TO MAKE A GREAT NATION:
The Hebrew Bible and the Idea of the People in Early-Modern Europe

by

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Abstract

Across today’s world, nearly every functioning state—whether democratic or not—makes some claim to represent a people. But where did this idea of “the people” come from in the first place? By this idea, I mean the people as both a popular entity—comprising a collective body of equal individuals—and a national one—representing a particular social and cultural group distinctive from all others around the world. My answer is that it arose out of the encounter between early-modern European thinkers and the Hebrew Bible. Beginning in the late 15th century, across a remarkable variety of texts—religious sermons, political tracts, dramatic dialogues, philosophical treatises, historiographic inquiries, and so on—we find writers drawing upon the Hebrew Bible as a resource for generating the images of peoplehood that would increasingly define political life into the modern era.

At the same time, I think it useful to examine more deeply how certain writers have interpreted the Hebrew Bible. To that end, the back half of this work is devoted to attending to the ways that three particularly important thinkers—Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Benedict Spinoza—read the Hebrew Bible with respect to this idea of the people.
A fuller understanding of the origins and development of the idea of the people—and the related concept of popular sovereignty—may provide a firmer basis for thinking about nationalism today. If we see this principle as constitutive, we may be less inclined to evince surprise at the next resurgence of nationalist energies. This may also help clarify how many contemporary conflicts have less to do with territory and security, and more to do with questions about peoplehood: who is in, who is out, and why. Conversely, the comparative stability of the contemporary world order owes much to our willingness to treat established settlements of that question as definitive. At the same time, as long as the concept of “the people” is up for grabs—especially in democracies—even the most settled questions may be open to revision in ways that impact both domestic and international politics.
Acknowledgements

It would be hyperbolic to treat this doctoral thesis as the summation of all that I experienced throughout my time at the University of Toronto, and yet I am continually surprised by the unexpected ways that offhand conversations, random recommendations, happy hour drinks, and much more besides, made their way into the final product. All of which is to say that it is impossible to adequately thank all those to whom acknowledgement is due.

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For as long as I can remember, my parents have been an unfailing if occasionally bemused source of support for my curious vocation. It was not until I had children of my own that I fully appreciated its measure. As for the children, I can almost unreservedly recommend having them to any PhD candidate: their existence draws one out of interior contemplation and provides an excellent spur to completing one’s work.
Finally, projects like this one are perhaps most frequently dedicated to the writer’s spouse or partner. This seems obvious, of course, but until undertaking the work I did not fully appreciate the reason. The life of a young, underpaid scholar is not without its real, hard-won joys, but those joys tend to be solitary ones. The burdens on the other hand, are collectively borne. My wife Alissa bore them with uncommon strength and grace. It is to her that this work is dedicated.
The Old Testament – that is something else again: all honor to the Old Testament! I find in it great human beings, a heroic landscape, and something of the very rarest quality in the world, the incomparable naïveté of the strong heart; what is more, I find a people.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*

Third Essay, section 22

And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee...

*Genesis 35:11*
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Introduction: We the Peoples

Every American schoolchild knows or will learn the first three words of the U.S. Constitution: “We the people.” Though we Americans think of our Constitution as an exceptional document, few realize just how ubiquitous such references to “the people” are among the constitutions throughout today’s world, from Albania to Vanuatu.\(^1\) Whatever the differences among cultures and regimes, the idea that there exists a people in most states that rightly possesses sovereignty is remarkably widespread—even amongst regimes not normally thought of as democratic.\(^2\)

The historian David Armitage has defined much of his work by the question, how did we—all of us in the world—come to imagine we inhabit a world of states?\(^3\) But we might just as well ask, how did we come to imagine that we inhabit a world of peoples?\(^4\) As the historical sociologist Andreas Wimmer puts it, a tripartite conception of the people—as sovereign, as democratic citizens, and as a national group—replaced “the Grace of God as the center around which political discourse draws its circles.”\(^5\) There is no shortage of accounts describing how this happened. More fundamental, but less discussed, is the question: where did this idea of peoplehood come from in the first place? By this idea, I mean the people as both a popular entity—comprising a collective body of equal individuals—and a national one—representing a particular social and cultural group distinctive from all others around the world. How did we

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1 Brown 2008, 45-46 provides a summary overview.
3 Armitage 2013, 13.
4 Burbank and Cooper 2010, 1.
5 Wimmer 2002, 2.
imagine that it might be possible to think of ourselves as organized into peoples, such that it came to be seen as the most obvious way to describe our political situation? And what exactly is its relationship with other important political (and geopolitical) phenomena, such as democracy and the modern state?

I want to argue that more precisely tracing the development of this concept will help us better understand the place of nationalism in modern political life. The supposed revival of nationalism around the world during the past decade has raised no small amount of worry and surprise in pundits and scholars alike. Much of the surprise seems due to the apprehension of nationalism as an historical phenomenon—properly left in the 19th and 20th centuries where it belongs. A fuller understanding of the origins and development of the idea of the people—and the related concept of popular sovereignty—may provide a firmer basis for thinking about nationalism today.

The Argument

My answer is that this idea of the people arose out of the encounter between early-modern European thinkers and the Hebrew Bible. Beginning in the late 15th century, across a remarkable variety of texts—religious sermons, political tracts, dramatic dialogues, philosophical treatises, historiographic inquiries, and so on—we find writers drawing upon the Hebrew Bible as a resource for generating the images of peoplehood that would increasingly define political life into the modern era—predominantly via the concept of popular sovereignty.

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6 For a strong argument for the enduring relevance of nationalism in world politics, see Pillar 2013.
7 This is not to suggest that this understanding sets deterministic limits upon future political possibilities—see Adler 2005, esp. 195-197 on this point. See relatedly the introduction to Adler and Barnett 1998.
What emerges is not an unbroken line of reasoning, but rather a common arrangement of conceptual resources that increasingly shapes the possibilities for thinking and writing about political life. So much so that by the 18th century, writers and thinkers in this vein (with the major exception of Jean-Jacques Rousseau) largely cease to recur to the Hebrew Bible, even as they accept the legacy of this interpretive tradition in the form of the ubiquitous idea of “the people,” embedding it in the related image of the nation.

I make two big claims in this project. The first is that this concept of the people appears far earlier than is often recognized—to the extent that it is in fact bound up with the development of the early modern state. Recognizing this may help us better understand where we are today. If we see this principle as constitutive, we may be less inclined to evince surprise at the next resurgence of nationalist energies. This may also help clarify how many contemporary conflicts have less to do with territory and security, and more to do with questions about peoplehood: who is in, who is out, and why. Conversely, the comparative stability of the contemporary world order owes much to our willingness to treat established settlements of that question as definitive. At the same time, as long as the concept of “the people” is up for grabs—especially in democracies—even the most settled questions may be open to revision in ways that impact both domestic and international politics.

The second claim is that the concept of the nation or people did not spring fully formed like Pallas Athena, but was derived from certain readings of the Hebrew Bible by early modern political thinkers. As Jonathan Jacobs rightly notes: “The ancient Hebrews served as a precedent and paradigm for a political conception of the nation.” Yet this model itself was the result of

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8 Jacobs 2006, 329. Jacobs, however, does not really develop this important claim. See also Sutcliffe 2003, 242-243.
significant interpretation on the part of early-modern political thinkers. Thus, what we are dealing with is not an “authentic” tradition of Jewish political thought, but rather a complex amalgam of biblical exegesis and original political philosophy. What the Hebraic example does here is provide what Philip Gorski calls “a discourse through which national distinctiveness could be articulated.”

At the same time, I think it useful to examine more deeply how certain writers have interpreted the Hebrew Bible. To that end, I devote the back half of this work to attending to the ways that three particularly important thinkers—Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Benedict Spinoza—read the Hebrew Bible with respect to this idea of the people. I specifically want to call attention to the ways that their treatment of these themes is premised upon practices of literary criticism—specifically biblical criticism. Indeed, they are in many ways the inaugurators of that particular tradition.

Because of the complexes of related literature with which this project overlaps, it is also necessary to outline what this project does not claim. First, this project does not make exegetical claims about the true “political” content of the Hebrew Bible or the body of writings known collectively as the Mishnah. Nor does this project make historical claims about the true “political” or “national” status of the Jews of antiquity, either during the Mosaic period, the Temple period, or thereafter. While there is significant evidence of their recognized distinctiveness from other groups, this does not a nation make.

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9 In a recent article that received a fair degree of attention, Yoram Hazony attributed the idea of nationalism to a Hebraic biblical tradition. In response, Peter Berkowitz accused him of disregarding the role of modern political thought. What neither writer suggested was the possibility that both claims might simultaneously hold—see Hazony 2016 and its responses.

10 Gorski 2003, 163.

Relatedly, I do not claim that the reliance upon biblical sources by thinkers whose ideas are foundational for our understanding of the modern state necessarily implies a theological core to an otherwise secular enterprise.\textsuperscript{12} Eric Nelson, for example, treats the early-modern use of Old Testament sources as evidence that modern political thought is not as secular as we commonly assume, with potentially significant implications for how we understand contemporary political life.\textsuperscript{13} But even if certain thinkers historically brought sincerely pious intentions to their treatment of the Hebrew Bible, it would not follow that we today are structurally bound by undisclosed theological precepts. Further, it is illuminating to consider the ways that even non-believers may have been drawn to the biblical text in order to develop novel categories of social thought that the classical tradition is unable to supply.

Finally, though this project is concerned with nation-states, it does not presuppose their inevitability or their permanence. Yet even if we are indeed entering a new, more universalist era from the standpoint of both states and citizens, it is still instructive to consider how certain thinkers originally justified their claims for new forms of particularism against universal monarchy and Christian universalism.\textsuperscript{14} For they can help us think more precisely about what Eric Voegelin called “the process by which the Western ecclesia dissolves into political subentities.”\textsuperscript{15}

Opening up the matter of Hebrew sources in early modern political thought helps us today to define that process. As the historian Yuri Slezkine puts it (with no small amount of hyperbole):

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Philpott 2000; Gillespie 2008.
\textsuperscript{13} Nelson 2010. See also Hurd 2008 and Hammill 2012.
\textsuperscript{14} Elliott 1992, 50; Manent 1996. Or as Colette Beaune (1991, 19) notes, “Nations are particularistic; Christianity is universal.”
\textsuperscript{15} Voegelin 1989-2008 vol. 5, 53.
The principal religion of the Modern Age is nationalism, a faith that represents new society as the old community and allows newly urbanized princes and peasants to feel at home abroad. Every state must be a tribe; every tribe must have a state. Every land is promised, every language Adamic, every capital Jerusalem, and every people chosen (and ancient). The Age of Nationalism, in other words, is about every nation becoming Jewish.”

Why these thinkers?

While the first part of this analysis is historical, aimed at clarifying what is distinctive about this understanding of peoplehood, the subsequent inquiry is largely conceptual, intended to illuminate how we think about the nation-state today. Thus, the second half of this work explores three different accounts of peoplehood in the history of political thought, each organized around a different reading of the Hebrew Bible.

In light of the extensive sources disclosed by recent scholarship on the phenomenon of political Hebraism, some explanations for the more limited focus of this project may be in order. To borrow David Armitage’s felicitous phrase, this investigation is “symptomatic rather than systematic.” Its purpose is not to undertake a comprehensive excavation, but to indicate the emergence of an important tendency that defines our understanding of modern international politics.

For the thinkers chosen here are by no means the only early modern thinkers who took up the Hebrew Bible or who are associated with what is increasingly known as political Hebraism. As will be discussed in its place, a sizable tradition of Christian Hebraism flourished in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. I have left out such canonical (or quasi-

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16 Slezkine 2004, 1.
17 Armitage 2013, 9.
18 See, e.g., Coudert and Shoulson (eds.) 2004. See also chapter 9 of Nirenberg 2013.
canonical) thinkers as James Harrington, John Selden, Petrus Cunaeus, Jean Bodin, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, John Milton and Giambattista Vico, as well as a host of more obscure figures of intellectual history.\(^{19}\)

In fact, I do not here claim that any of these thinkers merits the term “Hebraist.” Spinoza was the only one with the requisite philological training, and his treatment of the Bible is perhaps the most vituperative. More importantly, none of them appears to treat the Hebrew Bible as a preexisting source of political knowledge which might be usefully translated into practice by contemporary political actors. Rather, each thinker engages in interpretive labors to produce a political teaching that incorporates biblical accounts.

I do contend, however, that these particular thinkers tended to read and use the Hebrew Bible in ways common to themselves and distinct from most of their contemporaries or near-contemporaries—including those listed above.\(^{20}\) They thus form a kind of proto-epistemic community.\(^{21}\) Further, these thinkers are already widely-recognized as contributing in important ways to the development of the concept of the state.\(^{22}\) Yet their contributions to what we have come to think of as nationalism have been overlooked.

As Benedict Anderson has observed ‘unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinker: no Hobbes, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers. Bernard Yack puts the same point even more bluntly: ‘there are no great theoretical texts outlining and defending nationalism. No Marx, no Mill, no Machiavelli. Only minor texts by first rate thinkers, like Fichte, or major texts by second rate thinkers, like Mazzini.’\(^{23}\)

\(^{19}\) Such as Cornelius Bertram, Carlo Sigonio, et al. See Melamed 2011 for a concise overview.
\(^{20}\) Nirenberg 2013, 316 also makes this connection between the three thinkers.
\(^{21}\) I am grateful to Emanuel Adler for this point.
\(^{22}\) Shennan 1974; Skinner 1978; Bonney 1991; Mackenney 1993.
\(^{23}\) Beiner 1999, 2.
It is my view that each thinker discussed herein—without himself being a nationalist of any kind—also provides a particular account of peoplehood, incorporating the Hebraic model. Furthermore, each of these accounts bears directly on a particular problem inherent in the way that we conceptualize the nation-state today.

Hobbes presents perhaps the most powerful image we have of a unified state, and the power that authorizes it. Yet built into Hobbes’s account of the state, and heavily informed by his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, is a peculiar understanding of the body of the people as a distinct entity that comprises a political whole. Indeed, it is not possible to grasp Hobbes’s understanding of the state without reflecting on his understanding of the people. At the same time, there are certain conceptual problems built into this account that continue to be replicated in contemporary liberal democratic thought and practice.

The first problem: what are the origins and contours of the particular group of people with whom we form the state? Why do we covenant with these people to form this political body? This is not merely a theoretical problem, but one that is raised repeatedly in practice by policies concerning war, immigration, and expansion. The second problem: what is the particular character or culture of this people, beyond those practices that reflect a common recognition of the importance of preservation? Is it really possible to form what it is in effect a nation without nationalist affections? As Noel Malcolm puts it, “How strong is a state going to be if people are taught to think of it merely as a geographical area containing a certain number of human beings endowed with universal rights?”

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24 This is sometimes referred to as the “democratic boundary problem.” See chapter 2 for a fuller discussion.
With these problems in mind, I turn to the other two thinkers, beginning with Machiavelli (going backwards, as it were) because his own account of peoplehood is not yet bound up with concepts of popular sovereignty or individual rights, even as it plays a central role in his complicated political and ethical understanding. As a result, he can discuss in more direct ways the problematic origins of peoples (and their homelands) and their proximity to violence and war. The centrality of the people for Machiavelli has tended to be overlooked by modern scholars inclined to read him as a theorist of states or republics. The flexibility of Machiavelli’s ideas of peoplehood—drawn from his own reading of the Hebrew Bible—contributes much to the power and range of his influence on subsequent thinkers (from romantic nationalists to social contract theorists).

I finally examine the thought of Spinoza, who in many respects bridges the other two thinkers. He draws out the latent democratic elements in Hobbes’s thought, clarifying the conditions by which we can understanding a state as being wholly and collectively sovereign. But he also, relying upon his own biblical interpretation, extracts a concept of what we might now call “national culture” from his reading of religious law—one that, as it does for us, sits uneasily alongside claims for liberal individualism.

**Alternative Accounts**

Truly, there is no shortage of studies devoted to explicating the changes that took place in the early-modern period as a means of defining modern political life. Indeed, this is one of the central questions in the study of international politics: what John Gerard Ruggie called “the most important contextual change in international politics in this [now the last] millennium: the shift
from the medieval to the modern international system.”²⁶ Others would go even further to claim that these changes are not just part of the study of international politics; they are what make that study possible. As Nicholas Onuf admits: “It is anachronistic to speak of international thought – ways of thinking that are specific to the world of states—before there was such a world.”²⁷ What is striking is how few studies that bear on this theme incorporate the idea of popular sovereignty.

Christian Reus-Smit argues that the expansion of the sovereign state system was the product (across successive waves) of individual agents pursuing political change on the basis of novel conceptions of individual rights.²⁸ There are two problems here: 1) as in his previous work, he accepts that sovereign states have flourished in other times and places; what makes the present system unique is its realized universality. 2) He does not really substantiate his concept of sovereignty (this may be related to the relatively cursory treatment nationalism receives).²⁹ He rightly recognizes that individual rights find their purchase within more or less bounded polities, but he treats this as merely circumstantial. As a result, we never quite understand through his work how the expansion of ideas of individual rights “paradoxically” produces the sovereign state system. This paradox is recognized but not explored, precisely because the relationship between individual rights and statehood is recognized and built upon without being investigated in his work.³⁰

To put it more bluntly, individual rights as we know them exist almost exclusively within the context of sovereign states. We do not have an operational understanding of how individual

²⁷ Onuf 1998, 3. Anthony Giddens (1985, 257) also credits the era of the nation-state with the invention of “international relations.”
²⁸ Reus-Smit 2013.
²⁹ Ibid., 51-55.
³⁰ For discussions of how international law interprets individual rights through popular sovereignty, see Reisman 1990 and Araujo 2000.
rights are formulated and protected outside the state. More importantly, we do not even have a meaningful theoretical account of individual rights that exists independently of the theorizing of states.31

This problem is pointedly expressed in Rebecca West’s monumental *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* by the Yugoslav statesman, Constantine: “Now that we are making Yugoslavia… we must feel in a large way about the simple matter of saving our lives. You must cast away all your little rights and say that we have a big right, the right of the Slavs to be together, and we must sacrifice all our rights to protect that great right.”32 Who, in other words, will be the guarantor of one’s individual rights if not the nation?

Other scholars, like Rodney Bruce Hall, have more to say about the role of nationalism in the modern international system.33 Hall, however, treats nationalism as a late-modern variation on a preexisting structure of collective identity, without recognizing how nationalism is essentially constitutive of collective identity as we understand it. Our language of collective identity is broadly popular and national in ways that require unpacking. And Hall himself never offers an ideal-typical account of collective identities that is sufficiently abstracted from nationalism while also clear enough in its general contours as to be analytically useful.

Similarly, Daniel Philpott sees the world of sovereign states as emerging out of two ideational revolutions: 1) the Protestant Revolution, which produced the sovereign state system in early-modern Europe; and 2) the 20th-century nationalist movements that triggered

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31 It is true that individual rights in a Hobbesian or Lockean account literally exist “outside” the state, in that they are derived from the state-of-nature understanding of the human individual, but these accounts nonetheless issue in the creation of states, whose very purpose is the preservation and guarantee of those rights. Returning to the source, as it were, clarifies how these concepts are coupled.

32 West 1994, 86.

33 Hall 1999.
decolonization and thereby spread that system to the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{34} But in explaining the first movement, Philpott moves too quickly from the Reformation to the Peace of Westphalia, and moreover does not show how the ideas and discourses of Protestantism could produce the political framework of sovereignty.\textsuperscript{35} In explaining the second movement, he does not provide an account of nationalism; it springs fully-formed and only has to emerge in the colonial world to do its work. What is missing is an account of popular sovereignty which would in fact unite the two “revolutions” he describes.

In sum, the literature that deals with this systemic change tends to overlook the role of popular sovereignty. These and other studies do not really recognize the way that a world of states and a world of peoples coevolve over time. Perhaps the most compelling treatment (and the one closest to my own thinking) is Mlada Bukovansky’s, which does provide such an account. She argues that the most significant cause of the rise of the modern state system was an ideational and cultural shift in the basis for political legitimacy—namely, the emergence of popular sovereignty.\textsuperscript{36} But her thesis centers around the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century political revolutions; its comparatively late focus does not allow us to examine the development of the idea of the people in the first place.

The scholarship that focuses most squarely upon that development, meanwhile, largely clusters around a Cambridge School thesis that modern notions of popular sovereignty find their origins in the Roman Law tradition.\textsuperscript{37} But this tradition cannot really do what its present-day

\textsuperscript{34} Philpott 2001.
\textsuperscript{35} One might argue that Protestantism, by creating distinct religious communities across Western Europe, gave rise to the practices of what we have come to think of as state sovereignty, but this is not in fact what Philpott says.
\textsuperscript{36} Bukovansky 2002.
\textsuperscript{37} A broader version of this claim has proven influential among International Relations constructivists in explaining the development of the modern state system—see Ruggie 1983; Kratochwil 1986; Onuf 1998; and Holland 2010.
advocates need it to—namely, provide a workable and coherent account of the people as a comprehensive entity that is coextensive with the political community itself.38 (It is likely not incidental that much of the historical literature on the development of popular sovereignty largely disregards both nationalism and religion.39)

These contemporary scholars more or less exclusively focus upon the classical tradition as a philosophical and historical resource for Renaissance and early modern thinkers.40 The result is to either read back phenomena into that tradition that were not in fact present, or to tell an essentially incomplete story of political and philosophical change. That incompleteness in turn bears upon how we describe and evaluate contemporary political phenomena, because of the ways in which these prior traditions furnish our conceptual tools.

A similar problem exists for those scholars of political Hebraism who posit an alternative biblical tradition in early-modern thought but nonetheless recur to classical terms and concepts to interpret that tradition.41 Such scholars are insufficiently attentive to the ways that the Hebrew Bible is part of an alternative literary tradition.42

Meanwhile, scholars who look the biblical Hebrews as a forerunner of modern nationalism commit the opposite error: ascribing essentially modern features to an ancient tradition. Adrian Hastings, for example, acknowledges the transformational significance of the early modern period, but his account presents the use of the Hebrew Scriptures as a genuine rediscovery of an authentic identarian tradition, which could be transmitted to the nascent states

38 I deal with this problem at length in chapter 3 of this work.
39 See for example the essays in Bourke and Skinner 2016.
40 To take but one example, this is how Quentin Skinner frames his account of the formation of the state in his influential Foundations.
41 E.g., Nelson 2010. I deal with the problems with this approach at greater length in chapter 3 of this work.
42 See Averintsev 1999.
of that time.\textsuperscript{43} One should not simply assume a national dimension in the Hebrew text. However much the Old Testament has been read as \textit{particularistic}, it was not until the early-modern period read in terms that we might recognize as \textit{nationalistic}. It would simply be a hermeneutic error to see the Bible as straightforwardly presenting a usable political teaching.\textsuperscript{44} The most substantial tradition of biblical exegesis—the rabbinic one—did not produce a nationalist interpretation (quite the opposite). The most straightforwardly nationalist interpretations that we do possess all postdate the rise of nationalism as a historical phenomenon. What is lacking in this interpretation is the due recognition of the role of political theory (including what is now sometimes called international political theory) in interpreting and repurposing the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{45}

Granted, the most obvious interpretation of the biblical idea of peoplehood is the simplest: that the ancient Hebrews depicted in the Bible and/or their historical successors during the Second Temple period did in fact constitute a people or a nation in the modern sense of the word.\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, it was this entity that provided a model for a variety of emerging nations millennia hence. Anthony Smith expresses a stark version of this view: “To a large extent, the modern age owes to the Jewish Bible its fundamental vision of a world divided into distinctive and sovereign territorial nations.”\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Hastings 1997; see also Smith 2006 and Appelbaum 2013.
\textsuperscript{44} As Walzer 2012 notes, the Hebrew Bible is in many ways hostile to the concept of politics for its own sake.
\textsuperscript{45} Not least is the absence in this literature of any mention of the emerging doctrine of popular sovereignty.
\textsuperscript{46} One could argue that “the land,” rather than “the people,” is the salient feature of the Hebraic tradition that makes its way into modern political understanding. But as Statman 2003 notes, the term “holy land” is not actually to be found in the biblical text. One might further add that the Torah—the holiest part of the Hebrew Bible—chronicles neither the taking of the Promised Land nor the founding of Jerusalem.
\textsuperscript{47} Smith 2015, 403. Smith, however, posits a tradition that runs from the Reformation through the French Revolution, without really explicating in detail how this took place.
To some degree this is demonstrably true: the Israelites would serve as a rhetorical touchstone for a remarkable array of nascent polities, particularly those seeking independence or political liberty. This fact, however, does not require us to view the Israelites themselves in these terms—that is, to adopt the first premise. Yet a nontrivial body of literature holds that the biblical Hebrews were either the original self-conscious nationalists or, at a minimum, one nation (in more or less the modern sense) among many in the ancient world. This claim, meanwhile, is complicated by its conflation of the Hebrews as a primarily biblical entity (for which our principal or sole source of information is the Bible) and as a historical one (for which we have a variety of classical sources, as well as primary artifacts).

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to provide a full accounting of biblical expressions of nationalism—not least because such expressions are unlikely to be found. Suffice it to say that while the Bible is rife with passages expressing a self-conscious sense of distinct Jewish peoplehood, that expression is not just particular but singular. This is precisely the problem: expressions of uniqueness resist translation into a nationalist discourse as we understand it. For, as we have stressed, nationalism is not just particular but universal; for the Hebrews to serve as a usable model for nationalism broadly-conceived, it would have to lose its

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48 Walzer 1984; Akenson 1992; Smith 2003. The sheer prevalence of this ideal can lead to ironic juxtapositions: for example, black Americans in the Reconstruction-era South and the Boers of South Africa both looked to it for inspiration.


50 I owe this phrasing to David Novak. For examples see, inter alia, Exodus 23; Leviticus 18-20; Deuteronomy 7; Deuteronomy 12; Deuteronomy 18; Joshua 24; 2 Kings 17; Jeremiah 10. For an investigation of the word people itself in the Hebrew Bible, see Ijezie 2007.
singularism. This is why, conversely, Zionism has been described as an assimilationist movement—the modern equivalent of becoming “like all the other nations.”

Scholars are on stronger ground in examining the historical record. Yet, here too, the question is not whether we might find evidence of self-conscious distinctiveness on the part of the Hebrews; the answer there seems clear. The question is rather whether it is useful for us to describe this quality in terms of nations and nationalism, given all the historical and theoretical baggage that accompanies those terms.

This interpretation is reinforced by such events as the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids (167-160 BC) and the First Jewish-Roman War (AD 66-73), culminating in the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70. The broad assumption is that the Hebrews’ ancient version of nationalism made them difficult subjects for imperial rulers—akin to the difficulties that nationalist resistance movements pose for foreign occupiers today.

The problem again comes with the implicit reliance on what are essentially modern political categories to interpret these events, while abstracting from the relevant historical

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51 As Spinoza makes clear in his discussion of Hebrew election—see chapter 6 of this work for a fuller discussion.
52 Cf. Strauss 1994 with 1 Samuel 8; see also Deuteronomy 17:14.
53 On the actual uniqueness of Israelites among ancient peoples, see chapter 2 of Berkowitz 2012. On the difficulties of accurately describing the ways in which a recognizable Jewish identity developed amidst the historical Israelite people or peoples, see Entine 2007, esp. ch. 6. For the claim that the historical Israelites were not in fact a unified people, see Finkelstein and Silberman 2000.
54 Goodman 2007 emphasizes the contingency of this outcome. For a balanced treatment, see Schwartz 2014, 76-81.
55 Gibbon’s (1994 [1776], 447-451) treatment is the most influential modern one. See Stern 1980, 39 for a useful summary of ancient sources regarding Jewish separateness. See chapter 10 of Goodman 2007 for an overview of Roman attitudes and chapter 1 of Nirenberg 2013 for ancient attitudes generally toward the Jews as a separate people. However, cf. Gruen 1998 for an account that conversely stresses the flexibility of Jewish identity in the Hellenistic period. Similarly, Schwartz 2012 describes how Jewish solidarity did not forestall the acceptance of typically Mediterranean practices of clientelism and reciprocity. Finally, Goodenough’s (2014) magisterial work demonstrates how thoroughly Second Temple and Diaspora Judaism incorporated pagan symbols and iconography into its aesthetic representations.
context. The Israelite kingdoms waxed and waned amidst the great Near Eastern and Mediterranean empires: Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Seleucid, and Roman. Even where they engaged in military resistance, they did not aspire to take their place as a sovereign state within a system of states, as modern nationalists have, because no such thing existed.

The historian Seth Schwartz puts the point bluntly:

[T]he characteristic political condition of the Jews in pre-Roman (and early Roman) antiquity was not that of a state but of a partly autonomous province subject to an empire. Even the rebellions that brought the remnants of this arrangement to an end may be seen less as anticipations of nineteenth-century nationalism than as extreme responses to an imperial regime many Jews experienced as unprecedentedly interventionist and oppressive.56

Though the traditions would continue to exert enormous poetic and rhetorical power up to our own time, there is little in either the biblical text or the historical record that one can directly translate to the modern experience. What is missing is a political framework that would make this possible. “In the end, however, what may be most illuminating about ancient Jewish “nationalism” is not the way it anticipates modern nationalism but how it differs from it.”57

In sum, there is by now a robust literature on nationalism that focuses on the Hebrew Bible, and an equally robust literature that focuses on the doctrine of popular sovereignty. What is still lacking is a treatment that considers these themes together. Tracing the concatenation of different factors that produce the development of popular sovereignty will allow us to say more about its significance for our own understanding of nationalism and the state.

The Approach of the Work

57 Weitzman 2008, 171.
Methodologically, I follow scholars like David Nirenberg and Victoria Kahn, whose work I see as a model of how to combine contextual understanding with textual exegesis.\(^{58}\) Like theirs, my approach employs broad archival research across multiple languages, in order to provide a cumulative account of how religious motifs were mobilized not only to effect social change, but more fundamentally to provide the conceptual framework to make sense of that change.

I lay the first part of this research out in genealogical fashion. I call this a genealogy first because it is consciously informed by particular problems of the present, and by an interest in better articulating them. “Genealogies start with the present in order to trace the conditions of the emergence of the present in which we are present.”\(^{59}\) I wish to trace the descent of these ideas and concepts while avoiding deterministic claims that treat each development in this story as a necessary effect of what came before. Following a genealogical approach also avoids treating this discursive tradition as a monolithic one: different thinkers advanced different scriptural interpretations according to their own philosophical projects and theological commitments.

I do not then seek to make a categorical claim about the spirit in which early modern thinkers *in toto* addressed Old Testament revelation. The more specific claims I do make refer to the thinkers explicitly discussed. Second, with respect to the thinkers under discussion, I do not assume a comprehensive, unified project that incorporates either a common political teaching or a common interpretive reading of the Hebrew Bible. “Without exception, these thinkers come up with scriptural interpretations that cohere with their own theoretical project: Hobbes’s reading of the Old Testament supports *his* political philosophy…Spinoza’s reading of the Old Testament supports *his* political philosophy…”\(^{60}\)

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\(^{58}\) E.g. Kahn 1994; Nirenberg 2013.

\(^{59}\) Koopman 2013, 24.

\(^{60}\) Beiner 2014, 172.
Similarly, this account is not meant to demonstrate a pure or deliberate “origin” of statehood and nationhood in the works of the three thinkers I address at length. For, I do not claim that any of these (or other) thinkers had it as their express aim to create national political communities, either generally or particularly. First, each thinker’s work cuts in significantly different directions, defying any neat attempts to ascribe a common intent to them. Second, it is strikingly difficult to impute specific national sentiments to any of these thinkers. None of them is consciously advancing a national communitarian project for its own sake.

I am aware of the philosophical baggage that accompanies the term “genealogy,” as well as the divergent purposes to which it has been put. My own purpose in adopting it is relatively modest, aiming at neither a vindication nor a critique, but rather at gaining a clearer horizon on the history of our concepts, which might in turn prepare the way for critical reflection on contemporary understandings. I seek then to clarify the role that Hebraic ideas of peoplehood played in defining the changes that took place, to trace the descent of those ideas, and to bring to light certain problems that appear starkly in that model—problems that remain relevant to us today.

Considering the descent of those ideas does not require that we imagine every citizen of every emerging nation sitting down to read these thinkers. Alexis de Tocqueville described early 19th-century Americans as Cartesians who had never read Descartes. Something similar might be said of conceptions of peoplehood with their origins in interpretations of the Hebrew Bible.

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61 I discuss the ambiguity of Machiavelli’s expressions of Italian patriotism in chapter 5.
62 In this respect, it may come closest to that of Skinner 2005, though my substantive claims differ in many ways from his. Michel Foucault, despite some of his more radical metaphysical commitments, frequently veers closer to this more modest version, as when he describes genealogy as grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary (Foucault 1971, 145). In such instances, he seems to believe, as Alexander Nehamas remarked of Nietzsche, that genealogy is simply history, correctly practiced. See also Williams 2002, 20.
63 Tocqueville 1991 II, 514. I am grateful to Daniel Schillinger for reminding me of this passage.
Neither rulers nor ruled were theorists (or necessarily readers of theorists) of popular sovereignty; nor were they crypto-Jews. It is the routine practices and proximate interests that most directly shape our political institutions; but those practices and interests acquire shape and meaning only through such novel concepts such as “sovereignty” and “representation” which are themselves constitutively bound up with modern political life. Uncovering this strange heritage prepares the way to better learn from key thinkers within it.

This project makes two other moves that may warrant defending: first, it bridges themes and scholarship across political theory and international relations; second, it supposes that present-day social science could benefit in specific ways from sustained, closer engagement with past thinkers in their own right.

That the fields of international relations (hereafter, “IR”) and political theory have much in common, and that scholars of both fields might gain from greater communication across literatures are not themselves particularly radical claims. The more difficult task lies in substantiating the specific value that the two hold for one another.

We are in the complicated position of being heirs both to a certain political history and to a theoretical tradition which is inextricably bound up with that history. “When in the early fifteenth century [sic], Bodin, Machiavelli and others invented some novel ideas about political power and government, they did not simply describe an independently occurring series of social changes. They helped constitute the state forms that emerged from those changes.”

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64 Giddens 1985, 20.
65 For a consideration of the conceptual links between the two fields, see Rengger 2000. For the claim that divisions between the two fields are mutually harmful, see Owen 1999. For arguments that political theory benefits from taking an international perspective, see Schmidt 2002. For attempts to bridge the gap between political theory and IR theory, see Waltz 1959; Walker 1993; Onuf 1998; Williams 2005; the essays in Bell 2009; and Armitage 2013.
66 Giddens 1987, 20. Giddens refers to this as a “double hermeneutic.”
difficulties of reading and interpreting certain thinkers is that they are both philosophical and historical figures. That is to say they left behind texts that are of (presumably) perennial interest while at the same time both they and their writings played some part in the proximate events that followed them.

Consequently, when we talk about the provenance and character of the nation-state, we tend to shift, willy-nilly, between historical and theoretical languages. Nonetheless, I believe there is benefit in returning to older thinkers, free of our suppositions and historical knowledge, to gain a better handle on these languages, in which faux amis abound. Pierre Bourdieu puts it succinctly: “As soon as you conduct historical research, you discover in fact that at the origins of institutions things were discussed that nowadays have to be discovered in an extremely laborious way.”

Beate Jahn similarly offers a well-articulated defense of the value of returning to past thinkers to gain a superior horizon upon contemporary political problems. Her argument in a nutshell is that certain objects of study lie at the intersection of disparate disciplines, be they political science, economics, international relations, and so on. The fragmentation of modern social scientific knowledge is a barrier to meaningfully addressing certain problems, such that it is more efficient to “return” to thinkers who predate that fragmentation than it is to merely aggregate the approaches of separate disciplines. This project presupposes that “the people” is one such topic. I believe it is easier to demonstrate the centrality of nationalism to liberalism and the modern state itself by showing how those ideas coevolved, via the linking concept of

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68 Jahn 2012, 687-688.
peoplehood.\textsuperscript{69} “Looking more closely at earlier ideas about politics and the earlier practice of
government would help to distinguish what was really new about modern nationalism and what
came from other strands of thought.”\textsuperscript{70}

This approach is not without its potential pitfalls. Wayne te Brake, another scholar who is
similarly concerned with this period, points out several dangers in employing early modern
thinkers to help us analyze the geopolitical changes that Europe underwent (though only after
advancing his own treatment of Machiavelli’s significance…).\textsuperscript{71} He highlights three problems
that arise in particular (in ascending order of importance):

1. Such thinkers had normative—not merely descriptive—intentions, unlike present-day
   scholars interested in that historical period;
2. Such thinkers were the product of a classical education—with many actually writing in
   Latin—which shaped their thought into anachronistic philosophical categories with
   which they analyzed the political conditions of their time;
3. Most importantly, and building on the first two problems, these thinkers are largely
   working with an idealized conception of a whole political community that can serve as
   the common denominator across a variety of regime types—in contrast to the deeply
   divided “composite states” that actually prevailed at the time.

Each of these points has merit. In response, I would note first that it is in fact their normative
intentions, arising out of—but not limited to—particular historical circumstances, which most
interest us. Second, while the constraints of classical idioms are clearly present in certain
writings, one can also find early modern thinkers devising new vocabularies with which to
describe their intentions, usually by subtly but steadily warping the existing lexicon.\textsuperscript{72} Finally,

\textsuperscript{69} This is a lacuna in much of the scholarship on the state. Quentin Skinner, for example, effectively rules
out considerations of nationhood from his account of the development of the modern state concept—see
Skinner, 1978 I, ix-x.
\textsuperscript{70} Reynolds 2005, 64.
\textsuperscript{71} te Brake 1998, 169-170.
\textsuperscript{72} It is likely no accident that two of the three thinkers discussed at length in this project wrote mainly in
the vernacular, rather than scholastic Latin. I pay special attention to how Spinoza, the exception,
indicates diverse meanings with his use of Latin terminologies.
part of what is compelling about these thinkers (and this bears on the normative significance of their work) is how they trace political possibilities that are bound neither to classical idealism nor to the institutions of early-modern composite states.

**Plan of the work**

This work is divided into two, roughly equal halves. The first aims to substantiate the claims for the importance of peoplehood for how we think about states and nations, and to trace its emergence as an historical idea. The second half turns to examine more closely how particular thinkers have worked out this idea, and how it might bear on our thinking about international political life today.

**Chapter 1** provides a survey of the social science literature on the modern state and its development. There is substantial scholarship that historicizes the modern state (in contrast with other, older political forms), while at the same time casting doubt on the popular association of modern states with the Peace of Westphalia. Nonetheless, the core features of the modern state remain constant: sovereignty and territory. Here, I show how both are anchored by the concept of popular sovereignty.

**Chapter 2** presents a similar exploration of the literature on nations and nationalism. In recent years, a number of scholars have come to note the importance of ideas of popular sovereignty for the emergence and spread of nationalism, first in Europe and then worldwide. The flexibility of this concept allows for both “civic” and “ethnic” nations to develop a political language for themselves. Thus, popular sovereignty forms a common bond for both nations and states. Yet popular sovereignty presupposes a people. Nowhere in this otherwise useful
scholarship do we come to know whence this novel concept derived. Moreover, we do not find a “people” as we might use the term today in either the classical tradition or the medieval one.

Chapter 3 presents a genealogy of the concept of the people. I trace the emergence of the modern understanding of a people—as demotic, national, and sovereign—through the turn to the Hebrew Bible in early-modern European political thought. I take pains to show that this idea does not—contra the recent intellectual tradition of Cambridge School-scholarship—stem from the Roman tradition of political and legal thought. Rather, it is tied in often highly imagistic ways to a variety of passages from the Bible, as interpreted by early-modern political thinkers. Precisely because it is nothing so simple as a biblical excavation, this idea of peoplehood increasingly comes to exist independently of the Bible or the specific depiction of the ancient Israelites, even as it comes increasingly to dominate political and philosophic discourse up to the French Revolution.

Chapter 4 marks the shift away from larger historical claims to an exegetical approach intended to more concretely define the value of recognizing the Hebrew sources in international thought. Here, I examine how Hobbes’s depiction of the person of the state still informs contemporary state theory, while showing how attending to his use of the biblical Israelites substantiates that concept. Yet his treatment leaves vague the origin and particular character of the people, both questions that will be taken up by the other two thinkers discussed.

Chapter 5 will examine Machiavelli’s unique account of peoplehood and statehood, highlighting the ways in which the history of war and conquest defy our ability to securely define the political community or its origins. Because Machiavelli’s account is not contractarian, it serves as a useful foil to theorists of popular sovereignty.
**Chapter 6** considers an oft-overlooked thinker whose work in further democratizing much of Machiavelli’s thought makes him in many ways the most modern of the thinkers discussed herein. Spinoza above all shows how religion (with the Hebrews as the model) provides the template for what we come to think of the national culture of a people.

Finally, in a brief concluding chapter, I summarize how the preceding investigation can clarify our understanding of nationalism in modern political life, and I draw out the specific import of each of the three treatments that comprise the latter half of the work.
Part I
Chapter 1: The Cold Monster

The state? What is that? Well then! Now open your ears, for now I shall speak to you of the death of peoples. The state is the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it lies, too; and this lie creeps from its mouth: ‘I, the state, am the people.’

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Arguing for the importance of the state for political science would be like arguing for the importance of the electric guitar for rock and roll. Of course, one would be hard-pressed to find a comparable literature devoted to the question: what is the electric guitar and how can we study it? States, by contrast, hold the curious conceptual position of being both central and elusive.

This elusiveness combined with the sheer ubiquity of the state as an object of study has obscured the significance of the emergence of the idea of peoples in early-modern Europe, due to a largely formal understanding of state structures across the longue durée. On the one hand, the state is a convenient placeholder term for any kind of organized political community; on the other, it is the unique outcome of certain historical processes which has come to define modern political life specifically.

It is necessary first then to say something about the distinctiveness of the specifically modern state in order to examine the role that the idea of peoplehood plays in substantiating it. Indeed, as one examines the existing literature on modern states and state formation, recurring

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1 Nietzsche 1961, 75.
throughout that literature is a central concept of peoplehood, albeit not always explicitly. In recent decades, scholars have done more work to historicize the modern state (in contrast with other, older political forms), while at the same time casting doubt on the popular belief that modern states simply originate with the Peace of Westphalia. This scholarship converges on two core features of the modern state: sovereignty and territory.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how both are anchored by the broad concept of peoplehood. This will allow us to more clearly describe the modernity of the state, and to consider the relationship of the state to nationalism. If Liah Greenfeld is right that every state is both a modern state and a nation-state, it is largely because of the idea of the people. 4

What We Talk About When We Talk About States

The pervasive Weberian tendency in the social sciences has led many scholars to simply equate the state with the political community as such. 5 Max Weber himself sometimes treats the two concepts as interchangeable, thereby ascribing features of statehood to premodern communities. 6 In this understanding, the Near Eastern empires, imperial China, the Greek poleis and Roman republic, medieval feudal kingdoms, and contemporary nation-states (among many others) are broadly comparable, due to common features such as centralized authority over a given area.

Even when we recognize that this tendency poses obstacles for establishing a more concrete understanding of particulars, it is difficult to avoid using “state” as a placeholder term when attempting to characterize older particularistic (and usually violence-wielding) entities. Thus, certain historians employ the term “composite states” for the combination of feudal-

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4 Greenfeld 2011, 5. See also Hobsbawm 1990, 9.
5 Bartelson 2001, 9; Sharma 2015, 153-155.
6 Weber 1968, 901 ff. See also Greenfeld 1996, 20.
dynastic rulership and nascent bureaucratic administrations that emerged in early-modern Europe. Or the Greek polis is sometimes called a “city-state” to indicate that, despite its size, its citizens exercised the kind of autonomous control that we associate with state sovereignty.

In either case, whether dealing with contemporary or older phenomena, the tendency is to discuss formal qualities rather than substantive ones. The state serves as the chassis upon which particular attributes are painted or welded. And these attributes in turn frequently risk either redundancy or obfuscation. “[I]f the observer concludes that the state is an historically omnipresent phenomenon, he is confronted with a bewildering array of entities with so little in common that it becomes necessary to adopt highly abstract and effectively nonoperational definitions of the phenomenon.”

This tendency has normative implications as well. “Terms, such as quasi-states, soft states, shadow states, weak states, non-state states, decay, corruption, weakness, and relative capacity, all implied that the way things really work are somehow exogenous to the normative model of what the state and its relations to society are, or should be.” We have, in other words, an ideal-typical image in mind when we talk about states, which is largely bound up with the specific entity of the modern state.

This has historically been the case for a good deal of scholarship in the field of international relations. As Alexander Wendt admitted, “it is necessary to treat states as, at some level, given for purposes of systemic IR theory.” If one wants, in other words, to conceive of

7 Koenigsberger 1978; Elliott 1992. This term is also widely-employed throughout Nexon 2009.
8 Ferguson and Mansbach 1989, 17.
9 Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 11.
10 Jackson 1987.
11 Perhaps most notably for neorealism—cf. Waltz 1979, 93-97 with Ruggie 1983. See also the discussion in Polansky 2016.
12 Wendt 1999, 244.
international politics as a system, its components are in turn conceptualized as states—whether one is describing contemporary dynamics, or those of the Peloponnesian War or Warring States-period China, and so on. And while systemic theory is by no means the only kind, much of the field’s horizons are fixed according to systemic theory, and much midrange theorizing takes its bearings from preexisting systemic theory. For quite a few scholars, however, a proper understanding of the relevant “units” is a necessary precondition to accounting for the kinds of relations that result in a given international system. These scholars contend that “empires, city-states, and other kinds of actors not only exhibit different domestic processes than sovereign states, but that the basic structural characteristics of international politics depend upon the structure of the units that populate international politics.” Absent a concrete understanding of the state, one cannot account for “the profound change that the institutional transformation of the system’s constituent units has brought about” beginning in the early-modern period. Indeed, what chiefly defines that change is the emergence and development of the concept of the state. “By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the concept of the State – its nature, its powers, its right to command

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13 Arguably, the two most influential IR texts of the past several decades are Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* and Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics*, both of which present systemic theories, though important earlier studies abound—see, e.g., Holsti 1972.
15 Nexon 2009, 37.
16 Wimmer and Min 2006, 893. Oakeshott 1980 is doubtful that such a “shift” ever occurred and contends that the contemporary state system is as multivariate and hodge-podge as anything to be found in the medieval or early-modern eras. Though many of Oakeshott’s specific criticisms have merit, particularly his attentiveness to the problem of fixing an exact moment in which this shift took place, this synoptic judgment seems doubtful. Even if the messy reality of modern international politics falls well short of a world of ideal-type, universally homogenous states, it seems fair to say that the present reality nonetheless approaches it in a way that nothing that came before it did.
obedience – had come to be regarded as the most important object of analysis in European political thought.”

Yet, as we mentioned at the outset, the state is in the ambiguous position of being both modern and perennial. As John Agnew, in his influential critique of geopolitics, claims:

State-centricity has finally been recognized as the main strategy of modern intellectuals of all political persuasions in limiting the definition of power to that of a coercive instrument and restricting politics to the domestic realm of the state (a way of thinking that has its roots in the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle as well as those of the early modern Florentine political theorist Machiavelli). This is wrong on several levels, but instructively so. By placing statehood on a conceptual path that extends backward into the history of political thought, Agnew obscures what is distinctive about it, conflating it with the political understanding of an early modern thinker like Machiavelli and a classical one like Aristotle (as well as conflating both with one another). Agnew’s substantive claim, meanwhile, might be restated as follows: the modern state represents the apotheosis of a certain philosophical tradition that attempts to circumscribe political life within particular horizons. Whether this is true or not, focusing on the formal aspect of particular, delimited communities tells us very little about them (not to say about the practices of politics, generally).

It is certainly true that there is something limited and particular about states, as opposed to, for example, empires. To put it broadly, empires are fundamentally diverse forms, encompassing multiple peoples and language groups, and featuring comparatively diffuse

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19 Agnew 2003, 53.
boundaries. Moreover, empires are comparatively hierarchical structures: they do not recognize equals within a shared framework.

Yet a world dominated by states, as opposed to empires, is also distinctive in ways that cannot be reduced to its particularistic, limited character. After all, states are not the only particular groups that can claim our loyalties. Today alone there are families (as Michael Corleone famously put it, “never take sides against the family again”), community associations, religious affiliations, and so on. And history provides us with an even grander menagerie: tribes, poleis, commercial republics, leagues of city-states, ecclesiastical authorities.

For this reason, other scholars present more nuanced treatments that do not insist on ascribing full statehood to earlier eras. The historian John Watts, for example, claims that late medieval Europe saw the emergence of “polities”: particularistic political communities that do not enjoy all the trappings of statehood. Susan Reynolds has argued that “regnal” communities—neither wholly feudal nor as hierarchal as modern states—emerged there even earlier. It is clear, in any case, that in neither instance did these communities define political life in their respective eras as the state does today.

There is by now a fair degree of consensus that there is something historically distinctive about the modern state, and that it is not useful to treat it as a timeless phenomenon. Many scholars go even further to argue that the modern iteration is in fact the only political structure

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20 See Poggi 1978, 87-88; Münkler 2007, 4-5; Burbank and Cooper 2010.
21 For the argument that it is in fact the emergence and spread of popular sovereignty that shattered the modern empires and drove decolonization, see Strang 1992.
22 Watts 2009. Though he concedes that his term is chosen less for its explanatory power and more for its avoidance of the “baggage associated with the rise of the modern state” (380).
that merits the term “state” at all. “It is an unavoidable redundancy to speak of the modern ‘state,’ for there is no other kind of state properly understood.”

Suffice it to say that when we speak of modern states, we refer to significantly different entities than nearly any other form of social organization that the world witnessed previously. Though states may pursue imperial aims, they are not constitutively imperial in the manner of the Roman republic, the Persian and Macedonian empires, and the Islamic caliphates; though they may be factional, their factions do not define the regime, unlike the Hellenic poleis and the Roman republic; and they retain isolated and limited sources of authority, unlike the dynastic and papal states of the medieval and early-modern period. To this we might add that they are functionally undifferentiated from one another, unlike the various coexisting polities of the early-modern period—the Habsburg and Russian empires, the Swiss confederated republic, German principalities, the Hanseatic League, the Low Countries, and so on.

But to insist on the state’s modernity is not to say what makes it modern. As we have discussed, the existence of particular political communities within a larger environment is not itself unique. The novel development was that of an idea of sovereignty as a new logic of rule within an autonomous territory. Indeed, most contemporary scholars have largely converged upon sovereignty and territory as the defining features of the modern state in contrast to other political forms.

There is a tradition of compressing a long, complex history into a single “big bang” moment—the Peace of Westphalia—which produced these novel entities of sovereign, territorial

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26 Burbank and Cooper 2010.
states. In more recent years, we have seen a wider recognition that the Peace of Westphalia is an inaccurate placeholder for the emergence of a system of sovereign states. We have already noted the prevalence of dynastic politics in composite states, but as Benno Teschke points out, “the logic of inter-dynastic relations structured the early-modern geopolitical order until the regionally highly uneven and protracted nineteenth-century transition to international modernity.” In other words, changes that may have begun during the early-modern period continued to unfold over time.

At the same time, early-modern Europe was the site of more than one development that we now associate with the emergence of sovereign states. Prior even to the Peace of Westphalia, individual kingdoms, principalities, and republics began to set juridical and practical limits upon imperial and ecclesiastical authority over their territories. This development can be described as the resumption of particular, local forms of government following the long experience of medieval universalism, which ended with the “collapse of universalistic accounts of political, religious and metaphysical hierarchies.”

The modern state then is neither a permanent feature of political life, nor something that emerged fully-formed in mid-17th century Europe. Yet if the “myth of Westphalia” has largely lost currency in scholarly discussions, it lingers on as a convenient shorthand. And whether it emerged in 1648 or only later, the core features of the modern state and state system remain the

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30 Teschke 2003, 217.
31 This is the story told in, e.g., Ritter 1964; Strayer 1970; and Hinsley 1986. It would be more accurate to describe this as several developments, insofar as the experiences of the Italian republics, the German principalities, and the kingdoms of England and France, inter alia, do not form a single account. Furthermore, there is no single vector at work: Plantagenet England could seek to exercise imperial authority over various French territories (as it did throughout the 100 Years’ War) only for Tudor England to resist papal authority over its jurisdiction.
32 Walker 1993, 16.
33 See Osiander 2001; Carvalho et al. 2011.
same for most scholars: sovereignty and territoriality. “[The state] is sovereign in that it claims final authority and recognizes no higher source of jurisdiction. It is territorial in that rule is defined as exclusive authority over a fixed territorial space.”

Sovereignty

Sovereignty, consisting of—in Bodin’s famous words—absolute and perpetual power, is definitionally twinned with the concept of the state to the extent that the two are difficult to decouple. As Nicholas Onuf remarked, “Sovereignty unproblematically defines the state as unique to modernity.” Indeed, no small amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to explaining and critiquing the concept of sovereignty. Our own purpose here is emphatically not to challenge or even critique these accounts, but simply to indicate the ways that ideas of peoplehood or popular sovereignty are already at least latent within the prevailing scholarship on sovereignty.

Granted, the historical emergence of sovereignty did not presuppose a popular basis. It arose out of a legal and, later, philosophical tradition that sought to define and clarify the nature of kingly authority. Medieval and early-modern theories of sovereignty arranged monarchs in a uniform scheme in which earthly power was an ordained expression of a divine order. It is thus common today to describe the trajectory of state development as progressing from “absolutist”

34 Spruyt 1994, 34.
37 See Sheehan 2006 for a historical overview.
38 Kantorowicz 1957
states to “nation-states.”

But this description confuses a set of legal claims for political practice. Consequently, it elides the way in which modernizing states—including liberal ones—become more “absolute” in their purview. The government of present-day Canada (e.g.) possesses more comprehensive knowledge of its citizens’ lives and can peaceably regulate their conduct to a degree that, say, Louis XIV could only have dreamt of. The absolutist state hardly presupposes an absolute monarchy, and is in fact quite consistent with bourgeois liberalism.

Indeed, having left behind the age of kings, we associate sovereignty not with the rule of a particular individual (nor for that matter, with any particular regime at all), but rather with the enduring structure of the state itself. But if we are to understand state sovereignty as something that cannot be reduced to its immediate executors or government—in which case it would be a far more ephemeral thing—then we almost inevitably presuppose a collective body that instantiates it. For sovereignty necessarily describes the recognized power of the state itself, not merely the domination of one part of it over another part. It is for this reason that the vast majority of our contemporary discussions of state sovereignty (rather than the larger concept of sovereignty as a historical development) also entail some form of popular sovereignty. Statism and popular sovereignty are, after all, mutually reinforcing phenomena.

Daniel Lee is worth quoting at length here.

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40 Anderson 1974; Poggi 1978, 60-85; Hall. 1999. By contrast, Bonney 1991 provides an excellent overview of the era, which reveals the disconnect between the claims of monarchical absolutism and the reality.
42 Koselleck 1988, 21-22. Scott 1998, 4 also notes how much liberal states fundamentally rely upon the same technological and bureaucratic mechanisms as totalitarian ones.
43 Krasner 1999.
44 Shennan 1974, 9.
45 E.g., Weber’s classic definition of the sovereign state refers to the entire community or association that successfully claims a monopoly of legitimate coercion, not just the governing structure itself—see Weber 1946.
46 Onuf 2008, 354.
The doctrine of popular sovereignty emerged in the early modern context to show that the constitutive function of sovereignty requires that its form must always be, without exception, popular: state sovereignty originates and always remains with the people...This was not only because the authority of the state was thought to be *derivative* of popular consent[.] It was, more significantly (and unlike the social-contract tradition), because of the view that the unity of the state...depended entirely upon the anterior unity of the people, rather than the other way around. Statehood, in short, presupposes peoplehood.  

Indeed, for contemporary purposes state sovereignty *is* popular sovereignty. It is through popular sovereignty—through the (successful) claim to represent the people in their totality—that states become truly sovereign, avoiding the fragmentation of composite states or dynastic states, or the political fractiousness of the classical city-states. When we talk about modern states, we are broadly presupposing that the institutions of the state represent a given people, irrespective of regime type.

By the same token, when scholars address challenges to state sovereignty, what is concretely at issue is the emergence of consequential actors who are not beholden to or representative of the people, being instead either more exclusive bodies such as terrorist organizations and multinational corporations, or more inclusive ones such as international organizations that claim authority across and over multiple peoples.

Yet even where it does prevail, absolute and perpetual power has limits, and these limits are largely spatial. For sovereignty is not just described as supreme authority, but supreme authority within a territory.

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47 Lee 2016, 12.
48 John Rawls tries to get around this issue by titling his celebrated work on international relations, *The Law of Peoples*, thus treating peoples as the proper political subject as opposed to sovereign states—see Rawls 2001, 23 ff. Tellingly, however, he reproduces the connection between the two, by according to peoples nearly all of the prerogatives and functions conventionally accorded to states themselves. Peoples, in other words, become salient insofar as they can be understood in statist terms.
49 See, e.g., Strange 1996; Van Creveld 1999; Cooley and Spruyt 2009.
Territoriality

The other key feature that scholars almost universally associate with the modern state, and indeed with modern international politics generally, is “territoriality.” Some scholars, seeking to acknowledge the complexity and variation of state forms, have taken to distinguishing the “territorial state” from older state forms, even calling it the “natural ground of the state.” As Charles Tilly notes, in his definition of states, “All states exercise priority within relatively well-defined territories; that is one way we know they are states, not lineages, gangs, churches, corporations, or something else.” Alexander Wendt is even more succinct: “No territory, no state.”

For other scholars, territoriality is a fundamental feature of human, not just modern, societies. “The strong international concern to preserve existing state boundaries is itself evidence of a robust human penchant for territoriality.” This is not a bad example of the kinds of confusion that arise in the absence of clarity of terms. One would not want to say that territory had no import prior to the modern era, any more than one would want to deny the significance of communal ties. The trouble is that there is territory and there is territory. Whether one wants to claim that modern conceptions of territory share psychic space with older ones or are simply parasitic upon them, some distinction between the two remains, though that distinction requires explaining.

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51 Biggs 1999, 375. He is referring here to the modern state. Max Weber, in his classic definition, also expressly links the state with territory—see Weber 1946.
52 Tilly 1994, 139-140.
53 Wendt 1999, 211.
54 Johnson and Toft 2013/2014, 33. See also Grosby 1995.
For most scholars, however, territoriality is predominantly assigned as a central feature of modern states and the modern state system.\textsuperscript{55} It is frequently operationalized to explain particular outcomes in peace and war.\textsuperscript{56} And many scholars justify its quiddity by asserting its chronological priority: the existence of the territorial state and territorial state system predates the rise of nationalism and democracy.\textsuperscript{57}

There are two significant problems with claims for the priority of the territorial state in the development of the modern state system. The first is that for most of the period under discussion, a non-trivial number of international actors were not in fact territorial states: these include the Low Countries, the Russian Empire (whose borders were much closer to frontiers across a vast expanse), the Ottoman Empire, the Hapsburg Empire, the Swiss cantons, and the papal states. The issue is further clouded by the significant overseas colonies held by France, Spain, and Great Britain, which otherwise had perhaps the best claims to the title of “territorial state.” And two of the major players in the modern state system, Italy and Germany, only formed territorially in the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century and in a manner not easily distinguished from the process of nationalization (and industrialization).

The second problem is that those states labeled “territorial” lack many of the institutions and practices that we now readily associate with modern states, including meaningful border patrol, advanced cartographic techniques, and the invention of passports, not to say the relative stabilization of territories themselves.\textsuperscript{58} Their territorial status may have more in common with

\textsuperscript{55} Elden 2013 is probably the best book-length study on this theme.
\textsuperscript{56} E.g., Gibler 2012; Johnson and Toft 2013/14. See also the essays in Kahler and Walter 2006. Wimmer and Min 2006 note that most large-N research on causes of war presupposes territoriality.
\textsuperscript{57} Tilly 1992; Hall 1999.
\textsuperscript{58} As Holsti 2004, 88 notes, all of these phenomena come into fruition with the spread of the idea of “the people.”
the baseline territorial features of all settled societies going back to the ancient Near East. The specifically modern attributes of territoriality are not as clearly present.

To this we might add, we have a “turtle problem.” In Peter Taylor’s words, “The state’s ‘capture’ of politics, and much else besides, in the modern world is premised upon territoriality.” But what is territoriality premised upon? We have already discussed the recognized historical problem of treating it as a real feature of politics established by the Peace of Westphalia. Jordan Branch, for example, focuses on advances in mapmaking techniques as the driver of state development and centralization, describing the institutions and practices of modern statehood as being “cartographically constructed.” But Branch also acknowledges that the territorial state doesn’t become a dominant model until the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, you must have something to map, and something whose boundaries you are concerned with fixing. It is popular sovereignty that supplies that something.

We can more readily understand this by differentiating the territory of modern states from that of other polities. For when we talk about territory, what we are really concerned with is borders. And borders only gain salience in light of a population that is represented or incorporated by the state and/or its leader(s)—in fact, borders are a sine qua non of the modern representative state. One need only compare the vaguer delineation of imperial Rome’s limes, or of imperial China’s frontiers. “Although the Romans recognized that their public authority (imperium) had a spatial dimension, this authority was marked by frontiers rather than

59 Taylor 1994, 151.
60 Branch 2014.
61 Ibid., 32-33. That is, it requires the spread of practices of popular sovereignty to be fully realized.
62 In some ways, Branch doesn’t go far enough, as he ignores the techniques of cadastral mapping that proved instrumental in allowing centralized states to survey their populations—see Scott 1998.
63 Anderson 1996, 5.
64 On Rome, see Mattern 2002 and Whittaker 2004; on China, see Barfield 1992.
boundaries. The Roman *limes* measured how far Rome’s power reached, not where another’s power began.”

Ladis Kristof usefully distinguishes between frontiers and boundaries as broad concepts. The latter is exclusive to the modern state, due to its inward-looking rather than outward-facing orientation. “The *frontier* is *outer-oriented*. Its main attention is directed toward the outlying areas which are both a source of danger and a coveted prize. The hinterland—the motherland—is seldom the directing force behind the pulsations of frontier life.” By contrast “the *boundary*… is *inner-oriented*,” representing “the mediated will of the people.” Frontiers are domains of practical activity; boundaries are abstractions founded upon yet another abstraction: the people.

The term territorial-state, then, is both superfluous and insufficient. Superfluous, because the authoritative jurisdiction of the state apparatus necessarily covers a given territory; indeed, this is one of the crucial points of distinction between the modern state and older structures such as empire, with its comparatively nebulous borders, or Renaissance city-states, with the complicating factor of the *contadi*. But it is also insufficient because the focus on territory misses the most salient element of the modern state, to which territory is a subordinate element: population. Insofar as the state is a territorial entity (except in the banal sense in which all political structures materialize in a given space), this is largely due to its representative status: the lawful state and its agents must represent a given body politic which in turn resides in a particular territory. Where that population and the territory under meaningful control by its representative state are not congruent, problems frequently arise.

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65 Sheehan 2006, 5. See also Kratochwil 1986, 36.
66 Kristof 1959, 271.
68 See Anderson 1996.
69 Fasano Guarini 1996.
70 Migdal 2001, 17.
What is distinctive about the modern state is not territory as such, but the image of a uniform population seamlessly bound to the authorized sovereign, which in turn makes our conceptions of territory conceivable. Territory, as it is conceptualized here, is largely a function of this particular state, delimiting the boundaries separating one population from another, just as individual human bodies remain naturally separate. “The ‘hard shell’ of the modern territorial state…is and must be hard because it contains a great store of value, namely a national population living and enjoying its distinctive way of life.”

This phenomenon meanwhile ramifies through the international system. It was the proliferation of the concept of peoplehood that played such a role in solidifying the borders of the territorial state system. As James Mayall notes, “the global integration of international society on the basis of a principle of popular sovereignty was accompanied by an unprecedented attempt to freeze the political map.” Though the spread of nationalism unquestionably played a role in this process, the way we think about borders is not reducible to an ethnic core or to expressions of nationalist sentiment. It is rather derivative of a political structure of popular sovereignty, which in turn implicates democracies no less than any other state.

As I say sometimes, this is harsh, but democracies require borders, they require boundaries, in fact, one needs to know who is representative to whom, and who is accountable to whom. So it’s very difficult to square the circle. I think it is possible to have an empire without borders; I don’t think it’s possible to have a democracy without borders.

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71 Connolly 1991.
72 I discuss the significance of this image for how we think about the state in chapter 4.
73 Jackson 1990, 266; see also Herz 1957.
74 Mayall 1990, 35.
75 See, e.g., Carter and Goemans 2011. See Shelef 2016 for a rare treatment that explicitly links territoriality to nationalism.
76 Benhabib 2004.
Ultimately, it is peoplehood that grounds our conceptions of territory—rather than the other way around—such that “the nation as people, not land, delimits the span of rule.”\(^\text{77}\) The modern state is sovereign insofar as it represents the people, and the people (as opposed to many peoples living under common rule) serve to define its territory.

**The Modernity of States**

We are perhaps now in a better position to assess the distinctiveness of modern states, and to say more clearly how their core institutions are absent in premodern polities. This is most easily done by considering historical contexts that are frequently likened to the modern state system, such as the ancient Mediterranean world and the Renaissance-era Italian peninsula. In each case, the differences are grounded in the absence of a modern concept of peoplehood—as an entity that meaningfully encompasses the whole of the political community. This absence is in turn reflected in much of the existing literature concerned with highlighting the relevant historical differences therein.

For reasons that are not difficult to grasp, the ancient polis—and to some degree the larger sphere of the Hellenic world of poleis—is often imagined as either a forerunner to the modern state or an approximate ideal to which we might liken ourselves. It was, after all, an autonomous community of citizens capable of governing themselves at home and wielding and executing organized violence abroad. Moreover, it was defined by its regimes or constitutions,

\(^{77}\) Onuf 1998, 153. Sahlins 1989 examines the case of the border between France and Spain by presupposing that the emergence of the “national territorial state” was a separate and earlier event than the emergence of “political nationalism.” This is true insofar as we might be able to observe that certain borders became fixed at an earlier date than the emergence of recognizable signs of widespread affective nationalism, but he rather gives up the game by already ascribing a “national” content to the territorial state.
the different types of which remain very much in usage in our own political discourse today. Yet
the differences are no less significant.

First, for the Greeks, the citizens themselves as political individuals remained the key
actors in political life—not the entity of the polis itself.78

The Greeks distinguished between the city, its inhabitants and its citizen-
proprietors. Our practice of talking about, for instance, the United States of
America as an abstraction is derived from our greater sense of historical
continuity and from the territorial rather than proprietary basis of our statehood.
The Greeks did not say that Athens went to war with Sparta: they said that the
Athenians, meaning the corporation of armed proprietors, went to war with the
Spartans.79

In other words, older political communities—particularly classical ones—did not possess a
unified corporate identity distinct from the actions and obligations of their citizens. As Oswyn
Murray argues, the proper signifier for the political community was “not its geographical
toponym, but the names of its citizens.”80 By contrast, modern states are readily described as
singular, as though individual actors.81 Thus, though the autonomy of the ancient polis was quite
real—and jealously preserved—it did not have quite the same significance as the autonomy of
modern states.

As for the regimes that we compare to our own constitutions, the typology of regimes
(politeiai) presented in the classic works of political thought has been willy-nilly transposed
from the context of the polis to that of the modern state. In the process, it has become
universalized in a way that requires unpacking. The orders of constitutions discussed by Aristotle

78 Rahe 1984.
79 Watson 2009, 50. See also Brown 1993, 23.
80 Murray 2000, 235. For useful discussions of what the polis was and wasn’t, see Strauss 1964, 30-32;
Finley 1977; Hansen 1995; Ando 1999; See also Osborne 1985, 6-14, for the argument that the polis was
neither a city nor a state.
81 Consider relatedly how the title “United States” underwent a shift from a plural to a singular meaning
over time.
were not intended as universally applicable descriptions of social order, but as specific to the organization of the polis. The Persian Empire, for example, would not have been described as having a “regime” in the same manner as Athens or Sparta.\(^82\) In the context of the modern state, however, the types of regimes are treated as representing the comprehensive set of possibilities for organizing political life—largely as a function of the state’s own universal status. In other words, every country in the modern world is a state, and every state has a regime, be it a democracy, a monarchy, and so on.

More importantly, the classical regime—that is, constitution—was literally constitutive of the polis in way that we would not uphold today. As Aristotle puts it, when the regime changes, the polis itself changes.\(^83\) By contrast, today we imagine the state as an enduring entity that can undergo, as it is commonly called, “regime change” while remaining fundamentally itself. Spain, for example, could transition from a Francoist dictatorship to a monarchy under Juan Carlos to a parliamentary monarchy (in practice, a democracy) all in the span of a few years, without anyone supposing it had become another country altogether.

Thus, the rulers of an oligarchy were loyal not to the enduring body of the state as such (for such a thing hardly existed in ancient Greece), but to a particular oligarchic regime, and they derived their status not through impersonal offices, but in their capacity as rulers of their particular polis. The same went, *mutatis mutandis*, for democrats.

It is the concept of democracy, meanwhile, so central to the development of modern states, that particularly confuses our attempts to distinguish it from the polis. “The adoption of the Athenian term to describe a series of political developments in the modern world which claim some connection with the Greek notion of *demokratia* has tended to make more difficult

\(^82\) Though cf. the famous discussion of regimes in Herodotus 3.80-83
\(^83\) Aristotle, *Politics* 1276a40-b3.
the modern understanding of what happened at Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.\textsuperscript{84} For democracy today no longer refers to the rule of the political community by the popular faction, but to the constitutive basis for legitimate government in \textit{any} state.\textsuperscript{85} That is to say, democracy is rule of the people in their entirety, not just in their capacity of dominant party.

The political significance of class, meanwhile, extends to the context of the ancient Roman republic as well. For the Romans, “citizenship entailed a complex of rights, duties, and privileges, which varied according to each citizen’s place in a well-defined hierarchy based on birth, wealth, and individual merit.”\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, the Romans went even further than the Greeks in assigning significance to more granular distinctions even within classes.\textsuperscript{87} More importantly, even as suffrage was expanded, practices of voting did not encompass the entire people, but were filtered through institutionalized distinctions among the citizenry, in the form of tribes and voting assemblies (the \textit{comitia centuriata} and \textit{comitia tributa}).\textsuperscript{88} Modern citizenship is comparatively egalitarian, at least notionally premised upon what we share in common as rights-bearing individuals. To this we might add the significance of the clan or extended families, which ramified through Roman social life and was frequently bound up with the perquisites of Roman citizenship.

This is especially evident in the Roman republican institution of \textit{clientela}, an extensive patronage system extending through political offices, the court system, commercial dealings, and much else. This system moreover encompassed both domestic and foreign dimensions. The

\textsuperscript{84} Richardson 1991, 1. Though cf. Ober 2015, 8-10 for the claim that modern democracies and ancient self-governing city-states remain comparable forms of political organization.

\textsuperscript{85} I discuss the full significance of this in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{86} Cornell 1991, 53.

\textsuperscript{87} Such as the distinction between \textit{senatores} and \textit{equites}.

\textsuperscript{88} Nicolet 1980 (esp. chapter seven) provides a remarkably comprehensive overview of Roman republican citizenship.
former served as a conduit across plebian-patrician lines, providing access for the one and influence for the other. The latter provided a means by which conquered or subordinate communities could press their interests via a unique channel of patronage by individual Roman citizens or families—effectively, a specific imperial expansion of oligarchic prerogatives within the republican system.89

These webs of institutionalized private relationships (albeit with very public consequences) disrupt the possibility of sovereignty, whether “internal” or “external”: at home, they establish significant modes of authority outside of centralized government; abroad, they establish diplomatic channels with foreign communities. In both cases, it becomes difficult to speak of a single authorized representative, or representative body, of the people for the entirety of Rome. And these extensive patronage networks were hardly unique to ancient Rome. They would continue to be key features of how power and authority actually operated through the medieval and early-modern periods, before direct, personal ties were only slowly replaced by impersonal, representative institutions.90

To take another significant example, there is a long-standing tradition of treating the cities of Renaissance Italy as the first modern states, or at least as earlier iterations of the modern state.91 But, even republican cities could scarcely be thought of as unified and impersonal loci of power.92 The first reason is because their contours were dissimilar from the strong borders of

89 Cf. Cicero, De Officiis I.35; Badian 1958. Which is hardly to say that clientelist modes of rule cannot be found today—see Bayart 1993—only that they are generally viewed as defective within the context of the modern state.
90 Molho 2006. Constantinidou 2010 provides an excellent overview of studies that highlight the extensive role of patronage in early-modern politics.
91 Ranke 1909, 38. Burckhardt 1878 similarly views that period as the foundry of the state concept. Many longitudinal studies of modern warfare also begin with this era.
92 The strongest exception to this point is probably their development of relatively sophisticated administrative municipal bodies—see Chabod 1958a.
contemporary states. “The concept of territoriality—that political power should be based on a specific piece of territory, and sovereignty should extend only to certain natural frontiers corresponding with historical or ethnic divisions—had not yet developed, so the geographical bases of each unit were almost as ill-defined as the political bases for government and administration.”93

Second, and perhaps even more importantly, as with the Greek polis they lacked any concept of a true corporate body that was not beholden to the particular interests of some individual or faction. At their broadest, they still largely served the interests of the oligarchic classes.94 And they frequently functioned at the pleasure of still more limited interests, when ruled by the notorious Renaissance princes. As Garrett Mattingly notes of the policies they pursued: “The sixteenth-century struggle for power had a dynastic, not a national orientation… Whether such conquests would be worth to his people the blood and treasure they would cost was an irrelevant, absurd question. Nobody expected that they would.”95

Indeed, this dynastic factor was generally predominant up to the 18th century. Richard Mackenney remarks of the ancien régime that, from the standpoint of “those who governed, the interests of the family were all important…Indeed, the survival or extinction of the dynasty was the difference between peace and war, and the accidents of inheritance shaped the power blocs of Europe as a whole.”96

Consequently, the public arena that we associate with government and governance today was scarcely to be found in a dynastic world. The core political institution of dynasts was not a

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93 Holsti 1972, 55.
95 Mattingly 1955, 162-163. See also Bueno de Mesquita 1988.
96 Mackenney 1993, 219. Edward Banfield characterize this dynamic as “amoral familism” when it appears several hundred years later among the denizens of modern southern Italy. A fundamental change to the horizon of political commitments makes possible radically different evaluative judgments.
parliament or bureaucracy or any other public venue, but the court. “If some rulers [prior to the 19th century] deliberately neglected their own court for some time and tried to rule in an exclusively ‘bureaucratic’ way, they soon came to regret it.”97 Though dynastic rulers undeniably claimed substantial prerogatives and executive powers, these are not *eo ipso* equivalent to sovereignty as we understand it. It was instead the long development of the concept of the people, however inchoate, that made it possible for sovereignty to be articulated in a manner that reflected the collective interests of an enduring state.98

**Stories of State-formation**

This distance between these concepts—of dynasticism and modern sovereign states—is clearly present in much of the literature on state formation, which seeks to trace the processes by which the latter grew out of the former in early-modern Europe. At the end of this line of development, somehow, stands the impersonal, “abstract entity” of the state.99 Closer to the state’s origins and for much of its existence, it remained the personal possession of its ruling part—and the means by which the ruling part exercised authority over the ruled.

Implicit in the dominant theories of state-formation, however, is some collective concept of peoplehood or nationhood that gestates alongside that of the modern state apparatus (and makes it possible). That is to say, both the people and their rulers must come to see themselves as possessing a common set of interests and obligations. Joseph Strayer highlights this factor, but

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98 This is not to say that dynastic interests themselves didn't play a role in the embrace of this concept—see Bukovansky 2002.
99 Shennan 1974, 9. See also, Mansfield 1983, Rahe 1984, 268; and Skinner 1989. I discuss the significance of the state as an impersonal entity at length in chapter 5 of this work as well.
does not elaborate on it when he ultimately attributes the modern state’s successful rise to a “shift in attitudes [that] produced greater loyalty to the ruler and to the state.”

When it comes to explaining the formation of modern states, some scholars emphasize war-making processes; others the development of capacities to invite and centralize capital while serving as the guarantor of contracts, which in turn stimulated greater trade and investment; and still others on the state’s institutional efficiency, which won out in the ruthless geopolitical and geoeconomic competition with other polities. But whether the emphasis is on war, economics, or governing institutions, all of these accounts accord a central position to the bargaining relationship between ruler and ruled across a recognizable population.

This is perhaps most evident in the so-called “bellicist” accounts of state-formation. In brief, war-making practices on the part of dynastic rulers necessitated the establishment of coercive (military bureaucracies) and extractive (taxation) institutions in order to successfully prosecute wars. These institutions in turn outlasted the wars that gave rise to them, providing the embryo for nascent modern states, especially as the populations to which they were linked began to demand concomitant benefits and privileges from their rulers. Or, as Charles Tilly put it in a much-quoted line: “war made the state, and the state made war.”

It is, meanwhile, common in such accounts to define the modern state as the “national state.” It is these national states that prove most capable of extracting and directing capital while mobilizing their populations against other states. This process reaches its apotheosis with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests, as well as the subsequent imitative

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104 Tilly 1985.
nationalization of other European countries throughout the “long” 19th century. To put it in the terms of our discussion thus far, these national states possessed the clearest boundaries and manifested the strongest sovereignty by virtue of their ability to plausibly (i.e., in the eyes of both ruler and ruled) claim to represent their respective populations.

The trouble is that the above process does not obviously produce the specific kind of cohesive state—replete with the functions of sovereignty and territory—that state theory presupposes. In particular, it lacks an explanation for what binds rulers and ruled beyond momentary expediency. And technological innovation and systemic pressures were insufficient to produce this model. 105 In Rogers Brubaker’s pithy formulation, “The bellicist argument is a demand-side argument, not a supply-side argument.” 106 In other words, it explains how and why rulers increasingly came to require a sustained commitment from their respective populations to provide money and manpower for their war efforts. 107 But it does not explain why they increasingly received it.

Barry Posen, for example, argues that nationalism came into being as the logical solution for the problem of encouraging this mass mobilization (and the sacrifice it potentially entails) in the age of the modern state. 108 Similarly, Charles Tilly argues for the distinction between processes of state-building and nation-building (with the latter following the former, without being a necessary consequence of it). 109 But such instrumentalist explanations have difficulty accounting for why the many would find nationalism a compelling doctrine if it were so well

105 Avant 2000.
106 Brubaker 2010, 378.
107 Ertman also calls attention to the difficulty, as early as the 15th and 16th centuries, of recruiting soldiers and generating tax revenues without the cooperation of the “political nation”—see Ertman 1997, 93, 111.
109 Tilly 1975, 70; see also Poggi 1990, 28-30.
calculated to serve the interest of the few. For that matter, they do not even account for its serving the interest of the few, unless they had already committed themselves to the state as such, as opposed to more particular dynastic or familial loyalties.

Indeed, Tilly himself would arrive at a more complex and nuanced version of his own argument, in which he clarifies that he is really describing the transformation of a vaguely-defined dynastic “state” into the more recognizable entity of the modern state over several hundred years, with warmaking as but one component in that process.\textsuperscript{110} More to the point, this meant linking effective military buildup with the ideas and practices of popular sovereignty.\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, Samuel Finer, who had earlier promoted a strong bellicist account of state-formation, nonetheless already admitted that the extractive-coercive state only reaches its zenith with the amalgamation of nationalism and popular sovereignty.\textsuperscript{112}

In sum, even if warmaking generally concentrates power in the form of centralized governing structures, this does not account for the specific emergence of nation-states. For this to happen, the people have to see themselves as part of the state. “Nation- and state-building succeeds only when the subjected territory no longer sees itself as distinct and potentially independent entity but as part of the core. The subjected populace no longer sees itself as ‘subjected’ but as equals.”\textsuperscript{113} An evolving idea of peoplehood, then, is not so much missing in accounts of state-formation as it is presupposed by it.\textsuperscript{114} This, however, requires a political

\textsuperscript{110} Tilly 1992. Brubaker 2010 argues that Tilly has an implicit theory of nationalism.
\textsuperscript{111} Tilly 1994, 139.
\textsuperscript{112} Finer 1975, 161.
\textsuperscript{113} Spruyt 2013, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{114} Levi 1988 in fact calls for “bringing people back in” to state theory, but is referring only to people as rationally-motivated individuals.
framework, which connects ideas of individual equality with meaningful membership in a broader population.\textsuperscript{115}

The social contract (based on an implicit agreement between rulers and ruled) suggested a different type of connection between citizens and the state than was prevalent in old regime states. It implied the relevance of the political community, rather than just the leader, to notions of sovereignty. If sovereignty rested in the people, the defense of sovereignty was an obligation held by all.\textsuperscript{116}

The Role of Representation

As we have said, much of the novelty of the modern state lies in the shift from direct, personal forms of rule to indirect, impersonal rule.\textsuperscript{117} This in turn places a critical emphasis on popular representation as a constitutive element.\textsuperscript{118} Accordingly, the state, along with its agents, functions by virtue of its claim to plausibly represent the collective body of the citizenry—that is, the people. Throughout this chapter, we have alluded to the theme of representation (and its absence elsewhere) as a key component of statehood. As Anthony Giddens puts it, it is popular representation that signals “the emergence of a novel political formation. More than this [sovereignty and popular representation] become key elements of what the modern state is—they help constitute its very distinctiveness.”\textsuperscript{119}

Because the ancient polis, for example, was not a representative institution, the citizen’s attachment to it emerged primarily through engaged political practice and not via the intersection of personal and collective identity. The modern state is perfected by the concept of representation, which connects the ruling apparatus of the state to an entire body of the people or

\textsuperscript{115} See Bukovansky 2002, esp. 61-109.
\textsuperscript{116} Avant 2000, 44.
\textsuperscript{117} Mansfield 1971. See also Holland 2010.
\textsuperscript{118} Pitkin 1967.
\textsuperscript{119} Giddens 1985, 20.
nation. This raises the obvious question: who or what is being represented? To return to Weber’s famed definition of the state, who is it that actually possesses the monopoly of legitimate physical coercion? After all, the subject of Weber’s definition is not the monopoly itself, but the association that wields it. But what (and whence) is this association? And what distinguishes it from other kinds of associations? Today, the readiest answer to the first question would likely be, “the nation.”

“[S]tate formation is a totalizing project, representing people as members of a particular community…This community is epitomized as the nation, which claims people’s primary social identification and loyalty.”

Yet most scholarship on statehood does not, on its own, explain the nation, nor can it grapple with our other questions here. In order to do so, and to more fully address the relationship of the idea of the nation to the idea of the people, it is necessary to turn to the literature on nationalism.

Conclusion

To sum up, a concept of peoplehood or popular sovereignty is integral—if not always explicitly—to our prevailing theories of the state and state-formation. It substantiates the related concepts of sovereignty and territoriality, and it allows us to more concretely define the modernity of states in contrast with other political forms.

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120 See Navari 2007.
121 Runciman 2003, 29.
122 See Bourdieu 2012, 199.
123 Perhaps owing to Weber’s rejection of nationalism as a meaningful category of study, he does not clarify the nature or origins of this association in its relation to the state. See Geuss 2001, 16-17.
124 Corrigan and Sayer 1985, 4. See also Breuilly 1994, 113,
The trouble comes with making practical sense of this concept. After all, if the dominant scholarship on nationalism is accurate, no state has a “people” in the sense of a unified, homogenous population that predates the establishment of that state. And yet insofar as modern states are largely nation-states, this itself is due to their notional ability to represent their peoples. Indeed, as we shall see, scholars of nationalism have increasingly come to see this claim as central to its development.
Chapter 2: The State of the Nation

...et forment enfin dans chaque contrée une nation particulière, unie de mœurs et de caractères, non par des règlements et des lois, mais par le même genre de vie...

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Given the pivotal role of popular sovereignty in how the modern state is conceptualized, it is no coincidence that scholarly accounts of modern state formation culminate with the nation-state, in which the state is said to represent a given people. As Andreas Wimmer puts it, “modernity itself rests on a basis of ethnic and nationalist principles.” Yet the relationship between the idea of the people and the idea of the nation still requires investigation.

As in the previous chapter, the purpose here is less to advance an original argument than to summarize the relevant scholarly literature so as to demonstrate the salience of ideas of peoplehood and popular sovereignty. As with that concerning the state, much of the scholarship on nationalism, too, converges upon the significance of popular sovereignty. Yet given the number of studies that have come to link nationalism with popular sovereignty, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the peculiar concept of the people, which it presupposes. Even political theorists who have come in recent years to investigate this concept in greater depth, and noting its problems and lacunae, have tended not to inquire into its origins.

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1 Rousseau 1964, 169.
Qu’est-ce Qu’une Nation?

The difficulties of productively discussing nationalism, much like those of the state, have largely to do with the analytical problem of distinguishing it from other forms of particularism. What, after all, makes a given group identity “national” or “nationalist”? Indeed, few political terms and concepts are so contested as nations and nationalism. As Hannah Arendt wrote: “Nothing in the historical sciences is more obscure than its terminology. The arbitrariness with which the same groups are alternatively called peoples or races or nations, the loose talk which uses terms such as nationalism, patriotism and imperialism as equivalents, the many parallels which are used to explain away everything that may be new under the sun...” Like the state, nationalism is a near-universal phenomenon that has arisen out of a variety of distinctive geopolitical conditions and taken various forms of particular cultural expression.

Interestingly, the one point on which otherwise differing scholars largely agree is the baseline definition of nations, such that a nation is “a community of people with an aspiration to be politically self-determining,” and a state is “the set of political institutions that they may aspire to possess for themselves.” Thus, insofar as nationalism describes an ordering principle of world politics, it entails the claim that nations are generally entitled to possess states, and that states where they exist should represent their nations. To this we might add the belief that obligations to one’s nation should supersede all other attachments. The nation is “the largest community which, when the chips are down, effectively commands men's loyalty, overriding the

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3 Vincent 2002.
5 Tilly 1999, 418.
6 Miller 1997, 19. This definition is obviously quite “thin”: it tells nothing about the actual content of that community nor of its basis in the historical record; there is substantial disagreement on both of these points.
7 Tilly 1999, 417.
claims of both lesser communities within it and those which cut across it or potentially enfold it within a still greater society.”

One can meanwhile hold that all three claims are meaningfully descriptive of contemporary political life without endorsing them on behalf of any particular nation.

From this point on, consensus breaks down. There is significant debate over whether nationalism is a feature or a bug of modern liberal politics. For many, nationalism is an atavistic reaction to a triumphalist liberal democratic order. Half a century ago, Isaiah Berlin wrote of nationalist furies that, “What we are seeing, it seems to me, is a world reaction against the central doctrines of nineteenth-century liberal rationalism itself, a confused effort to return to an older morality.” However one might quibble with this timeline, his represents a familiar analysis of nationalism as a form of reaction. That view persists in the face of a number of highly influential studies of nationalism that instead insist upon its essential modernity. Ernest Gellner mocked the “sleeping beauty” theory of nationalism, in which slumbering nations are awoken by the tumults of the modern world—Berlin and others might for this substitute a sleeping giant or dragon, perhaps. But this reading likely persists, at least popularly, both because of the ways that particular nationalisms represent themselves as predating modern

8 Connor 1990, 98.
9 This discussion mostly sidesteps the literature that seeks to account for the psychological wellsprings of nationalism, which would take us in a very different direction. Interestingly, none of the modern scholars who have substantially contributed to our understanding of nationalism could be described as nationalists in the sense of possessing affective attachments to a specific nation—quite the opposite, in many cases. Even Benedict Anderson, who has a largely congenial account of nationalism, could not accurately be described as a nationalist.
11 Berlin 1972, 24
12 The title of his essay refers to the image of a bent twig snapping back violently in reaction to being disturbed.
governments, and because of a common negative association of violent nationalism with the forces of reaction.¹³

What the interpreters of nationalism-as-reaction and their modernist critics share is the claim that nationalism is an essentially recent phenomenon, whether created or merely triggered by modern dynamics. Thus arises the obvious question of why and how the “imagined community” of the nation only came to exert such a profound force in the context of the rise of the state system.¹⁴ This dual nature of nations—as something both notionally ancestral and evidently modern—has led to a great number of debates over their origins.¹⁵

For so-called “modernists,” nations are fundamentally either the direct result or the byproduct of the actions taken by self-interested military and economic elites within the past two centuries. Charles Tilly for example, makes a common distinction between “state-led” and “state-seeking” nationalism: rulers began to demand sacrifices from their peoples in specifically national terms, thereby shaping the ruled into nations, while independent nations subsequently (and in response) sought to establish states of their own.¹⁶ Similarly, Anthony Marx argues that exclusionary (and often fanatical) interpretations of religion were used by the elites of centralizing states in order to foster a sense of nationalism those same states required.¹⁷

¹³ Consider then-President Bill Clinton’s judgment on Bosnia, as it was depicted in Robert Kaplan’s Balkan Ghosts. See relatedly the acid exchange between Kaplan and Noel Malcolm in Kaplan et al. 1993.
¹⁴ The term is Benedict Anderson’s—see Anderson 2006.
¹⁵ For a microcosm of such debates, read in order: Gellner 1983; Smith 1986; Smith 1996; Gellner 1996a. See also, Connor 1990; and Connor 2004. Gat 2013 has made the most recent extended case for nations as age-old forms of association.
¹⁶ Tilly 1994; see also Mosse 1975. Breuilly 1994 argues the opposite: that nationalism arose in opposition to the encroachment of state authority.
¹⁷ Marx 2003. Marx relies heavily upon the single case of Ferdinand the Catholic, however, and he downplays the tendencies of religious factionalism to undermine state authority. Similarly, he places undue emphasis upon the fact that both religious and liberal polities are necessarily particularistic to some degree.
Others like Ernest Gellner instead focus on more impersonal developments, such as industrialization, which to be successful functionally requires a degree of popular homogenization for the benefit of the political economy, which in turn becomes fodder for nationalist sentiments.\(^{18}\) For Benedict Anderson, it was instead the modern development of print capitalism that created the vernacular languages that allowed otherwise unrelated local communities to see themselves as interconnected on a national level.\(^{19}\) It is worth noting that all of the modernist theories tend to describe a process and not an essential quality of nationalization. Moreover, they largely do not explain how so many citizens were able to continue to transfer—indeed intensify—their allegiances to the state even as it secularized or modernized.

By contrast, and against purely modernist claims, Anthony Smith advances what he calls an “ethno-symbolist” account that treats modern nations having “emerged from earlier ethnic communities which shared traits such as language, traditions, memories, a belief in common descent, and a sense of collective identity which often reached far into the past.”\(^{20}\) Smith’s treatment has the benefit of prima facie plausibility, aligning with our own intuitions, however amorphous they may be, about the history of human associations. That is to say, we recognize how peoples have clustered together along lines of shared traditions and practices, and that these communities are self-consciously acknowledged within the ancestry of modern nations.

And yet we find little reference to anything like such a natural, or at least historical, community that serves as the basis for peoplehood prior to the late eighteenth century.\(^{21}\) It isn’t

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\(^{18}\) Gellner 1983.

\(^{19}\) Anderson 2006.


\(^{21}\) See the following chapter for a discussion of how the search for ancestral national origins postdates the emergence of ideas of popular sovereignty.
that the existence of these ethnic or cultural communities was denied; it was simply that they had little relevance to determining the breadth of dominion or establishing the justifications for political authority. Yet if these groups really lay at the origins of nations as we understand them today, we might expect to find evidence of their political recognition going back to the early-modern period (if not before).

There is, likewise, a substantial literature—much of it built upon Smith’s work, while going beyond his claims—concerning what are in effect “nations before nationalism.” As should be clear, however, this quickly reduces to a semantic argument: should we understand nations as uniquely modern and older communities as something else altogether, or should we understand nations as both modern and medieval (or ancient), with modernity principally supplying new political ideas and institutions that, when mixed with older nations, produce the novel phenomenon of nationalism? In either case, there is no disagreement that something new has emerged that is essentially unique to modernity.

How its members affectively identify with the national group and with what degree of intensity is a complicated story, and must almost always be told as a series of highly specific branching pathways; e.g., Hungarian nationalism didn’t “happen” in the same way that Peruvian nationalism did. But this question—what explains the emergence of a specific brand of nationalism and the strength of its hold on adherents?—is a different one than: what explains the plausibility, not to say the extraordinary success, of nationalism as an organizing principle for modern political communities?

One consistent problem in sociological explanations for nationalism is that they veer between explaining the conditions for the emergence of nationalism in a particular case (or

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22 Armstrong 1982; Beaune 1991 specifically makes this argument with respect to France. This view is sometimes called “perennialism.”
cases), and explaining its historical emergence generally.23 For example, it may have been the case that industrialization (Ernest Gellner) or the spread of print capitalism and widespread literacy (Benedict Anderson) were the necessary conditions for nationalism’s initial growth in Western Europe, but not in its subsequent proliferation around the world.24 Similarly, the establishment or recognition of a common, standardized vernacular was historically bound up with the rise of nationalist sentiment.25 But the apparent recognition of some form of national identity did not presuppose a national language in practice.26 Nor do we deny nation-state status today to such countries as Canada, Switzerland, and India, which both encompass and officially recognize multiple linguistic groups (albeit with varying degrees of success).

It is important moreover to distinguish nationalism as an historically-specific phenomenon from communal particularism. Cultural or ethnic group identities can and have existed in the absence of political nationalism.

For most of world history…thousands of peoples claiming distinctive identities have coexisted with and within states that managed some form of indirect rule. More states resembled the Austro-Hungarian Empire than emulated Sweden. Those states have usually favored some identities over others, but have neither homogenized their populations nor faced serious threats that subject peoples would rebel in the name of their distinctness.27

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23 Or, as in Deutsch 1957, explaining how logics of nationalism work within modern structures. See also Breuilly 1985, 73.
24 Like Marxism, nationalism readily spread to pre-industrialized countries, such as Cambodia or Indonesia—a point that Anderson is quick to make.
25 As early as the 13th century, Dante Alighieri recognized the significance of the development of distinct dialects-cum-languages out of the once-universal Latin.
26 As Weber 1976 demonstrated, standard French was spoken amongst a bare plurality of French citizens as late as 1900.
27 Tilly 1994, 133.
Local and particular groups can and have existed throughout history in ways that are recognizable to both insiders and outsiders, without advancing the core nationalist claim that they must possess a sovereign state unique to that group.\textsuperscript{28}

Conversely, an ethos of nationalism is not a precondition for the existence of political communities. Indeed, the absence of peoplehood or nationhood as political concepts in the ancient world is striking. The Roman example does not depict a single nation congruent with the political apparatus. The original Romans, according even to conventional Roman historiography, were in fact a curious admixture: the men descendants of mixed Trojans and Latins, the women taken from the neighboring Sabines, several of their early kings Etruscan, and so forth.\textsuperscript{29} In other words, the early Romans were not dissimilar from early-modern European populations—an amalgam of invasions and migrations living under what Daniel Nexon calls cross-hatched dynastic agglomerations.\textsuperscript{30}

More to the point, neither Greeks nor Romans understood the nation to be a necessary basis for the political community. The original political community (in the etymological sense) was the ancient Greek \textit{polis}, but the \textit{polis} was not rooted in a nation as such.\textsuperscript{31} This is not to say that the Hellenes collectively had no concept of themselves as a nation or people across Greece;\textsuperscript{32} only that it was not coextensive with the political community of the \textit{polis}.\textsuperscript{33} The term “nation” and its cognates is age-old but has only in the past two centuries come to mean what it

\textsuperscript{28} The collective desire for autonomy does not equal nationalism per se, not least because autonomy in practice has frequently coexisted with imperial rule.


\textsuperscript{30} Nexon 2009.


\textsuperscript{32} See the remarkable passage in Herodotus 8.144

\textsuperscript{33} Though cf. Aristotle \textit{Politics}, 1327b30-32 and Isocrates \textit{Panegyricus} 173 on the merits of a pan-Hellenic empire. I owe these references to Ryan Balot. Socrates also suggests that the distinction between Greeks and barbarians has political ramifications in Plato, \textit{Republic} 470c-d.
does today. Indeed, its origins were largely pejorative, used to describe foreign groups, rather than citizens.\textsuperscript{34} Much the same was true for the related term, \textit{patria}. “In Greek as well as in Roman antiquity, the term πατρίϛ or \textit{patria} referred chiefly, if not exclusively, to the city. Only barbarians were named, like modern nationals, after their country, and only barbarians were \textit{patriōtai}, whereas the Greeks were proud of being \textit{politai}, citizens.”\textsuperscript{35}

Even political rhetoric that might seem to us as redolent of modern nationalism, such as Pericles’ Funeral Oration, nonetheless differs from it in important ways.\textsuperscript{36} Pericles admittedly valorizes amoral glory-seeking on behalf of Athens’s empire. Yet he also emphasizes Athens’s democratic regime, whereas for a modern nationalist, it is the nation itself and not any particular arrangement of government that validates our actions on its behalf (and, indeed, is the only thing that can). Pericles also treats Athenian greatness principally as the vehicle for individual glory and recognition, and not exclusively as a collective achievement as would a modern nationalist.\textsuperscript{37}

Suffice it to say, the debates over the attempts to fix for all time the ontological reality of nations are almost designed to be self-perpetuating: one will always find, in a variety of historical and cultural milieux, evidence of the kinds of collective affective commitment that we now associate with nationalism; and one will also find contrary evidence that limits that association. So, while it is not necessarily “wrong” to refer to older communities as “nations,” be they ancient Athenians or medieval Saxons, it is difficult to see how these might be distinguished from any form of particularistic community that acknowledges shared ties of language, custom, and kinship. What is gained by calling them nations, other than to acknowledge the communal

\textsuperscript{34} Zernatto 1944.
\textsuperscript{35} Kantorowicz 1951, 474.
\textsuperscript{36} See Thucydides 2.35-2.46.
\textsuperscript{37} Contrast this with the sentiments of “Deutschland über alles” as expressed in the German national anthem.
features they may share with modern nations? One can speak about “nations before states” as much as one likes, but it is observably the case that nationalism only becomes salient in the context of the nation-state; prior to its advent, numerous preexisting ethnic or tribal groups lacked a comparable object of such value over which to compete. This again is defined by the distinction between particularism—even ethnically rooted particularism—in general and nationalism as a specific development.

To sum up, competing accounts of the origins of nations and processes of nationalization largely agree that nationalism—that is, the belief that states should have nations and nations should have states—is a modern phenomenon, whether or not nations themselves are too. Where these accounts disagree, each approach has particular problems or lacunae. “Modernists” have difficulty explaining why state-led (or “top-down”) nationalism held such mass appeal.38 “Perennialists” have to explain how and why those groups whose identity was primarily cultural prior to the 19th and 20th centuries came to see state-seeking as a worthy and viable enterprise.39 “Ethno-symbolists” similarly have to explain why late modernity witnessed such a drive to demonstrate and systematize those cultural symbols that were formerly relegated to lived practice.40 If nations are not primordial forces that eject onto the geopolitical landscape in modernity after having been bottled up for centuries (as almost no contemporary scholar on

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38 This is of course bound up with the same problems that confront theorists of state formation: how does one account for the popular success of elite strategies without resorting to arguments of false consciousness?
39 Perennialist (or “primordialist”) is in many ways a misleading term: Walker Connor, for example, places greater stress upon members’ observed belief in a nation’s ancestral roots than on the reality.
40 Even this process was hardly straightforward. The compiling of the Finnish Kalevala, for example, was as much a matter of interpretation and recreation as recording existing stories. I owe this example to Clifford Orwin.
nationalism believes), then their emergence is linked (as most scholars, one way or another, acknowledge) to the rise of particular political conditions.\footnote{A point stressed by Brubaker 1992 and Breuilly 1994.}

Indeed, it is difficult to separate what John Breuilly calls “the political context in which nationalism develops” from “the cultural and social contexts which give a particular relevance and function to the nationalist argument.”\footnote{Breuilly 1985, 75. O’Leary 1997, 215-217 has similarly criticized modern theories of nationalism for their apolitical character.} In a word, that political context is the emergence of the state. Eric Hobsbawm puts it most succinctly: it is “pointless to talk about nations apart from the state.”\footnote{Hobsbawm 1990, 9.} More than any other defining attribute perhaps, the nation is what marks the state as a distinctive form of community. Conversely, as Rogers Brubaker puts it, “the power to validate claims to nationhood resides above all with states.”\footnote{Brubaker 2004, 117.} The state is thus the political expression of the national community – the community that trumps all other types of community partly due to its exclusive representation by the state.

There are, of course, nationalisms that form outside or against the existence of state structures (Basque, Serbian, Palestinian, Quebecois, Tamil, etc.), examples of which are not obscure.\footnote{See Guibernau 2013.} But the salient feature of such nationalisms is that they do not predate states as such; they arise within the gaps of regional state systems, under the pressures created by the establishment of other nation-states, or within established states whose claim of representation they reject.

It is the final case that provides fodder for Anthony Smith’s argument that modern nationalism arises organically out of premodern groups. After all, if a state claims to represent its population in toto, and that claim is rejected by certain subgroups who point to various cultural,
religious, and/or linguistic differences between themselves and the majority population, how can it be said that nationalist identities are themselves merely the creation of states? Because such differences present as prepolitical—that is, they do not require the prior establishment of state structures to cultivate them—Smith argues against the pure constructivist account of nationhood as the instrumental creation of states. Against this view, Ernest Gellner (Smith’s mentor) argues that “a nation/culture cannot normally survive without its own political shell, the state.”

The matter is that such prepolitical factors have been recognizable features of human societies since well before Herodotus wrote his inquiries. It is only in the modern era, however, that they have acquired their particular political salience. (Conversely, the absence of such prepolitical, ethnic factors does not necessarily deprive a given state of fuel for nationalism—as the case of the United States has demonstrated on more than one occasion.) Yet, as the previous chapter’s discussion may indicate, our understanding of the state does not really exist independently of the nation. It is insufficient, then, to try to understand nations as functions of states. Something more is at work.

Suffice to say, an increasing consensus has formed, holding that if nationalism is not a natural phenomenon, neither is it to be simply dismissed as a social construct. It is—regardless of its origins—a form of politics and rhetoric that develops, along with the modern state, around a conscious national identity. And yet: “Karl Deutsch long ago remarked that for national consciousness to arise, there must be something for it to become conscious of.” What precisely is that something?

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46 Gellner 1983, 142-143. Whether this is empirically true is a separate question.  
47 Tambini 1998. Tambini provides a useful overview of the literature on nationalism generally.  
48 Hroch 2012, 79. See also Deutsch 1953, 153-155.
The Role of Popular Sovereignty

Ernest Gellner writes:

[N]ationalism is not explained by the use it has in legitimizing modernization… but by the fact that individuals find themselves in very stressful situations, unless the nationalist requirement of congruence between a man's culture and that of his environment is satisfied. Hence that deep passion which… is a reaction to an intolerable situation, to a constant jarring in the activity which is by far the most important thing in life—contact and communication with fellow human beings.49

But this presupposes rather than accounts for the significance of that perceived stress. In fact, for most of history, such stress was largely absent. Gellner seems to attribute this awareness of the incongruence at work (the chief cause of this stress) to the rise of industrialized societies. In other words:

\[ \text{Modernization (industrialization + mass communication)} > \text{Perceived incongruence of local identities with respect to one’s larger environment} > \text{Experienced stress} \]

Even if we accept the relationship between the first two factors, the actual relation of the second two is ambiguous to say the least. Why does this perception necessarily produce dissatisfaction? It is true enough that nationalism requires some congruence between one’s culture and one’s political situation.50 But no such congruence existed for many peoples throughout history, with little evidence of the kind of collective psychological stress that Gellner describes. Ancient Greek cities shared a good deal of cultural overlap—common language, burial and cultic practices, structures of myth, political institutions, and so on—while retaining separate political autonomy. Conversely, many peoples for much of history were ruled under imperial structures, wherein their rulers or governors predominantly hailed from foreign places and cultures, without

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49 Gellner 1996b, 627-628.
50 See chapter 6 for a discussion of the conceptual relationship between culture and nationalism.
evidently seeing this as a problem requiring a nationalist solution.\textsuperscript{51} Nor is it the case that many people living under either ancient or colonial empires could have failed to perceive the incongruence between their own local identities and the larger institutions of rule (not to say extraction and exploitation) that governed them—even in the absence of modern industrialization and widespread literacy. What, then, are the political conditions specific to modernity that catalyze nationalist demands?

At a lower register, John Shotter claimed in his influential work that nationalism is “best thought of as a tradition of argumentation, a way of people continually arguing with each other over who or what they are.”\textsuperscript{52} This tradition of argumentation evinces a distinguishing mark of the modern nation: a self-conscious concern for its essential status. This concern for defining a common identity is not mere navel-gazing, but has to do with the mainsprings of the extraordinarily powerful and intrusive machinery of modern states. We argue first not “what should be done?” or “who is most qualified to do it?” but “who are we?” because it is the answer to the latter question that would legitimize (or not) the exercise of that machinery.

In other words, the arguments we have center around a particular problem of self-definition, which is itself intertwined with the politics of modern citizenship. As Rogers Brubaker points out:

\begin{quote}
Citizenship in a nation-state is inevitably bound up with nationhood and national identity, membership of the state with membership of the nation. Proposals to redefine the legal criteria of citizenship raise large and ideologically charged questions of nationhood and national belonging. Debates about citizenship...are debates about what it means to belong to the nation-state. The politics of citizenship today is first and foremost a politics of nationhood...The central question is not “who gets what?” but rather “who is what?”\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} For this reason, Kedourie 1993, 135 concludes his work by rejecting nationalism as a meaningful evaluative criterion for determining the justness or unjustness of one’s rulers.


\textsuperscript{53} Brubaker 1992, 182.
But there is a question being begged here: why do we now argue with *these* people in *those* terms? And beyond this: what allows us to conceive of such a thing as a people in the first place?

It is partly because of questions like these that Benedict Anderson’s description of nations as “imagined communities” has proven so successful. Yet as Anderson himself admits, the nation is not unique in being an imagined community; that same term could be used to describe most settled polities that were sufficiently large that their members could not plausibly all know one another.\(^{54}\) What is most salient about the nation is not the fact of its being an imagined community, but the particular way in which its members imagine that community and their membership in it.

As above, a political framework is necessary to account for these perceptions—that there are particular people with whom we should be arguing about our common identity, and that we might be uneasy at the prospect of being ruled by those who do not share that identity. That political dimension is nationalism’s most salient point of connection with the state: the exclusive right of representation. “What remains common to all modern nationalist discourses is that the nation is a ‘whole society’ and is no longer ideologically subordinate to any other idea. That is linked to its appeal for popular support, if necessary directed against existing authority, and to the claim that the nation can provide the justification for reformed political institutions.”\(^{55}\) It is for this reason that much of the most fruitful scholarship on nationalism—particularly in more recent years—has focused upon the connection between the rise of nationalism and the emergence of the doctrine of popular sovereignty.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{54}\) Anderson 2006, 6. Aristotle famously proposed just that as a precondition for the best city in book VII of *Politics*.

\(^{55}\) Breuilly 2005, 92.

As we said at the outset, evaluating our present situation requires us to adequately distinguish between particularistic attachments as such and the particular attachments of nationhood. Bernard Yack usefully summarizes nationalism as “the mutual reinforcement of feelings of communal loyalty and beliefs about political legitimacy.” If communal loyalties of some kind are so ubiquitous as to be natural features of human life, they only acquire the particular shape and significance that we think of as nationalism within the political (and discursive) context of popular sovereignty.

This may seem obviously true in retrospect, yet a surprising number of writers on nationalism have granted it scarce attention, even including those who emphasize nationalism’s political dimensions. It is not sufficient to draw out instances of common reference to ethnic particularity or linguistic continuity and so forth; when we use these concepts, we emphasize this political dimension. By examining the articulation of these understandings, we can recognize that they appear early, powerfully, and joined with conceptual blueprints for political institutions. “Even a brief glance at modern history suggests that there is an important connection between popular sovereignty and the rise and spread of nationalism. For wherever popular sovereignty leads, nationalism seems to follow.”

This approach neither dismisses the existence of premodern notions of group identity, nor does it disregard the highly particular ways in which national ideas are incarnated in specific instances. At the same time, it clarifies the political perceptions that guide nationalist beliefs. Istvan Hont went so far as to claim that “without a historically informed understanding of the

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57 Yack 2012, 158.
58 For example, Laitin 2007 describes the processes by which particular actors emphasize national identities to achieve political ends within modern state structures, but does not discuss the conceptual framework of popular sovereignty that makes this plausible.
59 Yack 2001, 517.
theory of popular sovereignty no clarification of the modern language of ‘nation-states’ and ‘nationalism’ is possible.”60

Popular sovereignty, understood as the idea of the people as the collective and undivided body that is uniquely positioned to legitimize the power and authority of the state, prepares the way for nationalism.61 For, in order for the nation to be truly national, it must account for the total body of the people. As Walker Connor notes, “The nation, to be a mass phenomenon, must refer to the entire mass, ‘the masses’ and elites alike.”62 Or as Craig Calhoun, puts it, “A crucial dimension of nationalism…is the claim that the people of a country constitute a socially integrated body, a meaningful whole.”63

At the same time, the nation is to be understood as a culturally distinct entity, not just one democratic body among others.64 But these are not independent and unrelated strands of thought. For, popular sovereignty is not limited to a set of purely political claims about legitimating governmental authority. It spills over into other spheres conventionally thought of as cultural or national. As Charles Taylor remarks, “For a people to be sovereign, it needs to form an entity and to have a personality.”65 The doctrine of popular sovereignty is not just a claim about the definition and rights of the people in a given polity; it also warrants—however implicitly—that there is such a meaningful prepolitical entity as a people that is distinct from other peoples. And that it is this particular people that enjoys (or should enjoy) exclusive status to authorize governmental power on its behalf.

60 Hont 1994, 171.
61 It should be noted that the doctrine of popular sovereignty does not actually require that the people participate, even indirectly, in governing themselves.
62 Connor 2004, 42. See also Jackson 2007, 78.
63 Calhoun 1997, 77.
64 Breuilly 1994 argues that nationalism entails blending these two concepts in a less-than-straightforward manner.
65 Taylor 1999b, 265.
Of course, the doctrine of popular sovereignty may be primarily conceptualized as a matter of rights: collective rights not to be ruled by feudal lords whose claim to rulership is historical rather than constitutional; and individual rights whose protection is to be guaranteed by a legitimately constituted government (and to which government one may lawfully appeal in the event that those rights are infringed upon). But insofar as both kinds of rights are linked both to the existence of a people and to one’s membership within it, the attributes of that people become salient.

Consequently, it is difficult to avoid considering the particular character of the people as a distinct cultural entity, whose very distinctiveness confers its status as a people. The doctrine of popular sovereignty, then, “positively invites the nationalization or culturalization of politics by the way in which it transforms our image of political community.” Anthony Giddens puts it more succinctly: “Nationalism is the cultural sensibility of sovereignty.”

Viewing nationalism as informed chiefly by the principle of popular sovereignty makes it possible to see how Michael Billig’s amusing descriptions of the banality of nationalism could be squared with, e.g., Anthony Marx’s more troubling account of nationalism as a source and vector of violent public passions. It is also for this reason that the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism is viewed by many as analytically questionable. For, they are both predicated upon a shared basis of peoplehood; both are necessarily exclusionary and both are historically bound up with both domestic and international violence. Even our institutions of political inclusion are systematically tied to exclusionary nationalism. We do not really possess an operative

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66 Yack 2012, 146.
70 Wimmer 2002, 5.
definition of citizenship and political rights absent a national framework—what Hannah Arendt
called the “right to have rights.”

Margaret Canovan has likened nationalism to a battery: it can be a power source for
whatever political model one is building—just plug it in. This is an evocative analogy, but it
leaves out an important factor: the ever-growing structural and functional resemblance between
those political models that employ nationalism over time. Because of the ways that popular
sovereignty shapes those political models, nationalism is not just the battery that powers it but
part of the machinery itself.

For, it is the political doctrine of popular sovereignty that allow us to think of nations and
states as coupled institutions. The relationship of peoplehood to territory (discussed at length in
the previous chapter) is not incidental: the boundaries of peoplehood practically express
themselves in spatial terms. States either attempt to draw (or redraw) their physical boundaries
according to an independent conception of their people, or given borders are themselves used to
define the contours of the people, whoever they may be. As Ilija Garašanin, the interior minister
of Serbia in the late-nineteenth century, said: “Where a Serb dwells, that is Serbia.”

It is because of this legitimating function that we tend to be specifically concerned in a
modern context with the kinds of prepolitical, ethnic communities that Anthony Smith rightly
points to as predating the advent of modern states. At the same time, they acquire their national
salience from the doctrine of popular sovereignty.

Popular sovereignty arguments encourage modern citizens to think of themselves
as organized into communities that are logically and historically prior to the

71 See also Reus-Smit 2013.
72 Canovan 1996, 72-75.
73 Connor 1978, 381-382.
74 David Miller (2012) and Margaret Moore (2015) have both labored to produce a normative version of
this claim: that peoples, rather than states, are the proper bearers of territorial rights.
75 Quoted in Clark 2012, 21.
communities created by their shared political institutions. To the extent that one condemns our tendency to look for prepolitical sources of political identity, modern democratic political culture is part of the problem, not the solution.\footnote{Yack 1996, 200.}

This of course poses significant historical and conceptual problems. One sees in modern nationalism the attempt to replace the divine principle with the \textit{historical} principle as a mode of fixing and legitimating political authority. This is surely not to say that the nation-state is the only instance of political organization wherein its members’ claims on its behalf do not quite align with history.\footnote{Consider, e.g., the Athenian autochthonous myth.} But one might say with Ernest Renan, that forgetting—even historical error—is constitutive of it. That nation-states have a particular historical problem (relative to other political forms) is not an original claim. Yet it remains to be explored how this might be the case and why it might matter.

\section*{Who is the people?}

In recent years, there has been a turn within political thought toward assigning greater significance to the concept of “the people.”\footnote{See Canovan 1996; Canovan 2005; Näsström 2007; Frank 2010; Espejo 2011; and Yack 2012.} Yet investigating that concept more often than not only reveals its lack of foundations. “Both in large, hegemonic states and in aspiring independence movements, claims that “we have always been a people” actually are appeals to \textit{become} a people—appeals not grounded in history but, rather, attempts to create history.”\footnote{Geary 2002, 37. Geary argues (against Anderson) that all modern nationalisms are problematic precisely due to their constructed (modern) origins; a paradigmatic case would be Jean-Marie Le Pen’s attempts to root the true French political community in a common tradition that began with the crowning of the Frankish Clovis.} The difficulties raised by using history in this manner are well-recorded.\footnote{E.g., Renan 1882, 7: “L’oubli, et je dirai même l’erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la formation d’une nation...” See also Connor 1990. For a more favorable take, see Anderson 2006.} They arise, however,
because there is no straightforward or programmatic way to interpret the historical reality of a given modern state.\footnote{For a study that treats this problem as a cause of major interstate wars, see Wimmer 2013.}

Modern citizens are compelled to view the nations of which they are members, “not as a given reality but as a work-in-progress, a model of something at once to be built and to be treated for political reasons as already in existence.”\footnote{Weber 1976, 493.} Forming a people may be a continuous process but, for constitutional reasons, the people must also be understood as an original and prepolitical entity that predates the establishment of the state. One need only consider the preamble to the U.S. Constitution: if there was no people at the outset, then who or what constituted the country’s government?\footnote{See Morgan 1989 for an extended examination of this problem in that context.}

In considering the particular salience of the prepolitical community for modern nationalism, we might contrast it with Aristotle’s account of the origins of the polis.\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{Politics} 1252b.} For Aristotle, the polis is preceded by any number of prepolitical communities or groups which come together for largely pragmatic, and in fact common, reasons—principally to gain increased security and prosperity. The existence of these prepolitical communities is easily recognizable, but also somewhat arbitrary. That is to say, it need not greatly matter what community one’s forebears adhered to prior to the consolidation of the existing polis; their prior existence is merely a historical fact. This is because such prepolitical communities, while practically necessary, had little foundational significance for citizens’ conceptions of themselves as members of a particular political community.\footnote{This description admittedly elides the significance of Aristotle’s teleological understanding.}
The problem of establishing the people is not just a matter of how the citizens of existing states grapple with their own histories. It also manifests itself in practice when it comes to the constitution of nascent states. As one contemporary observer remarked of the post-World War I movement for self-determination: “On the surface it seemed reasonable: let the people decide [what the government shall be]. It was in fact ridiculous because the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are the people.”86 Though this emerged as a particularly acute problem after the First World War (and since), it is really one that is fundamental to the concept of popular sovereignty.

This practical and historical problem has deep theoretical roots that long predate the 20th-century waves of decolonization.87 “How to decide who legitimately makes up ‘the people’ …is a problem almost totally neglected by all the great political philosophers who write about democracy.”88 Similarly, K.J. Holsti notes “one searches in vain in Hobbes or Locke to find exactly who would make the contract among themselves or with a Leviathan. The state of nature is universal, but the states that result from the social contract are particular. They are based on some sort of community, but the authors do not outline its entrance requirements or limits.”89

To put it another way, if the people constitutes the state, who or what constitutes the people? “It would take a nation to constitute a nation, which means that the search for the contractual origins of a nation leads us into an infinite regress.”90 This is sometimes called the

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86 Jennings 1956, 56. See Chambers 2004 for a discussion of attempts to define this question under duress in three real-world cases.
87 Reus-Smit 2013 presents a fine account of the contested, and changing idea of self-determination throughout the 20th century.
88 Dahl 1970, 60.
89 Holsti 1995, 325.
“boundary problem” of democratic theory. But, as noted above, the people is not an exclusively democratic concept. This boundary problem is a problem for nation-states as such.

Cultural nationalism claims that political power is legitimate insofar as it expresses the nation’s prepolitical culture, but it cannot fix cultural–national boundaries prepolitically. Hence the collapse into ethnic nationalism. Traditional democratic theory claims that political power is ultimately legitimized prepolitically, but cannot itself legitimize the boundaries of the people. Hence the collapse into cultural nationalism.

This is a conceptual space where theoretical claims (about the legitimate basis for modern political authority) run headlong into historical claims (about the reality of any nation’s prepolitical existence). At least it seems they do: it is striking how, until recently, the relevant scholarly literatures tended to talk past one another, such that scholars of nationalism have tended to treat it as extrinsic to our own political discourse, and political theorists concerned with democracy and popular sovereignty have downplayed (or held as illegitimate) the significance of nationalist claims.

John Lie offers a rare exception, when he notes, “The development of the modern state generates the reality of modern peoplehood. Because the modern state is grounded in neither natural boundaries nor a ready-made nation, the normative idea of peoplehood shifts over time and remains contested.” But, in light of our discussion in the previous chapter, it might be noted how much the concept of peoplehood already conditions our understanding of the state in the first place.

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91 First mooted by Whelan 1983. For recent attempts to resolve the problem, see Abizadeh 2012 and Song 2014.
92 Abizadeh 2012, 867.
The Origins of the People

To sum up this study thus far, a political concept of the people extends through and grounds a remarkable volume of existing scholarship on both states and nations. It provides the conceptual framework for the core features of statehood as we understand it, as well as for the rhetoric of nationalism. The thread of peoplehood that runs through this literature has often gone undisclosed, however. And not being disclosed, it has not been fully investigated. Meanwhile, insofar as the concept of the people has been investigated, scholars have noted that it appears to be without foundation. More importantly still, one might ask: if it has no historical point of reference, and has never been substantiated theoretically, wherever did it come from in the first place?

After all, versions of this idea can be found in some of the earliest reflections on political life available to us. Herodotus’s magisterial histories, for example, function as a survey of peoples across the ancient world. Yet in the classical context, a people is not itself a political concept as it is for us. As we have discussed, the Greek poleis and Roman republic featured political divisions that were effectively built into their structures, so as to render ambiguous just who constituted the “people.” “Ancient democracies never turned the idea of the people (demos) into a representation of the community as a whole, as opposed to its less wealthy majority.”

Democracy means rule by the people. But in modern times the people has come to mean two things. The first is what the Greeks meant by their word demos. This means the ordinary people, the mass of the population. So democracy is rule by the ordinary people, the masses. But in our civilization the people also means

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94 Both al-Farabi and Ibn Khaldun offer similar accounts of nations across the Islamicate during the medieval period.
95 Yack 1995, 176. See also Greenfeld 1992, 6-7. That is not to say that this way of describing democracy was wholly foreign to the Greeks—cf. the speech of Athenagoras in Thucydides VI.39 (though note that the speaker here is depicted as a demagogue...).
“nation” or another Greek term, *ethnos*, an ethnic group—a people that shares a common culture and sense of heritage, distinct from other peoples.96

Similarly, the Romans had two terms that corresponded to our understanding of a “people”—meaning either a popular faction (*populus*) or a kinship group (*gens*)—but the nation was not coextensive with either.97 This is partly why democracy as a type of regime within the classical polis is not coeval with democracy as a contemporary political phenomenon.98 The former only indicated the rule of the largest part of the polity, but the latter is a comprehensive designation.99

Where then does this idea of the people originate? As Bernard Yack, whose own work relies heavily on the concept, notes: “The idea of the people is such a commonplace…that you would think that almost everything that could be said about it has already been said. In fact, the idea of the people has received nothing like the scholarly attention social and political theorists have devoted to the nation.”100

It should be broadly clear by now that the concept of the people cannot be empirically traced to a preexisting national entity. After all, few have done more work than scholars of nationalism to deflate the idea of “primordial” nations that emerge as political factors in the modern era. Nor was it a readymade political concept in either the classical or medieval eras. Nonetheless, early-modern theorists of popular sovereignty—whose ideas provided the conceptual framework for the emergence of nationalist practices—were in fact working with an

98 Wood 1996.
99 Justin Rosenberg (1990, 251) calls democracy “a generic ideology of the nation-state and not of previous forms” for this reason; see also Ringmar 1998.
100 Yack 2012, 102.
image of peoplehood. Indeed, they were working with the same image: that of the ancient Israelites as depicted in the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{101}

For, the biblical image of peoplehood stands in stark contrast to the classical image of the political community. Michel Foucault for example juxtaposes the Hebraic figure of the shepherd with the Mediterranean emphasis on cities: “The shepherd’s power is not exercised over a territory but, by definition, over a flock.”\textsuperscript{102} By the same token, the biblical idea of peoplehood is a far more detailed and organized depiction than the more amorphous and unsystematic apprehension of ethnies that we find in the surveys of the classical and medieval periods.

As Adrian Hastings perceptively notes:

The Bible… presented in Israel itself a developed model of what it means to be a nation—a unity of people, language, religion, territory, and government. Perhaps it was an almost terrifyingly monolithic ideal, productive ever after of all sorts of dangerous fantasies, but it was there, an all too obvious exemplar for Bible readers of what every other nation too might be, a mirror for national self-imagining.”\textsuperscript{103}

Hastings is quite right about the viability of this interpretation, but it must be noted that it was not until the early-modern period that this reading became common. This is not because such a reading is necessarily perverse, but because the larger conceptual framework for such a reading was hitherto lacking.

At the same time, this idea does not derive in any straightforward manner from the biblical text itself. As the next chapter will demonstrate, this idea of the people, which provides

\textsuperscript{101} Gorski 2000 argues (like Anthony Smith and Liah Greenfeld) that nationalism flourished earlier than is commonly-recognized, specifically in 16\textsuperscript{th}-century England and the Dutch United Provinces, and that the Hebraic model was an important component of it. Gorski, however, treats the Hebraic discourse and the discourse of democratic popular sovereignty as basically distinct, without seeing how the one informed the other over time.

\textsuperscript{102} Foucault 2009, 125. For Foucault, this mass acceptance of pastoral power is a hallmark of modern citizenship (in contrast to ancient Greek and Roman citizenship), though he attributes the dissemination of this concept to the Christian Church.

\textsuperscript{103} Hastings 1997, 18.
the spine of modern nationalism and connects it to the body of the state, emerges from the encounter between early-modern political thought and the Hebrew Bible. Aviel Roshwald concludes that “the comparative and theoretical analysis of nationalism...would benefit enormously from a greater understanding on the scholarly community’s part of the conceptual significance and historical impact of the Jewish case.”

But if this is true, it requires no small degree of elaboration and qualification.

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104 Roshwald 2004, 24. Anderson 2016 intriguingly suggests that it is no coincidence that a high number of the most influential scholars on nationalism— he specifically names Elie Kedourie, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony Smith—have all been Jewish.
Chapter 3: A Genealogy of Peoplehood

Only that which has no history is definable.

- Friedrich Nietzsche

If the defining feature of the modern state is the nation, and the nation is anchored by the concept of peoplehood, then we might wonder at how such a concept itself became central to our understanding of modern political life. We can, after all, find anthropologies of peoples, in the sense of nations or *ethnoi*, going back to Herodotus. At the same time, the people in the sense of “the many” are a constitutive feature of classical political thought and practice. But only at some point in the modern era did these ideas converge, such that “the people” simultaneously referred both to the totality of citizens in a given political community and to a distinct nation with its own practices and identity. Moreover, by the time of the French and American revolutions, it was this entity that was broadly seen as constitutive of statehood.

How did this happen? This particular and novel ideal of the people arose, as we have stated and as we shall see, out of the encounter of early-modern political thinkers with the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive account of conceptions of peoplehood, nor is it to demonstrate that ideas of peoplehood “caused” the modern state to arise (any more than did the Peace of Westphalia, or the Investiture Crisis, or the invention of gunpowder, or the development of cadastral mapping techniques, and so on *ad infinitum*). The purpose is rather to trace the emergence of a certain idea of peoples to more precisely fix its ancestry; by examining such ideas historically we can see them as distinctive—

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1 Nietzsche 1989, 80.
surprising, even—rather than as coextensive with political life as such, or as the inevitable byproduct of state-making processes.²

Moreover, we can see how this way of describing and articulating political communities opens up new political possibilities while increasingly closing off others “The decisive evidence that such a shift has occurred is...the existence of novel formulations that would have made no sense under the previous arrangement of conceptual and rhetorical resources.”³ The success of this process can be seen in the way that over time it comes to stand on its own, and to shape the horizon of political practices, without requiring rhetorical or conceptual support from the Hebrew Bible.

In tracing the genealogy of the people, this chapter will also advance the following claims:

1) That neither the Roman Law tradition nor the late Medieval and Renaissance recovery of classical texts was sufficient to independently generate the concept of the people that prevailed following the early-modern period.

2) That the turn to the Hebrew Bible was not itself sufficient to do so: many early-modern readings of the Hebrew Bible did not excavate such an understanding, being more preoccupied with demonstrating the political salience of scripture or with locating the Hebrew polity within a classical constitutional schema.

3) And, finally, that subsequent political thinkers and actors did not need to embrace (or even acknowledge) Hebraism to express this idea of peoplehood.

² I describe this analysis as a genealogy in the chapter title, though “conceptual history” would work as well—see Koselleck 2002.
³ Jackson 2006, 76; see 75-78 for a useful, larger methodological discussion. See also Bartelson 1995.
The Roman Case

The most common argument for a premodern forerunner to the concept of the people is not biblical but classical, centering around the Roman word, *populus*. It is largely used in the political sense, to denote a part of the Roman political community, but it is occasionally used to refer to other “peoples,” as we might refer to ethnic groups. To put it very briefly, any attempt to discover a usable model of peoplehood in Roman history or practices is met with at least two obstacles. The first is that there is neither consistent usage of nor systematic reflection on the term. The second problem lies in demonstrating some continuity of usage that either spans the classical and early-modern periods, or is meaningfully recovered during the latter.

Broadly speaking, modern scholars posit two variations of this thesis: a Cicersonic tradition and the Roman law tradition. While each contributes in some way to the furtherance of a general idea of the people into the early-modern era, both are in different ways limited in being able to usefully depict a coherent understanding of the people in anything like the way it would come to be expressed.

Cicero’s *populus*

Using Cicero’s writings to interpret Roman concepts of peoplehood is no easy matter. Our relationship to Cicero is complex, owing to his status as both a major documentary source of

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4 See Black 1992; Canovan 2005, 11-16; Lee 2016. Bendix 1978, 8-9 claims without explanation that this tradition merged with a Germanic tribal one along with Christian egalitarianism.
5 Though as we noted in the previous chapter, the more common word would be *gens* and its declensions. The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably—see, e.g., Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* III-VI, *passim*.
6 Cf. Ando 2010, who persuasively argues that the Roman law tradition principally issues in a defense of monarchic domination rather than popular sovereignty. It would be difficult to better Leibniz’s (1988, 113) judgment on adherents of the Roman thesis: “Because of a deplorable mania, those who undertake to write [on sovereignty] have eyes only for what is ancient…Among vulgar jurisconsults this does not surprise me; for them, all wisdom appears collected in the tomes of Roman law alone.”
information about the vocabulary of Roman life and as a philosopher advancing his own particular teaching.⁷

To the extent that Cicero writes of the “people,” it is largely in the popular sense of the term. He does so most clearly in De Re Publica, in which Scipio Africanus describes a republic as fundamentally the matter or property of the people (res publica res populi).⁸ Here he seems to conflate the constitutive and political significance of the people—the former being the collective multitude of individuals that forms the political association itself, and the latter being the basis for popular government within it. It would seem in this case to refer to the entirety of the citizenry and not only to that part of it that is separate from the aristocracy.⁹ Nor is this analysis altogether peculiarly Ciceronian. The Roman conception of the people (populus) did come to encompass the entire citizenry, in a way not limited to the plebs.¹⁰ On the other hand, the term itself had largely pejorative origins, which it never fully lost.¹¹

Malcolm Schofield argues that Cicero’s concept of the populus serves a legitimating function, and that this is a unique contribution to ancient political thought—particularly in contrast to the Greeks.¹² The “people” provides a standard for evaluating the condition of the state (status civitatis). Under conditions of tyranny, for example, the public thing vanishes altogether; this would go a good deal further than Aristotle, who characterizes still tyranny as a regime, albeit a defective one. The core claim here is that rulership derives its legitimacy from justly representing the interests of the people as a whole, even (or especially) when most of the

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⁷ Syme 1939, 153.
⁸ Cicero, De re publica I.39; see also III.43 ff.
⁹ See Asmis 2004, though she commits an anachronism in reading into Cicero an account of popular sovereignty; translating De Re Publica as “On the State” rather amounts to loading the dice as well.
¹⁰ See Nicolet 1979, 332 ff.
¹¹ Zernatto 1944, 364.
people play no actual role in the practice of ruling. Referring to the concept of legitimacy in this way raises the prospect of representation—one of the distinctive features of the modern state.\textsuperscript{13} Yet the Roman \emph{res publica} was no such thing, always serving as a kind of possession of the citizenry, and not as an impersonal agent that both comprises and represents them.\textsuperscript{14}

Further, if the people in its civic entirety were to serve a constituting and legitimating role in the modern way, this would raise questions regarding its origins and boundaries.\textsuperscript{15} Cicero’s character, Scipio, however, does not reflect upon the origins of societies in such a way as to assign priority to popular government for its link with constituting body of the republic.\textsuperscript{16} In light of the way that Cicero treats the republic as a thing instituted by a people who come together for that very purpose, we might expect to find an account of the origins of the Roman people in his subsequent discussion of the beginnings of Rome.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, the Roman people are depicted as a preexisting community that happens to come under the leadership of Romulus.\textsuperscript{18}

As for fixing the limits of the Roman people (beyond the status quo of voting prerogatives) in Cicero’s own time, the established fact of Roman imperial expansion had overrun any rubric provided by the limited character of the early city. The conclusion of the Social Wars (89 B.C.) alone resulted in the expansion of Roman citizenship to all of peninsular Italy. Indeed, this was partly Cicero’s concern: to justify in classical political language Rome’s

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} See chapter 1 of this work for an extended discussion.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Wood 1988, 120 ff. argues that Cicero is the first thinker to formulate a definition of the state, not just in the generic but in the specific, modern sense. Yet Wood is never really convincing that any of the terms Cicero uses can be read as referring to an impersonal agent—cf. Kharkhordin 2010.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} See the relevant discussion in chapter 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Indeed, Cicero follows the Greek thinkers in emphasizing the flaws of democratic rule.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Cicero, \emph{De re publica} II.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} See Cornell 2001. The difference between Cicero’s account and Machiavelli’s is striking—see chapter 5 of this work.
\end{itemize}
imperial expansion, and to deny that it eliminated the possibility of active political life and its
evaluative categories.

That imperial project raises similar problems for Cicero’s ability to discuss the political
significance of peoples as nations.\textsuperscript{19} Cicero speaks of \textit{patriae} rather than of peoples or nations
(by any etymological measure). But Cicero also makes quite clear that the patria is to be defined
as the place of one’s citizenship rather than one’s birth.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, Cicero is by this point
compelled to consider the patria in a manner distinct from that of older generations of Romans.
His \textit{Somnium Scipionis} provides a poignant example: the author and his immediate audience are
a century removed from the protagonist, Scipio Africanus (Aemilianus), who is himself half a
century removed from his spectral grandfather who visits him in his sleep. They form a
triptych—Cicero-Scipio Aemilianus-Scipio Africanus—with each figure a citizen of a Rome
further along in its imperial venture.\textsuperscript{21} Hardly simple to begin with, a word like “patria” only
becomes more complex the more expansive “Rome” becomes, ever further away from referring
to the city and only the city.\textsuperscript{22}

Defining the nature of Rome’s political community was never an easy matter,\textsuperscript{23} but
becomes ever more complicated as its imperial identity overtakes its republican one (an ongoing
process that began long before Octavian became Augustus).\textsuperscript{24} Cicero attempts to square this

\textsuperscript{19} Hirschi 2012 argues not only for a Ciceronian nationalist thesis, but for its having produced a tradition
of nationalist thought extending to the late medieval scholiasts and early modern European humanists. Cf.
\textsuperscript{20} Cicero also makes quite clear that devotion to the patria is not an end in itself, but rather something that
is productive of virtue while pointing to a supra- or non-political apprehension of virtue and reason.
\textsuperscript{21} Of course, both Scipios were transformative figures in that venture.
\textsuperscript{22} See also Wolin 1960, 69 ff.
\textsuperscript{23} Cf. Ando 1999.
\textsuperscript{24} One might argue that Athens would have faced similar troubles, but for the fact that Athens’ imperial
career was cut brutally short; and while it lasted Athens maintained very different definitions of
“citizenship” than did Rome—cf. Machiavelli’s discussion in \textit{D I.28}. 88
circle by acknowledging that all Romans have two fatherlands: “one by nature, the other by citizenship.” Cato the Elder, for example, is noted for having been born a Tusculan but made a Roman. Yet it is the latter that has priority. Given Rome’s imperial project (which Cicero never censures), this is not a minor or abstract distinction. It is also the latter (civic) fatherland which is to be the site of Cicero’s *populus*. Cicero, then, never makes the move of treating one’s ethnic nation or birthplace as fundamental, partly because of the way that Roman imperialism fractures this category. “A unity in terms of geography but in nothing else, the peninsula had been a mosaic of races, languages and dialects. The advance of alien stocks in the governing hierarchy of Rome can be discovered from nomenclature.”

In sum, Cicero’s attempts to situate and describe the *populus* in the waning days of the Roman Republic contain important ambiguities in their own usage, limiting their utility for latter-day interpreters. Furthermore, his prioritization of political engagement (and the virtues that requires) entails a distinctively classical understanding of citizenship. Far more important, however, is the fact of the absence from the available record of key Ciceronian texts up until 1819, setting limits on the direct transmission of Cicero’s ideas of the people through the early-modern period.

To the extent that a Ciceronian tradition continued to exert influence through late antiquity and beyond (on patristic theologians and medieval jurists and glossators) with respect to understanding the people, it was due to interpreters rather than the original texts. And the enduring concept of peoples was of a community bound by law: “A gathering of many in order

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25 Cicero, *De legibus* II.5. This problem would continue to bedevil writers and orators under the Principate, as the examples of Aelius Aristides and Cassius Dio attest—see Ando 1999, 28.
26 Cf. Syme 1939, 93. Intriguingly, Cicero appears to speak of the natural patria in affective terms that he never uses for the civic one—see *De legibus* II.3; *Post Reditum ad Quirites* I.4.
to live according to law, which, if it does not live according to law, is not a *populus*.”28 In other words, in the absence of a commonly accepted standard of justice, no people can meaningfully be said to exist. A people is a purely political—not a prepolitical—entity.

This is, for example, the definition that Augustine seizes upon in his discussion of Cicero’s understanding of the commonwealth in book II, chapter 21 of *The City of God*.29 Augustine, however, will go on to deny that such a commonwealth ever truly prevailed in Rome, or could prevail anywhere in the absence of Christianity.30 More specifically, he argues that if a republic is a possession of the people (as Cicero’s definition requires), then this logically presupposes a people (*populus*). Further, there could be no possession of the people in the absence of a people itself.31 A people, however, is not just any aggregation of individuals (nor is it a nation or ethnos), but an association united by common agreement concerning justice. But true justice requires God; thus, a true people could only be united by their common apprehension and worship of the Christian God.32

Ultimately, it was this Augustinian redaction of Cicero’s inchoate idea of the people that informed medieval considerations of peoplehood.33 It is difficult then, to say the least, to speak of a consistent idea of the *populus* that might indicate a classical antecedent for the early modern concept of popular sovereignty.

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28 Cited in Ando 2010, 187; see also Taylor 1999a, 229.
31 *De Civitate Dei* XIX, 23: *Ergo nec res publica est, quia res populi non est, ubi ipse populus non est.*
32 This comes strikingly close to a Hebraic version of civil religion, but Augustine does not mention the Israelites here. He does apply the term *populus* to the Israelites after they received the revelation at Sinai (book XVII). See Adams 1971, 17-69 for a discussion of Augustine’s uses of *gens* (nation) and *populus* (people).
The Roman Law tradition

Alongside the Ciceronian tradition, many scholars point to the vast body of Roman law encapsulated in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* compiled under Emperor Justinian, and the concomitant body of medieval commentary it inspired, as key sources for an emerging conception of popular sovereignty.\(^{34}\) Specifically at issue is its reference to the *Lex regia*—the “royal law”—by which the Roman people were said to have originally conferred all power upon the emperor.\(^{35}\) This was the antique basis for a supposed medieval innovation: if the people had held this power once (to grant such authority) then it could do so again.\(^{36}\) The innovator here is Azo of Bologna (c. 1150-1230), claiming without explanation that the Roman people effectively retained rather than transferred that power.\(^{37}\)

Not only did this claim contradict the extant tradition of commentary upon Roman law, however, it also does not appear to have generated any subsequent interpretive or theoretical body of thought.\(^{38}\) More fundamentally, he does not otherwise offer an account of who the Roman (or any other) people might be or where they might presently reside since the original transaction. Without such a definition, there was no way to demonstrate how other political communities might become the beneficiaries of this novel claim. “Put simply, Azo’s theory was useless unless there was agreement over who constituted the Roman people.”\(^{39}\)

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\(^{34}\) Tierney 1982, 56-60; Skinner 2002, 14-17; Lee 2016.

\(^{35}\) *Constitutio 'Deo Auctore'*: *cum enim lege antiqua, quae regia nuncupabatur, omne ius omnisque potestas populi Romani in imperatoriam translate sunt potestatem…* See also Digest 1.4.1.

\(^{36}\) Skinner 2002, 16.

\(^{37}\) Azonis 1966, 44: *Soli Imperatori, &C. Ergo populus Romanus non habet potestam legis condenda; quod olim habebat: sed lege † regia in eum transtulit populus omne ius habebat: ut Instit.de iur.natural.§.sed & quod. Videtur ergo quod hodie nullum ius habeat. Vel dic quod non transtulit ita quin sibi retineret.* It is worth noting that, following convention, Azo wrote commentaries not original treatises, inhibiting the development of full arguments.

\(^{38}\) Ando 2010, 195-198.

\(^{39}\) Ryan 2000, 71.
The difficulty of reaching such an understanding is almost ingrained in the original concept. For the law as recorded by Justinian was not a remnant of the Republic, but an imperial innovation, and moreover one designed to confer post hoc legitimation upon imperial authority. The ambiguities at work served a clear political purpose of obscuring the revolution that had occurred. Moreover, the legitimating function of this law is nothing like a plebiscite but was instead a once-and-for-all event; it did not prescribe a process for legitimating individual emperors as they reached office, but rather described a single and comprehensive transfer of authority from a republican government to the figure of the emperor. The problem yet again, though not for the last time, is that this conception of the people remains undeveloped, and does not correspond to any image of particularistic political communities featuring strong affective ties among equal members—even though something very like this was beginning to emerge in various places throughout the western Mediterranean.

During the late Medieval period, northern Italy saw the rise of independent cities (typically, though in some ways erroneously, called “city-states”). Owing to isomorphic features such as autonomy and self-government in cities like Florence, Milan, and Siena, this era is frequently taken as an important precursor to our own. Even without viewing them in light of the modern state, the Italian republics evinced a rare flourishing of political liberty.40

The independence of these “units” was given formal expression by the medieval jurist Bartolus of Sassoferrato (1313-1357) with the formulation: *civitas sibi princeps*—the city itself is its own prince. Quentin Skinner makes much of this anti-imperial legal innovation, treating it as a forerunner to a larger humanist rediscovery of political liberty.41 It is only in retrospect, however, that we might view Bartolus as working within a tradition of political, rather than legal,

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40 Jones 1997, esp. 333-358.
41 Skinner 1978 volume 1, 9-12.
thought. That is to say, his chief interest lay in providing a legal interpretation for the de facto independence that certain Italian cities had come to enjoy under the notional authority of the Holy Roman Empire. The framework for his scholarship remained the inherited body of Roman law as applied to an imperial system, rather than a structural commitment to a world of independent political communities.

Further, insofar as the cities enjoy a certain de facto autonomy, the internal political nature of that autonomy is not clarified in this account. Thus, civitas sibi princeps refers broadly to the political community as a whole—it does not suggest that the *people* are a prince. Nonetheless, even describing a theory of civic autonomy represented a break with a certain medieval juristic tradition in which there was no meaningful recognition that dispersed urban centers under different laws might share common geopolitical features.

It was left to Baldus de Ubaldis (1327-1400), Bartolus’s protégé, to clarify the significance of the people with respect to the *civitas*. He goes much further in introducing a popular element into his commentaries on feudal law. Baldus’ work, however, draws heavily upon Aristotle in formulating his account of political community; though this restores the possibility of discussing particularism and autonomy, it does not grant a clear account of peoplehood. Many readers have noted the vagueness of Baldus’ use of *populus*—we do not know the people’s origins, composition, or extent with respect to any larger population.

Nor is this vagueness unique to those confounded by the problem of describing the imperial patchwork in political language. It is conversely a sticking point for those who were

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42 Woolf 1913.
43 Elden 2013, 225.
44 Ryan 2000, 81.
45 Viroli 1992, 59-60. See also Canning 1987, 159-169.
46 Canning 1980.
primarily concerned with limiting (or denying) the extent of papal jurisdiction, as the example of Marsilius of Padua showed.\footnote{Canning 1996, 157-158. Quillet 1988, 559-561 concludes that Marsilius provides an account of popular sovereignty in his \textit{Defensor pacis}, but claims that he too relies upon the \textit{Lex regia}, which does not offer a clear image of peoplehood. Moreover, as she acknowledges, Marsilius is thoroughly Aristotelian in his assigning political significance to the distinctions in prudence and wisdom among individuals.} “Even in the later Middle Ages, after the revival of Aristotle’s philosophy had given secular rulers promising new territory on which to fight their battles for legitimacy, those who elaborated the idea tended to be much more interested in anti-papalist struggles than in how the \textit{populus} had actually authorized rulers.”\footnote{Canovan 2005, 16.}

One might say more broadly that the Roman law tradition and its generations of commentators and glossators preserved a general idea of the people, but at the cost of clarity and substantive understanding. It grew out of an essentially ambiguous set of circumstances—the need to account for the authority of the emperors under the Principate without acknowledging the end of the Roman republic—and was further compromised by the nominal universality of the Holy Roman Empire, under which all individuals could be termed members of “the people.”\footnote{In this respect, it was preceded not by any republican tradition but by the Edict of Caracalla (\textit{Constitutio Antoniniana}) in 212, which granted a highly notional version of citizenship to all free men living under the empire.} “Any feeling of national particularism in the later Middle Ages expressed itself as part of the universalism of the Empire.”\footnote{Kohn 1961, 93. Though cf. Bloch 1972 and Reynolds 1984, 250-256.}

To sum up, any concept of peoplehood through the medieval period was both too broad to have national implications \textit{and} too narrow to have demotic ones. It either applied to everyone living under imperial jurisdiction, or to a specific and non-authoritative part of a local polity.\footnote{Wootton 1986, 49.} Neither the original Roman tradition (really, traditions) nor its Christianized version could
independently supply the image of a people (and their homeland) that would become an increasingly central theme in international political life in the periods that followed.

The Hebraic Turn

Perhaps the clearest early account of peoplehood that concerns us appears not in the writings of any philosopher or jurist, but in the speeches of Friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498). He inaugurates this tradition in late 15th-century Florence with his sermons on books of the Hebrew Bible—principally Exodus, but also on the Old Testament prophets. Savonarola self-consciously posits the Florentines as a new chosen people under a new dispensation, a theme carried forward by his posthumous followers, the so-called piagnoni or frateschi.52

Savonarola, however, is not a Mosaic figure, but rather preaches as a kind of Christian Isaiah, seeking to redeem a corrupt city in advance of a coming era of renewed purity and goodness; political reform is but a stalking-horse for religious reform. The French invasion of 1494 served to solidify his authority by catalyzing the expulsion of the Medici from Florence, but also in seeming to confirm the truth of his message: that political catastrophe was a fitting punishment for a corrupt order.

Savonarola’s sermons thus became a curious mix of Florentine republicanism and Christian millenarianism, rooted in his treatment of the Florentines as an elect nation. “For Savonarola, Florence’s leadership would be primarily spiritual, rather than cultural as it was for the humanists; yet how much his message reflected of secular patriotism!”53 This message is

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52 Polizzotto 1994, 3, 175, 367. Viroli 2012, 163-167, also highlights the ways in which Savonarola employed religious motifs in expressing Florentine patriotism (and vice versa), but he does not remark on the fact of Savonarola’s heavy reliance upon Old Testament examples.

53 Weinstein 1958, 301
bounded by Christian themes, but is not thereby radically distinct from “political” concerns. Indeed, this seems to have accounted in some measure for his extraordinary popularity, promising not only spiritual redemption but liberty and the augmentation of the city’s power and hegemony.\textsuperscript{54} Partly for this reason, Niccolò Machiavelli, in a contemporaneous letter discerned such hypocrisy in Savonarola.\textsuperscript{55} Machiavelli largely indicts him for impotence rather than hypocrisy, however, classifying him as an “unarmed prophet”—a term with pejorative significance.\textsuperscript{56}

But in Discourse III.30, he concludes that it was due to the misunderstandings of Savonarola’s followers that he ultimately lacked authority.\textsuperscript{57} In other words, Savonarola did not in fact shy away from seizing or at least seeking political power, both for himself and for Florence, but the fundamentally religious rhetoric with which he gained his following foreclosed certain options to him (in a way it presumably didn’t for Moses).\textsuperscript{58} He was, in this telling, less constrained by his own piety (for which Machiavelli never credited him) then by the discursive resources available to him as a Christian preacher. It is not simply that Savonarola might have been limited by the ostensibly religious context of his sermons (though he was), but that his audience was also preconditioned to hear them in principally, or at least significantly, religious terms, irrespective of their political content.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} See especially his sermons on Haggai in Savonarola 1965, and his sermons on Exodus in Savonarola 1955.
\textsuperscript{56} P 6; see also D 1.43.
\textsuperscript{57} Machiavelli 1997 I, 492-493.
\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Weinstein 2011 with Geerken 1999.
\textsuperscript{59} The point is not that religious confessions preclude articulating strategic interests—what observer of Renaissance-era Church politics would conclude thus? —but that Savonarola’s religious message was tied to a particular pattern of interpreting those interests, one that Machiavelli opposed for a variety of reasons. See also Nexon 2009.
One of Machiavelli’s many innovations is to expand Savonarola’s Hebraic vision beyond Florence to encompass the entire Italian peninsula. But perhaps even more importantly, Machiavelli will categorically reject the established Christian order, both with respect to its universalist doctrine and to its papal institutions—a feat that not only the preacher Savonarola but also the legions of medieval jurists never could have done.

Pierre Manent describes Machiavelli’s most comprehensive innovation as “the discrediting of the idea of the good, coinciding with the elevation of the idea of the people.” Machiavelli may be the first writer to conjoin the two meanings of “people”—as both demotic and national—in a way recognizable to ourselves. Throughout The Prince, for example, he does employ “people” in the sense of the popular part of a city or province, as contrasted with the prince or the nobility. But in both chapter six and twenty-six, he refers to the “people of Israel” (as contrasted with the Persians or Egyptians) as though speaking of a nation. And it is Moses’s liberation of that people that is to serve as a model and inspiration for Italy’s own future liberator.

Perhaps nowhere is this influence stronger than in the work of Giovanni Botero, who found in the Hebrew Bible “instructions and ‘virtues’ taught by a people that found strength and deliverance in its knowledge of being in the service of God, chosen by Him to propagate his majesty, his cult and his glory.” Both in De regia sapientia and Della Ragion di Stato (1589),

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60 In P 26—see the discussion in chapter 5 of this work.
61 Ryan 2000, 78 notes that Bartolus was utterly unable to grapple with the issue of papal authority, despite its being a far greater political problem than the claims of the Emperor.
62 Manent 1996, 16; see also Kohn 1961, 128. Eric Voegelin (1989-2008 vol. 22, 86-87) goes even further: “The creed of the spirito italiano and the onore del mondo is not a Hellenic creed of the polis; it is a rejection of the transcendental meaning of history and a reversion to the tribalism of the particular community.”
63 See chapter 5 for a full discussion.
64 Machiavelli 1997 I, 131, 189. See also D I.1, II.8.
Botero explicitly avows the power of the Christian religion to advance the interests of the state, in contrast to what he takes to be Machiavelli’s anti-Christian animus. Yet both texts (particularly the former) draw principally upon the Old Testament, and though Botero’s God is nominally the Christian God, he is principally described as the Old Testament “God of armies.” What he nowhere acknowledges is that Machiavelli himself has already presented the Hebrews as a politico-religious model.

Botero pits a religiously-inspired politics against what he presents as Machiavelli’s amoral, areligious account. Apart from his insistence that theological considerations have priority over political ones as a matter of natural order, it is telling that his principal justification for this arrangement is ostensibly Machiavellian: a people that so understands itself will make a far more effective fighting force. Botero’s appropriation of Machiavelli’s employment of the Hebrew Bible is but part of a larger tradition in which a “loudly voiced Anti-Machiavellism was often associated with a hidden Machiavellism, a revisitation of Machiavelli’s doctrines and their spirit.”

Indeed, one could hardly find a greater illustration not just of the scope of Machiavelli’s impact but, more importantly for our purposes, of the widespread utility of the Hebraic model of peoplehood, than the fact that it was taken up by Counter-Reformationist thinkers (like Botero) and Reformationist thinkers alike. The former, as the case of Botero shows, tended to focus upon the nascent idea of the people as nation—a quasi-mystical body that only the king could properly

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66 It is impossible to know with what degree of sincerity he depicts Machiavelli thus, especially given what Machiavelli admits of Christianity’s possible utility (D II.2)—cf. Viroli 2012, 233-235, though Viroli goes to unwarranted lengths in Machiavelli’s defense. On Botero’s complex relationship to Machiavelli’s thought, see chapter three of Kahn 1994; Evrigenis 2008, 85-90; and Baldini 2015, 762.
68 Baldini 2015, 767.
incarnate. And it was writers among the latter who would develop one of the earliest accounts of popular sovereignty.

Machiavelli of course was not a theorist of popular sovereignty—or indeed of sovereignty of any kind. The earliest confluence of the Hebrew Bible and recognizable and transmittable accounts of popular sovereignty begin to appear in the works of the so-called Monarchomachs: the French Huguenot writers who proclaimed an institutional right to resist tyrannical rule in the wake of the Saint Bartholomew’s Massacre.69

Yet Machiavelli’s influence even manifests itself in works that are explicitly directed against him, such as the pseudonymous Monarchomach tract, Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos (1574).70 For our purposes, two features particularly stand out in this early statement of popular sovereignty: 1) the titular adoption of Machiavelli’s dichotomy between princes and peoples in its full title, and 2) the employment of Hebrew Bible to illustrate the concept of the people, even for Christian nations.71 It is also in this work that the concept of the Lex regia is partially vindicated by its application to the kingship of Saul, which (for the author of the Vindiciae) presents the clearest illustration of that concept, wherein kingly powers are authorized by the people.72

69 The principal treatises are François Hotman’s Francogallia (1573), Theodore Beza’s Du droit des magistrats sur leurs sujets (1574), and the pseudonymous Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos (1579). On the importance of popular sovereignty for the Monarchomachs (and vice versa), see Dunning 1904. On the significance of this period for English politics, see Salmon 1959.

70 On the nature and extent of Machiavelli’s influence on that work, see Garnett’s discussion in Brutus 1994, xxi-xxii. It may be more than a historical curio that Vindiciae and the Latin edition of Du Droit des Magistrats were commonly printed in an omnibus edition alongside The Prince. Kahn 2010, 242 has a useful discussion on the ambiguous uses of Machiavelli’s texts by 16th-century French printers.

71 The Hebrew Bible is deployed for this purpose throughout the Vindiciae, but see especially Brutus 1994, 37-46.

72 Brutus 1994, 129-130.
The Hebraic theme was also taken up by Theodore Beza, whose French translation of Psalm 68 would become “the Huguenot battle-song.” Though Beza does not actually describe the origins of “the people” as such in his *Du Droit des Magistrats*, he insists that they cannot issue from their rulers, that they in fact antedate any rulers whom they might authorize: “peoples are not created for their rulers, but on the contrary rulers created for the peoples.” He illustrates this claim with the example of David’s ascendance to the monarchy over Israel.

The Monarchomachs in turn would exert a significant influence on European political thought going forward. Indeed, political rhetoric drawn from Old Testament scripture had become an increasingly common idiom throughout various Protestant communities by this time. A discourse of election, and more specifically of a covenant among the chosen, was well-established in both England and Scotland by the mid-seventeenth century. As Philip Gorski notes, “the most common type of nationalist discourse in the early modern period was a religious one, which drew on the Exodus story, and on the notion of chosenness more generally.”

This phenomenon was especially apparent in the case of the Dutch Revolt (on whose thinkers Machiavelli remained a direct influence as well). This was not, however, the smooth unfolding of a single process. Paul Regan argues that rhetoric of a “New Israel,” though prevalent, did not acquire a national character until at least the mid-1600s. The strongest

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73 Sayce 1976, 121. Its closing lines not incidentally read: “The God of Israel gives to his people strength and power” (my translation).
74 de Bèze 1970, 9 (my translation).
75 On the broader significance of the Old Testament for (largely Calvinist) Protestant communities, see Oestreich 1982, 143-144.
76 Hill 1993, 264-283. Haller 1963 argued that this was already the case in Elizabethan England.
77 Gorski 2003, 163. Americans would later replicate this mythopoetic association with the biblical Israelites—see Shalev 2013.
78 Gelderen 1992, 185, 279-279. Gelderen interprets this influence in republican terms, but this is assumed rather than demonstrated. It certainly wasn’t the case for Machiavelli’s principal disciple from that period, Justus Lipsius, as Gelderen admits.
79 Regan 1996.
temporal attachments were more particularistic than the Dutch “nation,” and the (Christian) religious rhetoric consistently aimed in universalist directions.\(^{80}\) Moreover, the conception of themselves as an elect people was originally the distinct prerogative of the religious community of Dutch Calvinists, who never comprised a majority of Netherlanders. Even as they gained political ascendance in the 17\(^{th}\) century, the exclusiveness and militancy of their Israelite vision was limiting, especially insofar as it implied a priest-led, theocratic ruling structure.\(^{81}\)

Of course, Calvinism was neither exclusively nor originally a Dutch phenomenon. But as Simon Schama argues, a Hebraic political rhetoric drawn from Calvinism flourished more widely in the Dutch Republic where “the Hebraic self-image functioned much more successfully as a unifying bond than as a divisive dogma. It flowed out of the pulpit and the psalter into the theater and the print shop, diluting Calvinist fundamentalism as it did so, but strengthening its force as a national culture for the very same reason.”\(^{82}\) Thus, Hebraic symbols drawn from Reformist iconography were disseminated throughout Dutch and English societies, and would be increasingly embraced not only by Puritans and Calvinists predisposed to see themselves as new Israelites in a theological sense of a cohort of believers seeking escape from pagan domination, but by adherents of other confessions as well. Certain aesthetic representations and language taken from the Hebrew Bible—particularly the Exodus narrative—became suitable vehicles for proto-nationalist sentiment even where their initial impetus was primarily religious. Some of this may be inherent in the story itself: it speaks not of a universal (or catholic) faith, but of the faith of a newly unified people. But it is also very much the case that this reading of scripture was

\(^{80}\) Adams 2005 describes the Netherlands during this period as a “familial state,” in which the most important political factor was patrimonial rule amongst the elite families of the United Provinces.


\(^{82}\) Schama 1987, 97.
conditioned by the ongoing fact of Spanish imperialism.\(^8^3\) Hence, it largely did not translate to meaningful practices of pan-Calvinist solidarity across separate political communities.

Some scholars have argued for a more direct role for Calvinism (and Protestantism more generally) in shaping particular peoples. This interpretation points to the egalitarianism of Protestant ideas in conjunction with the post-Reformation proliferation of full-text vernacular Bibles along with the spread of Protestant communities theologically predisposed to recognize parallels between themselves and the Israelites.\(^8^4\) There are two problems with assigning such causal significance to the Reformationist and post-Reformationist return to Hebrew scripture. First, Martin Luther’s call of \textit{sola scriptura} does not implicate the Hebrew Bible per se;\(^8^5\) second, it overlooks the hermeneutic role played by influential early-modern readers of the Bible, who had political projects and interests of their own.\(^8^6\) What distinguishes this period is not simply the reliance upon Hebrew scripture in the first place, but of the particular political frameworks to which scripture was married. The religious dimension of early modern Europe’s geopolitical conflicts surely contributed to the fragmentation of the dynastic medieval order, but cannot fully account for the political forms that subsequently emerged.\(^8^7\) As Liah Greenfeld argues, “The significance of the Old Testament as the \textit{source} of the popular idiom for the expression of the nascent national consciousness should not be overestimated. While they were

\(8^3\) Spain playing for the Dutch something like the role that France played for Florence during the First Italian War.

\(8^4\) Appelbaum 2013. Philpott 2001 also claims that new religious ideas were causal for new practices of sovereignty.


\(8^6\) One might also note that while Calvinist communities were circumstantially particularistic (at least in the earlier years), the ethos of Calvinism, being after all Christian, was still universalistic.

\(8^7\) Cf. Nexon 2009.
borrowing from the Book, Englishmen were simultaneously modifying it.\footnote{Greenfeld 1992, 52.} One might add that Englishmen were not alone in this regard.

Surely, no Englishman who fits this definition was as influential as Thomas Hobbes.\footnote{I discuss Hobbes more fully in the following chapter. On the extent of Hobbes’s immediate influence, see Skinner 1966; Hobbes made explicit his hopes that his work would inform governing practice in \textit{Leviathan}, chapter 31 and Review and Conclusion.} Hobbes specifically employs his creative readings of the Hebrew Bible in explicating his novel accounts of the people as forming the body of the state via a process of representation. Of course, Hobbes is not the first thinker, in his milieu, or elsewhere to examine concepts like the “people” or “representation.” Parliamentarians like Henry Parker as well as their critics among the Levellers both made reference to the “people” as the basis for representative government (with the latter disputing that an oligarchic parliament could be meaningfully representative).\footnote{See Skinner 2005 for an overview.} Part of Hobbes’s genius was to invert the theories of popular sovereignty that were first mooted during the French Religious Wars: for Hobbes, the people cannot meaningfully exist in the absence of the sovereign.\footnote{Salmon 1959, 113-116.} What distinguishes Hobbes from earlier theorists of popular sovereignty is his attentiveness to the concept of the people and how they might be meaningfully described. Simply put, no other writer of this time, including the Monarchomachs and the Levellers, produced anything like Hobbes’s discussion of the people in terms of its complexity and detail.

That said, the proliferation of discussions and images of peoplehood was hardly of a piece: that is, it did not require the adoption \textit{tout court} of a single political philosophy, nor did it need to be linked to an especially compelling or ingenious one. Indeed, the flexibility with which the idea of peoplehood could be employed surely contributed to its dissemination, particularly

\footnote{Greenfeld 1992, 52.}
\footnote{I discuss Hobbes more fully in the following chapter. On the extent of Hobbes’s immediate influence, see Skinner 1966; Hobbes made explicit his hopes that his work would inform governing practice in \textit{Leviathan}, chapter 31 and Review and Conclusion.}
\footnote{See Skinner 2005 for an overview.}
\footnote{Salmon 1959, 113-116.}
after Hobbes. What remained almost constant until the eighteenth century was its attachment to references drawn from the Hebrew Bible.

One could hardly find a clearer demonstration of the increasingly diffuse ways that the Hebraic image of peoplehood is deployed than in the case of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* (1679). Bossuet presents a contradictory political account, combining Hobbes’s covenantal language with principles of traditional monarchism, biblical authority, and secular reason.92 His work is relevant to us not for its originality or profundity, but for the very conventionality of its author, who was after all chosen by Louis XIV to tutor the young dauphin.93 And this, his most political writing, was produced as both instruction to young monarch and as a broadside against the idea of popular sovereignty.

Yet even in such a largely traditionalist work, we find that same novel conception of the “unity of a people,” sustained by the monarchy, and crystalized in the specific depictions of the Israelites throughout the Bible.94 The point is not that he must abandon monarchism or Christianity—quite the opposite. It is that in order to adequately describe the concept of a particular and comprehensive people under the rulership of the dauphin, it is necessary to recur to the language of the Hebrew Bible.95

Nonetheless, despite its adoption by monarchists and Counter-Reformationists, this idea of peoplehood takes on increasingly and primarily popular connotations in the years to come. Moreover, it begins to appear in ever-more widely distributed texts. The radical Whig tract, *The

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94 Bossuet 1709, 23. See more broadly 21-28, where he explicitly links forming a nation with uniting a people.
95 For example, the opening pages of the work are devoted to the theme of universal Christian brotherhood. And yet the very first words are from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (*Écoute, Israël!*)—otherwise known as the Sh'ma Yisrael, one of the central prayers in Judaism. See Bossuet 1709, 5.
Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations, was first printed in 1709 under the title Vox Populi, Vox Dei (the voice of the people is the voice of God). This famous pamphlet made substantially similar claims as the earlier Monarchomachs and, like them, upheld the Israelites as the paradigmatic people.96 Just a few years later a countervailing Jacobite pamphlet printed under the same name would redeploy this image in support of restoring the House of Stuart to the throne. Though the Hebrew component would come to drop out, this rhetorical appeal would become “an established instrument of oppositionist writers of all stripes for the rest of the century.”97

Political Hebraism and the Commonwealth Tradition

The efflorescence of writings on popular sovereignty that drew on the Hebrew Bible during this period was part of what appears to be a wider turn in European letters called “political Hebraism”: the belief that the Hebrew Bible could be profitably read as a guide to political practice.98

This turn to the Hebrew Bible as a source of political wisdom came from multiple quarters and spread in a variety of different directions. It should go without saying that the descant of Hebraic influence was hardly univocal. Precisely because these readings did not constitute a single, coherent vision that produced political revolutions, the Old Testament functioned more as a Rorschach than a source text for the relevant actors on the ground. Indeed, readings of the Hebrew Bible frequently issued in fundamentally exclusive political accounts. For Thomas Erastus (Lüber) and Richard Hooker the example of the Israelite theocracy justified

96 The Judgement of Whole Kingdoms and Nations (1716). An erroneous tradition attributes this pamphlet to Daniel Defoe.
98 On political Hebraism more broadly, see the essays in Coudert and Shoulson 2004; and Schochet et al. 2008, esp. Jones’s introduction. This latter compiles articles from the short-lived journal Hebraic Political Studies.
the unification of civil and ecclesiastical authority. For Robert Filmer, the genealogical account in Genesis offered the original defense of monarchy. For figures like Petrus Cunaeus and Hugo Grotius in the United Provinces, and John Selden, John Toland, and James Harrington in England, it offered evidence of the wisdom of republican modes and orders. For their more pious brethren, it offered support for assigning political primacy to a priestly class with unique access to God’s intentions.

What the political Hebraists mostly shared in common was that they sought “a reconciliation of classical categories of government (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, mixed) with biblical proof texts.” Lea Boralevi describes the tradition that emerged through this period as “syncretistic”: representing a complex amalgam of Christian morality and theology, Israelite political models and institutions, and Classical (Greek and Roman) political thought. Johannes Althusius’s Poltica Methodice Digesta (1603) presents an almost paradigmatic example of this syncretism, fusing biblical scripture, Thomistic Aristotelianism, and Calvinist thought into one teaching. Interestingly, Althusius prefigures Hobbes in viewing the whole body of the people as the source of sovereign authorization. However, he embeds this notion in a federated model, akin to the republicanism of his contemporaries. Thus he does not appear to see (as Hobbes does) the significance of what he is proposing: that recognizing the whole people

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100 Harrington and Selden particularly warrant greater attention than the scope of the present study allows—see Beiner 2014 and Berkowitz 1994, respectively.
101 Abolafia 2014, 296.
102 Boralevi 2011, 115.
103 On Althusius and popular sovereignty, see Tierney 1982, 71-79.
as one body authorizing one sovereign overwhelms all conventional social and political divisions.\textsuperscript{105}

Within the larger genre of political Hebraism, the most significant alternative early-modern tradition of interpreting the Hebrew Bible is surely the Commonwealth tradition, which has received renewed interest in recent years.\textsuperscript{106} According to the collection of works concerning the “Hebrew Republic,” the Hebrew Bible depicts, in various passages, an ideal republican polity. This tradition, and indeed much of political Hebraism, is traceable back to Flavius Josephus, who both coins the term “theocracy,” as a political description of the biblical Hebrews, and adds it to the Aristotelian-Polybian typology of regimes.\textsuperscript{107} In doing so, he does conceptual violence to both traditions: the polis and its particular constitutions are treated as transferable to the vastly different, Near Eastern social context, and Moses the biblical prophet is reinterpreted as something akin to a Greek lawgiver: “For Flavius, it is not God who imposes the Law upon Israel through Moses, but Moses who imposes God upon Israel through the Law.”\textsuperscript{108}

Both Grotius (\textit{De republica emendanda}) and Cunaeus (\textit{De republica hebraeorum}), for example, rely upon Josephus for their accounts of a theocratic republic, which issues in an aristocratic government with a theological basis. That is to say, they reproduce the Josephan move of associating the Hebrew polity with the classical typology of regimes. They are content with maintaining the existing institutional structure of the Dutch Republic, while endowing it with biblical resonance.

\textsuperscript{105} Wolin 1960, 202.
\textsuperscript{106} The most thorough case for the significance of the concept of the Hebrew Republic is Nelson 2010, though the idea was previously mooted by Ligota 1992; Boralevi 2002; and Bodian 2006.
\textsuperscript{108} Momigliano 1987, 66. This mode of interpretation arguably reaches its zenith in Book II of Rousseau’s \textit{Du Contrat Social}. 

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Josephus does not, however, discuss the significance of the Hebraic concept of peoplehood. Moreover, it is impossible to ascertain with what degree of sincerity he sought to integrate his conception of the Hebrew polity into a Greco-Roman framework, given his rhetorical interest in doing so to appeal to his intended (gentile) audience. He was after all laboring under very different political conditions than 17th-century writers or contemporary scholars, to put it mildly.

Attempts to evaluate the significance of these 17th-century Josephan writings on the Hebrew republic face two problems, one conceptual and one historical. The first has to do with the appropriateness of assimilating the biblical text into a generic tradition of political reflection. The Hebraic examples are “simultaneously exemplary and exceptional, paradigmatic and peculiar,” and thus to some degree resistant to serving as direct models for political organization.109 It is necessary to acknowledge the role that Christian Hebraic interpreters themselves play in fitting the biblical text for their purposes.

The second and larger problem, however, has to do with the historic limitations on the “Judaic moment.”110 Eric Nelson’s thesis, for example, is a bit like the old folk wisdom about March: it announces itself as radical but concludes modestly. That is, evidence of the supposed theological origins of modernity is increasingly scarce come the 18th century. (By contrast, it is a recognizable fact that we continue to this day to associate ourselves, however ambivalently, with nations, and these are used to make sense of our political loyalties and obligations.) Indeed, though he acknowledges the historical limits on the Hebraic moment, he underplays the degree to which Enlightenment thinkers would turn on the Judaic example. David Nirenberg calls this

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109 Nirenberg 2013, 316.
110 The actual strength and duration of the Hebraic moment is debated: cf. Sutcliffe 2011 with chapter 9 of Nirenberg 2013.
the shift “away from *Hebraica veritas*, the quest for truths encoded in the Hebrew Bible by which a more perfect society might be organized, and toward what one might call *Hebraica falsitas*, a search for the origins of Christian society’s present ills in the errors and superstitions of Israelites and Jews.”

This is arguably why contemporary accounts of the Hebrew Republic tradition (and perhaps of republicanism, generally) run into difficulty as their narratives approach the later modern era. The failure to recognize this fact becomes especially salient in the case of a thinker like Benedict Spinoza, whose thought does not fit easily into republican categories or into the larger tradition of political Hebraism. Nelson, for example, largely follows Jonathan Israel’s interpretation of Spinoza as a fundamentally radical thinker, but maintains nonetheless that “Machiavelli’s Israel may have inspired Spinoza, but it was the Israel of Grotius, Cunaeus, Selden, and Harrington that more profoundly shaped the development of what would emerge as liberal political thought in the modern West.”

Here, this writer must disagree. And ironically, it was a Jew, Spinoza, whose work proved particularly influential over those subsequent thinkers who adopted this understanding of the people and its centrality to politics, even as they turned away from the Hebrew Bible that helped produce that understanding.

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111 Nirenberg 2013, 337.
112 Abolafia 2014 provides a fine account of the ways in which Spinoza both relies upon and fundamentally breaks with that tradition.
113 Nelson 2010, 134. Nelson is contradictory here, however, as only a few pages later (139) he allows that the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century had decisively turned against the biblical interpretations of the tradition he champions. What then is the political import of this pious tradition of political Hebraism?
The Rise of Nations

It is increasingly a commonplace to accept Spinoza’s remarkable intellectual influence over the two centuries that followed his death.\textsuperscript{114} Spinoza’s influence on the German romantic tradition—above all Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Johann Gottlieb von Herder, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling—is particularly significant.\textsuperscript{115} That influence is mostly notably manifested for our purposes in their reflections on the role of national culture in organized political life, and of the ways that culture is informed by a prior religious tradition.\textsuperscript{116}

But the more immediately impactful Spinozan influence was that which held sway over the \textit{philosophes} of 18\textsuperscript{th}-century France, above all that singular figure, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.\textsuperscript{117} A number of scholars place Rousseau at the theoretical origin of modern nationalism.\textsuperscript{118} But it should be clear that the core elements that make up his “proto-nationalism”—the general will, the importance of cultural distinctiveness—predate his writings.\textsuperscript{119}

Spinoza’s theory of sovereignty is to be aligned as much with Rousseau’s as with Hobbes’; for like Rousseau, he teaches, in effect, that because and so far as the sovereign power is absolute it can belong only to the whole people “led as if by one mind.” And he teaches also that the sovereign right of the state is most fully realized when it acts most nearly in the best interests of the whole nation.”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{114} For possibly the strongest statement of Spinoza’s influence, see chapter 8 of Israel 2001 and Israel 2011, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{115} See Goetschel 2004. It should be noted here that Machiavelli’s influence also “leapfrogs” subsequent centuries, directly inspiring Fichtean nationalism, most evidently in Fichte’s essay “On Machiavelli as Author” (1807)—see Fichte 2016. See also Moggach 1993 and Paret 2015.

\textsuperscript{116} See Kahn 2013, 137-138, who emphasizes the connection between Spinoza and Herder. See also Sheehan 2005, 219 for a discussion of how Herder views Israelites as the original model of a national culture. For Herder’s own discussions of how religion (especially biblical religion) becomes culture and literature, see Herder 1993.

\textsuperscript{117} See Vernière 1954, esp. 475-495; Israel 2011, 633-647.

\textsuperscript{118} See, e.g., Cohler 1970; Plattner 1997; and Engel 2005. These studies are generally judicious in considering how Rousseau’s thought could influence nationalists without itself being nationalist in orientation. My main point of disagreement is that they place him at the beginning of what should be seen as an older tradition of political thought.

\textsuperscript{119} Williams 2010 in fact attributes to Spinoza the original conception of Rousseau’s “general will.”

\textsuperscript{120} Harris 1973, 196; see also Waltz 1959, 174. Cf. \textit{TP} 3.7, 2.21 and \textit{TTP} 16.
David Bell argues against Jonathan Israel in defining Rousseau’s influences, preferring to trace them to Hobbes rather than Spinoza. But this arguably presents too stark a choice, not only insofar as Rousseau could have absorbed and transmuted the influence of both in different respects, but also as they find real compatibility in his own work. In a letter to the Marquis de Mirabeau, Rousseau claimed that he saw “no tolerable mean between the most austere Democracy and the most perfect Hobbesism”—a remarkably Spinozan claim.

But also like Spinoza, Rousseau brings to fruition a key consequence of conceiving of the people as a unified whole: seeing them as a distinct nation, with their own particular character. In other words, the people must also be a people. Indeed, Rousseau himself presents a remarkably coherent summation of the core themes that had come to coalesce around the concept of peoplehood. First, he provides a particularly striking account of the transformation of the masses or the many into a comprehensive collective citizenry. Second, and rare among political philosophers, he argues for the significance of the distinctiveness of different peoples, whether Poles, Corsicans, or Genevans. As he notes, “the philosophy of each people is little suited for that of another.” And most importantly, he describes the necessity of recognizing and embracing the latter for the successful realization of the former. As Richard Boyd remarks, “[T]he viability of the Rousseauean project comes to rest on the affective project of

121 Bell 2016, 131-133. Steinberger 2008 also argues that Rousseau’s conception of state sovereignty is materially much the same as Hobbes’s.
123 Though this is by no means the whole of his thought. In particular, Emile and Reveries of a Solitary Walker would heavily qualify any assumption to the contrary.
124 Rousseau 1964 III, 439-441.
125 Ibid., 906.
126 Ibid., 212.
127 Ibid., 255-256.
cultivating a sense of moral distinctiveness among the citizenry—that is, on forms of moral partiality that are pre-political and serve to differentiate citizens from strangers or foreigners.”

Finally, Rousseau is the last major political thinker to significantly look to the Hebrew Bible in formulating his political thought. Nearly all of the other influential writers of his era came increasingly to disregard the Bible, where they were not outright hostile to it.

Yet this broader turn away from the biblical text hardly inhibited the development of an increasingly universal idea: that the people and the nation are one and the same. Denis Diderot, Rousseau’s peer and collaborator, begins his Observations sur le Nakaz (1774) with perhaps the most explicit statement on the matter: “There is no true sovereign except the nation; there can be no true legislator but the people.” In fact, he had already made substantially the same argument—and well before Rousseau’s Social Contract—in his entry for “Political Authority” in the monumental Encyclopédie (1751).

In perhaps the most influential treatise of international law of its time, Emmerich de Vattel’s Droit des Gens (1758), the terms “people” and “nation” are similarly used interchangeably—in a way that clearly indicates a fundamental change in the age-old concept of the ius gentium. What was once used to define in the broadest terms what diverse independent population groups shared in common, now had come to refer exclusively to a single kind of

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128 Boyd 2015, 262.
129 See especially, Social Contract III.6, IV.8; Government of Poland II.6; and his remarkably strange prose poem, The Levite of Ephraim. See also Marks 2010. Rousseau particularly seems to be drawing on Machiavelli’s treatment of Moses when he writes of “the astonishing enterprise of establishing a national body from a herd of luckless fugitives… Moses dared to turn this wandering and servile band into a political body, a free people…” (Rousseau 1964 III, 956).
130 One need only think of Voltaire’s fulminations on the subject.
131 Diderot 1994, 507: Il n’y a point de vrai souverain que la nation; il ne peut y avoir de vrai législateur que le people.
132 Diderot and d’Alembert (eds.) 1772, 898-899. Here, too, Diderot makes clear the interchangeability of “people” and “nation.”
133 Vattel 1758, passim.
idealized political entity.\textsuperscript{134} Vattel is separated from his predecessors in the tradition of international law by his acceptance of the doctrine of popular sovereignty.

Finally, we can also already see evidence of a particular concern for discovering the prepolitical origins of the peoples that undergird and legitimize modern governments—well before the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Romantic nationalists. The Abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, an associate of Rousseau’s, begins his *Observations sur l’Histoire de France* (1765) by excavating an original French people prior to the coronation of Clovis that predated the rise of feudal hierarchies.\textsuperscript{135}

One can truly witness the advancement of the concept of peoplehood by consulting the most forceful critic of popular sovereignty during the revolutionary era: Joseph de Maistre. His *De la Souveraineté du Peuple* (1795), does not deny peoplehood, but, if anything, only further enshrines it, by insisting on its divine, rather than human, authorship.\textsuperscript{136} Thus he takes more literally the religious origins of all peoples (the Hebrews very much included), but still allows for the basic intelligibility of this idea.

It is revealing of how encompassing was the change in understanding that had taken place, that opposed thinkers like Rousseau and Maistre are still working within the same categories of thought, vis-à-vis a concept like “people.” Whatever their (profound) disagreements, their ideas are hardly incommensurable; they (and their respective followers) will henceforth speak a common political language. Here as elsewhere, the rhetorical vocabulary available to the relevant political actors was increasingly shaped by these understandings of

\textsuperscript{134} John Rawls (2001) makes this connection explicit when he translates the concept as “law of peoples.” But Rawls does not reflect upon the historical significance of his predetermined understanding of peoplehood.

\textsuperscript{135} Mably 1789-1790, 131-152.

\textsuperscript{136} Maistre 1992, *passim*, but see esp. 106-111, 280. Maistre, too, uses the “people” and “nation” interchangeably throughout.

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peoplehood. It is not necessary to insist upon any political or normative agreement among these actors to see how they become mutually intelligible. Their disagreements play out over a shared field of understanding—one they would not have shared with either civic republicans or ecclesiasts.

James Swenson provides a nice explanation of this process in describing the influence of these ideas on the seminal figure of the Abbé Joseph Emanuel Sieyès:

The fundamental question is not whether Sieyès (or any other figure of the revolutionary period) was subjectively Rousseauist. It is clear that Sieyès had read Rousseau closely...What is most important... is the extent to which Sieyès—and most if not all of his colleagues—was objectively Rousseauist, that is to say, was led by a combination of available concepts and tactical exigencies to recapitulate certain problems... that Rousseau had laid out with particular force and perspicacity.¹³⁷

Sieyès, meanwhile, would most fully combine the idea of the nation with that of the people in his version of popular sovereignty: “the Nation alone has the right [to make a constitution].”¹³⁸

Sieyès, who exerted perhaps the most direct intellectual influence upon the French revolutionaries in his capacity as propagandist, provides a clear example of how the concepts of “statehood” and “nationhood/peoplehood” underwent mutual transformation over time.¹³⁹ The title of his pamphlet, *Qu’est-ce que le tiers-état?* (1789), refers to the third of three “states” or “estates” of the hieratic society of *ancien régime* France. His contention is that the third estate, or the people, must in effect become the entirety of the country.¹⁴⁰ The estate must become the State, just as the definition of “people” must expand from the common people to encompass the

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¹³⁷ Swenson 2000, 211. These remarks admittedly overstate the extent to which these ideas are exclusively Rousseauean. For more on Rousseau’s influence on that period, see Williams 1933; Bell 2016, 131.
¹³⁸ Sieyès 1789, 104.
¹³⁹ Kelly 2003.
¹⁴⁰ The first and second being the clergy and the nobility, respectively.
entirety of the people or nation."\textsuperscript{141} “The Third Estate, then, was not a mere ‘order.’ It was the Nation itself.”\textsuperscript{142}

This principle would become enshrined in the third article of the \textit{Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen de 1789} which declared that “the principle of all Sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation.”\textsuperscript{143} Nor is this conception limited to one country or even one side of the Atlantic.

But Sieyes also manifested Hobbes’s influence more directly, just as much as Rousseau’s. Indeed, his pamphlet can be read as unfolding a particular logic of Hobbes’s account of the relationship of the people to the state.

For Hobbes the indirect, that is representative, sovereignty of the people was the ‘state’, and he introduced the term ‘state’ to distinguish it from the common understanding of the commonwealth as direct popular sovereignty. Sieyes similarly insisted that the people and the nation were the same, but he specifically redefined the term ‘nation’ to signify that the people’s sovereignty, its ‘constituent power’ could be exercised only through the unitary representative system of the National Assembly as a constituted agency. This was precisely what Hobbes meant by the ‘state’. Twinning these specific versions of the words ‘state’ and ‘nation’ in the composite term of ‘nation-state’ introduces not so much an oxymoron, but a plain tautology. As a political definition of the location of sovereignty, Hobbes’s ‘state’ and Sieyes’ ‘nation’ are identical. Sieyes’ ‘nation’ is Hobbes’s ‘Leviathan.’\textsuperscript{144}

One could quibble that the refinement and spread of the concept of the general will indicates a fundamental break with earlier interpretations of popular sovereignty, insofar as the direct rule of the people must supplant representative rule. But in fact, the victorious French revolutionaries,

\textsuperscript{141} Not coincidentally, Sieyès would also revive Mably’s claims in arguing that the older origins of the Third Estate trumped the ancien régime nobility’s historical claim to rule by right of their ancestors’ conquest—see Sieyès 1789, 16-18. See also Wood 2013, 45-51.
\textsuperscript{142} Schama 1989, 304. See also Sieyès 1789, 111.
\textsuperscript{143} As above, the concept of nation and people are largely interchangeable here. See also Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).
\textsuperscript{144} Hont 1994, 203. See also Forsyth 1981; Calhoun 1997, 137.
despite their increasingly radical language, would simply revert to practices of representation—substantially the same practices that, broadly-conceived, dominate our contemporary world scene.\textsuperscript{145} What remained constant, however was the principal importance accorded to the people, irrespective of the degree of their actual political engagement.

By this point—après Rousseau—the Hebraic component has largely dropped out in conceptions of nationhood and popular sovereignty. It is increasingly common to conceive of the people not in terms of the masses, but as comprising a) the totality of the body that authorizes the state’s existence and workings; and b) a distinct nation. Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, so liberal a thinker as John Stuart Mill could write without radical intent or context that: “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist.”\textsuperscript{146} The sea change had already taken place.

\textbf{Conclusion}

None of the foregoing analysis in this chapter is to suggest that nationalism’s full flowering in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries (not to say the distinctive ways in which it manifested itself within Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the post-colonial states) was inevitable. Nor should it imply that subsequent developments contributed nothing original to the story of nationalism. Istvan Hont is surely right that “any history of the ‘nation-state’ and nationalism which…either sees…straightforward continuity in state-building since the early modern period or presumes a

\textsuperscript{145} For a useful discussion of this turn, see Baker 1987. The importance of representation gets discussed further in the following chapter.
\textsuperscript{146} Mill 1928, 287.
rupture at the time of the French revolution, with their history commencing with its aftermath will fail to explain the modern conundrum of popular sovereignty.”

By the same token, the conceptual and practical development of nationalism cannot be viewed as a single, unified course with every tributary flowing easily into the same general current. Nineteenth-century romantics challenged Hobbes’s theory, insisting on the priority of the prepolitical community. Counter-Enlightenment monarchists like Maistre vehemently opposed the idea that the people could meaningfully wield sovereignty. Nonetheless, we can see these otherwise highly varied accounts converging upon a shared conception of peoplehood; their disagreements play out on this common ground. Even where they are opposed, they are not incommensurate.

What should, hopefully, also be clear is that the frequent recursion to the image of the biblical Hebrews did not in itself constitute a “return” to a once-extant, biblical nationalism. That image undeniably served as a source of pious inspiration for persecuted religious minorities during this period in ways that, over time, became enmeshed with the political symbols and rhetoric of nascent polities. But, as the saying goes, you can’t get there from here. There is no meaningful sense in which this image can work in the absence of the conceptual frameworks supplied by early modern political thought. At the same time, this intellectual tradition would have dissipated into sheer abstraction in the absence of the concrete images of the Israelites. It is

147 Hont 1994, 231.
149 One can contrast Maistre’s assault on popular sovereignty with Filmer’s: Maistre does not deny the existence of a people or peoples. By contrast, Filmer doubts that any consensus upon the idea of the people might be reached—see Filmer 1991, 198-199; see also Canovan 2005, 2.
150 Though it was not strictly impossible to articulate: Pope Clement V, in his papal bull Rex gloriae (1311), described the Kingdom of France as “like the people of Israel…a peculiar people chosen by the Lord to carry out the orders of Heaven” (Strayer 1971, 313). But who is the people that might find such a comparison intelligible?
the curious combination of political theory and biblical imagery that shapes the descent of the idea of peoplehood into the modern era.

We can better comprehend the problems and tensions inherent in that idea—ones that continue to express themselves in political practice today—by examining more closely the writings of some of the thinkers who have contributed so prominently to it. The remainder of this work will be devoted to that task.
Part II
Chapter 4: Hobbes’s Kingdom of God

The power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people.

- Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes’s status as the prime author of the modern state and its impersonal structure is secure. “[I]t is Hobbes who first speaks systematically and unapologetically, in the abstract and unmodulated tones of the modern theorist of the state.” His writings are both an important historical artifact in the development of statehood and an existing resource for contemporary scholars who remain concerned with the existence and durability of modern states and the state system.

But Hobbes is also a theorist of peoplehood—indeed it is in many ways the precondition for his thinking about the state. Hobbes has simply thought more deeply and more carefully about what it means to be a people than nearly all of the many writers discussed in the previous chapter, such that it is worth examining more closely what he to say about it and how he interprets the Hebrew Bible in the process.

One might argue, as many have, that peoplehood is a functional byproduct of social contractarianism. That is, a people is what you end up with after having covenanted with a

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2 Shennan 1974, 9; Van Creveld 1999, 179.
3 Skinner 1989, 126; see also Steinberger 2008.
certain set of individuals to abide by a common sovereign. But Hobbes has clearly given too much thought to the idea of a people—evidenced not least by the images he employs—for this to have been the case.⁵

Perhaps because his thought is more radical, Hobbes is able to make clearer certain logical predicates for popular sovereignty. First, where previous thinkers from the Huguenots to George Buchanan had presented an account of popular sovereignty that coexisted uneasily with the priestly and aristocratic castes of the ancien régime, Hobbes demonstrates how the people cannot truly be the whole people in the absence of a fundamentally egalitarian conception of human beings. Otherwise, the concept of the people is caught between a comprehensive understanding and a more limited, popular one. Hobbes goes further than previous thinkers in sloughing off the trappings of society in order to arrive at a prepolitical understanding of human beings.

Second, though much of the development of popular sovereignty is historically associated with the spread of Protestant ideas,⁶ Hobbes makes abundantly clear that the universalism of the Christian faith itself (and not merely Catholic institutional hierarchies) runs contrary to the delimited and particular authority that true sovereignty requires. Ronald Beiner calls Hobbes’s solution to the problem of instituting local civic order in a universalist Christian world (not to say one of endemic religious warfare) the “judaicization of Christianity.”⁷

⁵ Similarly, Margaret Moore (2015, esp. chapter 5) sees in Hobbes the origins of a “functionalist” account of territorial rights, in which the state acquires rightful authority over whatever territory it can establish sovereignty. But this overlooks Hobbes’s actual understanding of the state. For Hobbes, the state does not operate as an independent entity apart from the people. Where would it come from, and of what would it consist?
⁷ Beiner 2011, 46-60.
In demonstrating these and other claims, Hobbes does not mount a radical secular critique of existing conventions (at least not in any straightforward manner), but rather draws upon a shared biblical resource whose authority trumps that of prevailing Christian mores. The radicalism of Hobbes’s political thought then is twinned with the radicalism of his biblical interpretation. To fully grasp the former—above all, his understanding of the relationship of the people to the state—it is necessary to examine the latter.

States and Peoples in Hobbes’s Thought

The influence of Hobbes on contemporary state theory is as monumental as his image of the state.

So long as [the image of the state employed by Hobbes] carried conviction, some other questions, which arise naturally on an ecological model of society, could not even be asked: for example, how we can justify, or chance, the geographical boundaries of any particular state, and whether some of the powers of the national state will not be better performed on a subnational or transnational level.”

Hobbes has proven similarly indispensable for how we think about states in relation to one another—that is, in an international context. Most treatments of Hobbes as an international thinker focus on the so-called “domestic analogy”: that his account of solitary individuals in the state of nature provides the structural logic of states in an anarchic international system. Yet this tradition does not factor in Hobbes’s influence upon how international relations scholars think about the state itself—so much so that accounts of its historical development tend to become

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8 Toulmin 1990, 194. Kratochwil 2007 has similarly argued that critical theory will not be truly productive until it frees itself of Hobbes’s influence on modern political thought and practice—see relatedly Walker 1993.

intertwined with Hobbes’s ideal version.\textsuperscript{10} Given Hobbes’s foundational status for the field, the relative neglect of his account of the state is surprising—especially insofar as he presents the original depiction of the state-as-person.\textsuperscript{11}

One should not be misled by Hobbes’s most frequent term “commonwealth.” Commonwealth is of course an Anglicization of \textit{res publica}—the common wealth in place of the public thing. Yet its usage is so pervasive in early-modern writings as to defy consistent meaning. Hobbes’s “commonwealth,” for example, displays none of the institutional divisions of James Harrington’s \textit{Oceana} (a point Harrington reiterates by always referring to Hobbes’s creation as “Leviathan”). To put it simply, much like the term “state,” the substantive meaning of “commonwealth” must be derived from context, both intra- and extra-textual.\textsuperscript{12}

In Hobbes’s case, one might reasonably protest that Hobbes’ only rarely uses our modern term “state,” but this matters less than one might suppose. “[I]f we turn to the body of Hobbes’s texts, we still find him exhibiting a preference for the traditional terminology of ‘city’ and ‘commonwealth.’ But if we turn instead to his Prefaces, in the course of which he stands back from his arguments and reviews their structure, we find him self-consciously presenting himself as a theorist of the state.”\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, it is Hobbes who makes explicit what other thinkers (e.g., Spinoza) leave tacit, namely that “\textit{civitas},” “commonwealth,” and “state” are all mutually interchangeable terms.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} For a fuller discussion of Hobbes’s influence on theories of the state in the field of International Relations, see Polansky 2016.

\textsuperscript{11} That concept has been called one of the core judicial inheritances of IR theory—see Barkawi 2015, 61. It was, for example, crucial for Alexander Wendt’s highly influential version of constructivism—see Wendt 1999 and Adler 2013, 133; cf. also Wendt 2004 with Jackson 2004. Curiously, Wendt relies heavily upon Hobbes, \textit{without} referencing his many discussions of personation.

\textsuperscript{12} Onuf 2008, 329-330.

\textsuperscript{13} Skinner 1989, 121.

\textsuperscript{14} In \textit{L.} 17.
It is important, however, to qualify any claim about Hobbes as a state theorist, so as to avoid attributing to Hobbes an off-the-shelf concept of the state or treating him as but an “analyst” of contemporary geopolitical trends. As David Armitage sarcastically notes,

With the rise of international positivism in the era after the Vienna settlement of 1815, Hobbes came to be identified as one of the first theorists of what would later be called the ‘Westphalian system’ of sovereign states: after all, could it have been just a coincidence that *Leviathan* was published in 1651, only three years after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648?\(^\text{15}\)

Hobbes’s version of “state-formation” moves in contrary motion to the standard sociological-historical accounts, in which centralizing dynasts extend prerogatives to the people under their rule in the interest of ever more efficient modes of resource extraction.\(^\text{16}\) Hobbes’s state is primarily contractual (covenantal, really) rather than coercive; its stability rests upon the rational willingness of its members to accede to their bonds.

All of which is to say that Hobbes elevates and expands the concept of representation in political life.\(^\text{17}\) The sovereign character of the state derives principally from its representative status: its claim to represent the collective body of the people in its entirety in an unbroken manner.\(^\text{18}\) This requires some unpacking to make clearer the link between states and peoples in Hobbes’s thought.

It has been widely argued that Hobbes’s account of sovereignty borrows from an existing medieval body of thought on corporations.\(^\text{19}\) But Hobbes makes an important transition in his deployment of these ideas. “If Hobbes’s theory is… indebted to an ancient theory of corporate

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\(^\text{15}\) Armitage 2006, 234. I discuss the problems with the “Myth of Westphalia” in chapter 1.
\(^\text{16}\) This literature is discussed in chapter 1.
\(^\text{18}\) As with the terms “people” and “state,” Hobbes is canny about his usage: he rarely employs the word “representation.” Yet as Pitkin (1967, esp. chapter 2) argues at length, Hobbes remains the first thinker to provide a systematic treatment. Its concentration on that theme is one of the features that distinguishes *Leviathan* among his works.
\(^\text{19}\) Springborg 1976 provides a fine overview.
law, the use of the legal fiction that colleges are real entities, in order to describe the political community itself, is Hobbes’s own invention.”

This is not, however, just a matter of scaling up certain medieval or even contemporary theories of representation. This is because the Hobbesian innovation has to go beyond fiction in applying representation to the political community as a whole. This requires some elaboration. As many have noted, Hobbes’ discussions of “persons represented” are complex and encompass a broad spectrum of possibilities. A person can represent another person, but a person can also represent an inanimate object, such as a hospital or a bridge. As Hobbes notes in *De Cive*, “Although every commonwealth is a civil person, not every civil person is a commonwealth.”

What Hobbes particularly has in mind are colleges and mercantile corporations, smaller bodies than the commonwealth that are already shown to exist and formed by a fixed number of individuals for a common purpose.

What distinguishes the commonwealth from all of these—animate and inanimate—is that the body being represented by the sovereign is wholly notional until it is actually incarnated. All the more so, because such a body as the “people” has never truly existed in the absence of a Hobbesian state. By contrast, bridges and hospitals are observable things; merchants who form a corporation are living men who are recognized by both one another and others as engaging in established practices of trade and commerce. Though a corporation may be artificial, that which it represents is not.

Prior to the establishment of the state, however, the people are not a people but a “multitude”—a disaggregated mass of separate individuals.

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20 Foisneau 2010, 81.
22 Hobbes, *De Cive*, V, x.
23 For more on the complex distinction between a “multitude” and a “people” in Hobbes, see Sorgi 2014, 108-109.
…men do not sufficiently distinguish between a *people* and a *multitude*. A people is one entity, with one will, and to which one can attribute an action. None of this can be said of a multitude. The people reigns in every commonwealth; even in monarchies the people rules, for the people wills through the will of a single man. The citizens—that is, the subjects—are a multitude. In a democracy and an aristocracy, the citizens are a multitude; but the council [or assembly] is the people. And in a monarchy, the subjects are a multitude and (paradoxical though it may be) the king is the people.  

This represents a remarkable break with past precedent (not to say, ordinary observation), in which the people is a distinct, popular component of a larger political community. For Hobbes, the people is simply coextensive with the state itself. “Like Spinoza…Hobbes insists that all sovereignty is irrevocably popular.”  

While the “people” as such cannot be sovereign in the sense of exercising direct rule or authority, sovereignty nonetheless implicates them by its very nature. “It is not sovereignty that inheres in the people, but the people in sovereignty.” There is no possibility of meaningful sovereignty that does not incorporate the entirety of the people, even if only in a notional sense.  

This discussion is complicated by the fact that Hobbes is not a theorist of popular sovereignty in any straightforward sense. Indeed, by the time he wrote *Leviathan*, his references to the “people” become more circumspect, owing to his denial that they could ever act as an independent collective. Nonetheless, the concept suffuses that work as he arrives at a more precise account of how the people can be understood to exist, given his necessary denial of the value of their prepolitical status. “A Multitude of men, are made *One* Person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that

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24 *DC* XII.8.  
26 Sorgi 2014, 109 [translation mine].  
27 Indeed, this may contribute to his producing a fuller account of the people than most theorists of popular sovereignty; unlike them, he does not take the existence of the people for granted.  
28 Garsten 2010, 528.
Multitude in particular. For it is the *Unity* of the Representer, not the *Unity* of the Represented, that maketh the Person *One.* This is a less blunt presentation than in *De Cive,* but the point remains substantially the same: *Rex est populus.*

Thus, he makes clear that “the people” as a unified body that independently authorizes the sovereign to act on their behalf (for they cannot severally authorize), is itself a kind of fiction. “‘The people’ comes into existence retroactively, after the state is formed, according to the person the sovereign devises for it in representation. States make peoples, not the other way round.” But this requires a caveat: the state really has no independent existence either in the absence of the people it has brought into existence through their own authorization of it. As Sheldon Wolin notes upon examination of *Leviathan*’s frontispiece: “The sovereign’s powerful body is, so to speak, not his own; its outline is completely filled in by the miniature figures of his subjects. He exists, in other words, only through them.” Hence Hobbes’s conclusion: “For the good of the sovereign and people, cannot be separated.”

This is to some extent an answer to the paradox most fully elaborated by Jean Hampton: that if the people are able to coexist and cooperate in such a manner as to generate a sovereign ruler in the first place, why do they need such a ruler going forward? For peoplehood cannot exist in the absence of an authorized representative. At no point in Hobbes’ work are we given an anthropological account of either isolated wretches or an apolitical multitude congregating for the specific and mutually agreed-upon purpose of instituting a sovereign. That is to say, no

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29 *L* 16.
30 Brito Vieira 2009, 163. See also Pettit 2008, 73-76.
31 Wolin 1960, 266.
32 *L* 30.
33 Hampton 1986.
34 Hobbes transitions from discussing representation exclusively in terms of “personation” to adding the concept of “authorization,” which appears to trump it, in *Leviathan.* See Orwin 1975.
process for the acts of covenanting and authorizing are discussed; he never proposes a venue
where this might take place or mechanism to ensure a proper outcome. Rather, we are expected
to reimagine existing polities in essentially Hobbesian terms.\textsuperscript{35} Both rulers and ruled are or
should be persuaded to understand their situation as one in which the sovereign’s representative
status gives meaning to the body of the people as well as solidifies the condition of sovereign
rule.

It is this profound unity then that makes it possible to think of the state as a collective
body. It should be noted that, despite his strong association with the concept of the “body politic"
and related terms, Hobbes did not in fact invent it. John of Salisbury (c. 1115–1180) credits its
innovation to Plutarch in his counsel to Trajan.\textsuperscript{36} More significantly, Christine de Pizan (c. 1365–
c. 1430) made it the central focus of her treatise, \textit{Livre du corps de policie}.\textsuperscript{37} But in these and
other instances, the image is used to describe a differentiated body, comprising multiple parts
working in conjunction with one another. Pizan, for example, situates France’s “three estates”
within the context of the body politic. Though she emphasizes the importance of unity, the
“estates” remain separate and distinct in her account, with the people represented by but one of
the estates.\textsuperscript{38} It is Hobbes’ innovation to characterize the body as distinct from the head, but
otherwise an undifferentiated mass. The various social and economic divisions between priests,
merchants, burghers, soldiers, and nobles all pale beside our common drive for security and
commodious living, as revealed by the image of our natural state.

\textsuperscript{35} See Brito Vieira 2009, 158-176.
\textsuperscript{36} Salisbury 1990.
\textsuperscript{37} Pizan 1994.
\textsuperscript{38} It is not until Sieyes’s work centuries later that the estate of the people will be explicitly treated as
comprising the whole of the body politic—see the discussion at the end of the previous chapter.
Thus, unlike the Monarchomachs and other earlier thinkers, Hobbes supplies the microfoundations of peoplehood. Though the Monarchomachs posit a people that makes possible the exercise of state power, they do not grapple with the obvious historical and empirical barriers to treating a people as a unified, coherent entity. These necessarily include divisions of geography, class, religion, birth and family, and so on.

Hobbes, by imagining our presocial conditions, can proclaim our essential equality—all men are basically alike in the state of nature with respect to what is most important. And only if we are fundamentally equal individuals, can we imagine ourselves as joined together with other equal individuals in a covenant which trumps all other bonds of loyalty and connection. We are, for Hobbes, as alike to one another as were the Hebrews whose differences paled beside the distinction between man and God.39

The point is not that Hobbes was more accurately describing a historical state of affairs, with respect to state formation. The point is that Hobbes’s thought goes so much further toward both plausibly describing an account of the state, and in yoking it to a practical understanding of individual interests (which are largely inseparable from his understanding of rights).

Where the smallest conceivable social unit is a dyad—the relationship between two individuals—the smallest conceivable unit here is the individual himself. In constituting the state, which will preserve him against outside forces and against his fellow citizens, he asserts the primacy of that constitution. Though, realistically speaking, he cannot but have direct relations with other individuals and groups, his relationship with the state must be treated as prior

39 One might argue that Moses or Joshua enjoyed some qualitative superiority over the other Israelites. But Hobbes (L 17) claims ingeniously that the Israelites never really covenanted with God, but with one another and with God’s lieutenants (such as Moses and Joshua). God’s earthly lieutenants are the true sovereigns, rather than God Himself. But this is to say that they are merely human representatives—no different than any other human, whose basic nature has already been described in the first part of *Leviathan*. 
to these and as the fundamental precondition to their existence itself. It is the existence of the
state, after all, that makes nonconflictual human relationships possible, and its integrity depends
upon the priority it holds within each individual’s calculations.

Hobbes denies “that civil associations are created out of pre-existing and unified bodies
of people.”40 This is perfectly logical – the existence of such bodies would create conflicting
loyalties for the citizens of the commonwealth, and would furthermore provide the bases for the
kinds of passionate political engagement (potentially entailing conflict) that Hobbes so abhorred
in classical polities. They would also provide standing proof of civic life that predated the
formation of the commonwealth, both limiting its authority and reminding citizens of its essential
contingency.

Thus does Hobbes support such an account of the unity of the state or commonwealth.41
A theory of individual rights, then, makes possible a particularly plausible account of the state
and of the people. We do not possess “nested” identities; we are not members of overlapping
social networks. We are atomistic, and thus we can form the kinds of bonds of peoplehood.
Craig Calhoun puts this point nicely:

Hobbes’s argument transformed from within a tradition of seeing political
community defined entirely by subjection to a common ruler. Instead of locating
that subjection in a hierarchy of intermediate authorities (as, e.g., the inhabitants
of a given region might fall into a different political community with the conquest
or shifting allegiance of a superordinate nobleman), Hobbes treated each
individual as directly a member of the state. The political community thus became
the whole people (even if it was granted little power). This was an important step
towards nationalism.42

42 Calhoun 1997, 73. Istvan Hont goes even further, positing a consistent line of thought from Hobbes’s
version of popular sovereignty to the nationalism that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution—see
Hont 1994, esp. 171-172.
In light of Hobbes’s care to deny the reality of the people as a prepolitical entity (as opposed to the multitude), and in light of the ways in which he breaks with other theorists of sovereignty, one might wonder how and why his account of the commonwealth nonetheless resolves into a concept of the people as a discrete body. George Kateb argues that this is due to Hobbes’s unreflective commitment to political particularism—indeed, nationalism. “I do not see how we can make sense of key elements in Hobbes’s political theory unless we ascribe to him an unpurged patriotism or ethnocentrism. Something obdurately conventional remains inside him. He tries to see through everything except national feeling.”

But Kateb’s critique misses how radical Hobbes’s account remains, even with the reintroduction of an existing community into his scheme. For the people in this sense is not based upon a real social body that can be discovered by observation or historical investigation. It derives instead from Hobbes’s reading of the Hebrew Bible.

**Hobbes’s Use of Scripture**

The people, as Hobbes understands it, is a unique concept in his lexicon—and perhaps a unique concept generally. But does Hobbes invent it out of whole cloth? There is one source to which he returns that apparently exemplifies it—at least within in his own interpretation. This is the Hebrew Bible.

Harvey Mansfield claims that Hobbes “maliciously borrows his central metaphors from Christianity.” One might note, however, that universalist Christianity does not furnish obvious

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43 Kateb 1991, 382. See also Van Creveld 1999, 185-186.
44 For a useful overview of Hobbes’s use of the Hebrew Bible and of the responses to it, see Nirenberg 2013, 312-317.
45 Mansfield 1971, 110.
examples of autonomous political communities from which Hobbesian analogies might be
drawn. Though Hobbes’ explicit writings on religion largely concern themselves with
Christianity, it would be more accurate to view Hobbes as borrowing, liberally as it were, from
the Jewish tradition. This is particularly apparent in Hobbes’ distinction between the Hebrew
commandments, which have the force of law, and the Christian teachings, which he reduces to
the status of counsels.46

Hobbes’s explicit scheme for Leviathan is highly misleading. As Eric Nelson notes, “Part
III of Leviathan, which Hobbes called ‘Of a Christian Common-wealth,’ constitutes...his own
extremely significant meditation on the Hebrew republic.”47 Nelson, however, is himself misled
by Hobbes’s use of “commonwealth”; for Hobbes’s political order is in no meaningful sense
republican.

As the previous chapter shows, Hobbes was hardly alone in conceptualizing the people in
this manner, or in employing the Hebrew Bible to that effect. But, with the arguable exception of
Spinoza, his account may be the most radical among a host of thinkers facing the widening gyre
of instability in 17th-century Europe.48 Like Spinoza, he manifests a deeper skepticism toward the
text of the Bible, as well as a greater willingness to reinterpret it for his own ends.49 And as Noel
Malcolm notes, they were two of three 17th-century thinkers who disputed the Mosaic authorship
of the Torah.50

By the same token, Hobbes’ account of religion (much like Spinoza’s) is free of miracles
and prophets.51 Indeed, it is necessary for him to show that no existing religion accords with the

46 Martinich 1992, 132.
47 Nelson 2010, 22; see also pg. 123.
48 Rabb 1975, 54.
49 See also Curley 1992.
51 See Johnston 1986, 181-182; and Beiner 2011, 90-91
account of God’s kingdom provided by scripture. The “historical” basis for any such polity is to be found in the Hebrew Bible, though these polities are in various ways found wanting as well.

Thus, none of this discussion should imply that Hobbes’s political theory logically depends upon the existence of God. Though God is unquestionably at the center of the Hebrew Bible, He need not be at the center of Hobbes’s deployment of it. Hobbes (in contrast with the Monarchomachs and associated Calvinists) presents an account of the Hebrew covenant that is “de-theologized”—and hence ever more broadly applicable to and usable by a variety of different political communities. “In none of Hobbes’s works, including Leviathan where Scripture receives its most sustained attention, do we find an epistle read in its entirety, a gospel faithfully reflected upon from beginning to end, a book perused for its meaning or guidance. Hobbes hurled atomes of Scripture as ably and cleverly as any pastor, presbyter, or priest.”

Moreover, Hobbes treats as deeply problematic what many have since viewed as an important technological and social development in the emergence of nationalism: the widespread production of print Bibles. He in fact laments the dissemination of vernacular Bibles such that “every man became a judge of religion, and an interpreter of the Scriptures to himself.” This situation Hobbes compares unfavorably with that of the Israelites under Moses, in which all authority to interpret and communicate God’s will lay with one man. There are firm limits, in other words, on the similarities between Hobbes and the Calvinist Monarchomachs. The contrast

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52 This reading, formerly more common than today, is sometimes called the Taylor-Warrender thesis, after A.E. Taylor’s “The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes” and Howard Warrender’s “The Place of God in Hobbes’ Philosophy.” A more recent statement along these lines can be found in Martinich 1992. Cf. Strauss 1963. Skinner 2002 is similarly critical, though he largely fails to consider the ways that Hobbes employs religious tropes, even if his intentions are not actually pious.
55 See the discussion in the previous chapter.
56 Hobbes 1990, 22.
57 Ibid.
with the Hebrew case illustrates the problem: Calvinists have collapsed the authority of the pope in this respect without replacing it with anything in the context of their several communities.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, given the (essentially universalist) Christian basis for those communities, there is no way to clearly define the boundaries of civil or religious authority.\textsuperscript{59}

The relevant contrast is specifically with Moses, who wisely “suffered no man to go up to [Mount Sinai] to hear God speak.”\textsuperscript{60} Moses wielded sole authority in interpreting His word. (Hobbes does not mention here the other side of that coin: the need, which Moses himself also had, to punish those who proffer their own religious interpretations.\textsuperscript{61}) As Joshua Mitchell notes, “Hobbes finds in Moses the foundation of unified sovereignty: political and religious.”\textsuperscript{62} In this respect, Hobbes’s treatment of Moses resembles that of no other writer so much as Machiavelli.\textsuperscript{63}

“And therefore so far forth as concerneth the Old Testament, we may conclude, that whosoever had the sovereignty of the commonwealth amongst the Jews, the same had also the supreme authority in matter of God’s external worship, and represented God’s person.”\textsuperscript{64} Not for nothing did Rousseau say of Hobbes, “De tous les auteurs chretiens, le philosophe Hobbes est le seul qui ait bien vu le mal et le remede, qui ait ose proposer de reunir les deux tetes de l’aigle.”\textsuperscript{65}

It is moreover the existence of a single figure who unites all forms of authority that makes possible the existence of a people. Though the later institution of a true monarchy under

\textsuperscript{58} See also Beiner 2011, 63-66.
\textsuperscript{59} See here Stephen Holmes’s introduction to Hobbes 1990, esp. xxxvi. There is something basically anarchistic about Christianity itself (in Hobbes’s view) that is not limited to the problems that papal authority poses for political order.
\textsuperscript{60} Hobbes 1990, 21.
\textsuperscript{61} Hobbes only mentions the bloody outcome of the episode with the Golden Calf in his Conclusion to \textit{Leviathan}, where he insists upon the slaughter’s lawfulness. Machiavelli discusses this event rather differently—see the following chapter of this work.
\textsuperscript{62} J. Mitchell 1991, 687.
\textsuperscript{63} On Machiavelli’s possible influence on Hobbes, see Wootton 1997; and Sullivan 2004, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{L} 40.
\textsuperscript{65} Jean-Jacques Rousseau, \textit{Du Contrat Social} IV.8.
Saul is treated as a novel (and lamentable) development in the biblical text, it is treated by Hobbes as merely the restoration of the status quo under Moses. Spinoza will argue that a monarchy can never provide the unity it claims for itself; that the only true unity can be democratic. Yet both accounts rotate around the same conceptual axis: that the unity of a people is paramount. For this, the Hebraic image is the example par excellence.

Given the highly particular nature of the Jewish covenant, how can Hobbes meaningfully apply its lessons to the construction of new commonwealths? Adam Sutcliffe refers to this as Hobbes’s “exceptional treatment of the Jewish covenant, which he treats as politically paradigmatic and foundational, but in its sacred uniqueness also external to the normal flow of human history.” Yet its very externality is precisely the point: for the establishment of Hobbes’ commonwealth is outside of history as well; it lacks a clear chronology and finds support in no given historical or anthropological account.

In chapter 16 of *De Cive*, Hobbes describes the first institution of true religion via the covenant between God and Abraham in Genesis 17. Hobbes is careful, however, to note that the laws binding Abraham are merely the laws of nature (in principle, discernible by right reason). Thus, the laws of the Hebrews are not unique to them. Their distinctiveness, such as it is, lies in being the first and clearest instance of properly constituted civil authority, united with supreme religious authority. Like Spinoza, Hobbes is concerned with retaining the flexibility of the Hebrew case: if they are truly singular then they cannot serve as a model for anybody else. Similarly, and like Machiavelli, Hobbes is explicit in denying to Moses any divine significance:

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66 See chapter 6 of this work for a fuller discussion.
67 Sutcliffe 2003, 51.
68 Though even here Hobbes undercuts his argument by insisting that Adam had an implicit covenant with God. Any legitimate case he adduces will have been found retrospectively to have conformed with the logic of Hobbes’s political teaching, it seems.
69 By contrast, in the rabbinic tradition, only the Noachide covenant applies universally.
his political status is not different than that of other successful rulers. “His authority…as the authority of all other Princes, must be grounded on the Consent of the People, and their Promise to obey him.”

The one ineradicably particular aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, which cannot be derived from any laws of nature, remains the commandment concerning circumcision. Hobbes takes pains to describe this as a mere “sign” or reminder of the covenant. It has neither theological nor political significance in his telling, and thus could be eschewed by any other polity otherwise seeking to replicate the Hebrew model.

Hobbes’s interpretation of the obligation to circumcise differs from Spinoza’s in revealing ways. For, Spinoza, too, diminishes the importance of circumcision, treating it as a cultural marker. But for Hobbes, there could be no value in any sign of cultural distinction. As he remarks elsewhere, “men give different names to one and the same thing from the difference of their own passions.” We are already inclined to assign too much weight to ephemeral differences owing to egoistic passion.

Throughout this chapter, we have described Hobbes’s use of the Hebrews as a model. But it is a very peculiar one: its lessons (as with the Hebrew Bible itself!) are frequently negative. The theocratic polity instituted by Moses never achieves the same structural integrity following his death, and the Israelites themselves are “greedy for prophets”—that is, essentially unprovable accounts of divine will that are deeply subversive of the political order.

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72 See the discussion in chapter 6.
73 This is not to say he doesn’t value culture as a means of transmitting his own message—see Johnston 1986—only that culture as a prepolitical or extrapolitical concept has no intrinsic value for him.
74 L 11.
Stepping back, however, we can recognize the utility of the Hebraic model. Both its problems and its solutions play out on the same stage: that of a bounded community in which peoplehood is successfully achieved under the correct conditions. The contrast with the universal (yet impotent) claims of Catholicism is stark. Yet Hobbes has also demonstrated far more thought than the Monarchomachs about the problem of instituting order in a particular commonwealth.

One might say that the judaicization that Hobbes effects takes two forms: one spatial, one temporal. These come together in the final chapters of Leviathan, in which the Kingdom of God emerges as a real kingdom, with particular borders and rule over a particular people. In chapter 44 of Leviathan, at the beginning of the final part of the work, he describes the “greatest and most principal misuse of scripture” as the belief that the Kingdom of God comprises “the multitude of Christian men now living.” This is an extraordinary denial of Christian universalism, except insofar as it is reduced to sheer abstraction. The all-encompassing nature of Hobbes’s political program rules out any practical implications for that universalism. Against the covenantal bonds of a particular commonwealth, the universal brotherhood of man can have no purchase.

But Hobbes’s judaicization is also temporal insofar as the Kingdom of God exists in this world and not the next. (The other part of this error he describes as the belief that the Kingdom of God might include the dead who will rise again.) Citizens in a Hobbesian commonwealth can see themselves as comprising a people, then, both because they do not look beyond their borders to seek fraternity with all mankind and because they do not look beyond their mortal

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76 Ibid.
lives to seek unity in paradise. Carl Schmitt’s description of Hobbes’s intention as “to de-anarchize Christianity” is particularly apropos here.\footnote{Cited by Tracy Strong in Schmitt 1996b, xxiv.}

And the problem is Christianity as such—not just Catholicism. As Hobbes makes clear, the lie of a “Universall Monarchy,” though originating with the papacy, has been adopted by the reformed churches.\footnote{Hobbes 1985, 705.} One might logically expect, says Hobbes, that in those communities that had broken with Rome, we would see a restoration of civil power over ecclesiastical authority, but this has not happened. The reason is simple: the priority of a universal kingdom of believers grants the clergy power over any temporal ruler of a particular kingdom. Even more, it profits by gaining “Sovereign Power over the People.”\footnote{Ibid., 706.}

In his attack on the “Presbytery,” Hobbes demonstrates why Calvinism’s own adoption of Hebraic motifs is necessarily limited. Despite the de facto independence and separation of Calvinist communities, they remain wedded to a universal principle.\footnote{Hobbes specifically criticizes Beza, one of the leading Monarchomachs, on this point.} Hobbes contrasts this with the only Kingdom of God that has ever in fact existed: that of the Jews, which began under the leadership of Moses and ended with the kingship of Saul.\footnote{Hobbes 1985, 629. In biblical terms, the period covered by Exodus 19 through 1 Samuel 12.} Perhaps ironically, it is only by limiting the Hebrew example that it can serve as a model. If contemporary Christianity is the successor to the Israelites as the realization of the Kingdom of God, then there is no reason to look to them as a model: they have been surpassed by a progressive revelation. But, if the Kingdom of God represented a finite period in human history, then contemporary peoples can do
as the Israelites rightly did: choose a mortal man to rule them and accept his sovereignty over all competing claims to authority—especially priestly ones.  

As we have noted, there is no shortage of scholarly interpretations regarding Hobbes’s treatment of Christianity. But most of these have not highlighted a particularly salient effect of Hobbes’s rejection of both Catholic and Presbyterian understandings of the Kingdom of God. Namely, that in denying its universalism he makes separate and particular peoples the foundation of his new order. As Charles Taylor remarks, “The New Testament is full of calls to leave or relativize solidarities of family, clan, and society and be part of the Kingdom.” Though he insists that his is still a Christian commonwealth—even making it the titular theme of Part III of  

Leviathan—he has demolished any conventional Christian aspirations to universalism.

This also indicates the limits of the Hebrew example, as Hobbes employs it. For, the Israelites did have a particular and nonreplicable history as a people: being Israelites, they were collectively the descendants of Israel (alias Jacob). And in the biblical account, God announces to Abraham his intention to make them a nation hundreds of years before the fact. Simply put, the problem of origins doesn’t arise in an account with such a specific (and literal) genealogy. Moreover, in the Bible itself, the divine role in creating the Hebrew nation is not in doubt. The Israelites come to witness many highly visible and unambiguous miracles.

The Hebrews as a people, then, are the product of genealogical descent and divine purpose. About the former Hobbes says little, but he devotes much space to the latter. Our knowledge of the divine necessarily comes about through miracles. To these Hobbes devotes an

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82 Perhaps needless to say, Hobbes’s interpretation of the coronation of Saul is very different from the (largely pejorative) rabbinic one.
83 Taylor 2004, 62.
84 Genesis 12:1-3.
entire chapter of *Leviathan*, with all of his examples drawn from the Old Testament. He describes the purpose of miracles as “to beget beliefe, not universally in all men…but in the elect only; that is to say, in such as God had determined should become his Subjects.” Miracles then are always wrought on behalf of a particular people. More specifically, he defines a miracle as “a work of God…done for the making manifest to his elect, the mission of an extraordinary Minister for their salvation.”

But miracles are things we perceive, and the trouble is—as it always is for Hobbes—that our perceptions are apt to be faulty. Thus, Hobbes cautions against mistaking natural, if obscure, events for miracles, and against being deceived by false examples. Anyone who claims either direct knowledge of the divine or phenomenal knowledge of miracles is either mistaken or lying. In either case, such a one poses a direct threat to the civil order. Hobbes’s discussion of miracles is quite similar to his discussion of prophets. Both require divine foundation, yet we cannot readily tell true from false in either case. His solution is largely the same in both cases: neither can be accorded independent recognition; both require the sovereign’s imprimatur. In sum, we should relinquish our (public) interpretation of miracles to the judgment of the sovereign—that is, the very person whose authority miracles are designed to confirm! We need not then have indisputable evidence of miracles—which is to say, of divine favor—to accept our situation as akin to that of the elect. We too are a people whose sovereign works for our salvation, that is, our “peace and defence.” Thus does Hobbes close the distance between contemporary commonwealths and the biblical Hebrews.

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86 *L* 37.  
89 Johnston 1986, 162.  
It is true that the universal Christian covenant between God and mankind was to have superseded the particular Hebrew covenant between God and the Jews. But it was the latter form (albeit hollowed of national or theological content) to which Hobbes returns in his account of covenanthing, which act brings the nation into creation.\(^91\)

As the previous chapter described at length, Hobbes was neither the first nor the last influential writer to employ the ideal of Jewish peoplehood. Yet he faces directly a problem that bedeviled other figures, from Savonarola through the Monarchomachs and beyond: how to reconcile a discourse of Hebraic particularism with Christian universalism. His elegant, and surprisingly brazen (for Hobbes), solution is to embrace the former while insisting that it in fact represents a truer fulfilment of the latter. Truer insofar as it is actually realizable in the form of a universal system of sovereign states. There is something undeniably comic in this, but that he devoted the second half of his greatest work to demonstrating this claim serves as testimony that he did not take the task lightly.

At the same time, and in light of his critique of the proliferation of print Bibles and the social problems that that engendered, his solution does not imply a return to the text of the Old Testament for citizens of the commonwealth. Given the problems inherent in textual interpretation, as well as the fact that “the actions of men proceed from their opinions,” it implies instead the correction of those opinions via Hobbes’s own teaching. The judaicization (such as it is) of Christian Europe proceeds from Hobbes’s own text, and it is that text that will be taught in the universities of the commonwealth.\(^92\)

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\(^91\) Lessay 2007, 244.
\(^92\) L 18, 30, Review and Conclusion. See also Strong 1993. Hobbes even prescribes that a day be set aside—modeled on the Sabbath “of the Jewes”—in which ordinary citizens will be instructed in their duties under the laws (Hobbes 1985, 381-382).
In this way, too, Hobbes simply goes further than nearly any of his predecessors or peers in considering the political implications of reading the Hebrew Bible. It is not sufficient to treat it as an available resource in carpentering doctrines of popular sovereignty. The construction of states and peoples rests upon the beliefs and practices of ordinary individuals, and those beliefs and practices are to be informed not by the Bible per se, but by Hobbes’s peculiar reading of it. In the end, Hobbes does not want us all to become Jews, but Hobbesians. We cannot, however, grasp the full meaning of that project without attending to his use of the Hebrew Bible and its importance for his thought.

Hobbes’s Problems and Ours

Hobbes’s solution is not without problems of its own. Indeed, in his account of the commonwealth, we find particularly stark illustrations of two broad problems that continue to plague modern nation-states. And these problems are central to how we conceptualize peoplehood.

The first Hobbesian problem is simply expressed: where does a given people come from? If states are formed through the covenancing of a particular people, what produces that people in the first place? If we are led to think of ourselves as fundamentally isolated wretches, why do we find ourselves covenancing with these particular wretches? This is in effect an historical problem, one with which Hobbes is not especially concerned. “Hobbes...cannot rest content with such findings as to the historical origin of States, for they give no answer to the only important question, which concerns the right order of society.”

93 Strauss 1963, 103.
But it is also the democratic boundary problem in a nutshell. What determines the boundaries of the people who constitute the state, and what kind of authority should we accord it? The answer of course is that the particular makeup of this particular commonwealth is essentially dictated by its pre-contractual history. There are limits to how extensively we can start from the beginning, as it were. And Hobbes explicitly tells us, in the conclusion to *Leviathan*, not to go digging around into the origins of political communities—that way lies madness. For every political community has origins in real history, and these are never pristine.

Therefore I put down for one of the most effectual seeds of the Death of any State, that the Conquerors require not onely a Submission of mens actions to them for the future, but also an Approbation of all their actions past; when there is scarce a Common-wealth in the world, whose beginnings can in conscience be justified.

Don’t try, in other words, to figure out where your particular group of people comes from, or how your rulers got to be where they are: take what you’re given and form the people through the covenant that erects a sovereign. Be happy with your collectively commodious life.

One might say that Hobbes seeks to radically reground the basis for authority in the political community without wishing to disturb the contours of that community established by prior convention. Though Hobbes wishes to reconstitute the political community, he does not wish to redraw its boundaries. This is Hobbes’ curious combination of radicalism and conventionalism.

The second Hobbesian problem similarly arises from the deductive abstraction of Hobbes’s method. If the truest universalism is not Christian universalism, but the universal

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94 Discussed at some length in chapter 2.
95 Roeder 2007 makes this argument empirically: that the existence and boundaries of nation-states are heavily determined by the presence of prior non-national political institutions (though his analysis largely presupposes an established system of nation-states, which new states then join).
96 Hobbes 1985, 721-722. This is as close as Hobbes will come to Machiavelli’s open claim (in *Discourse* I.1) that all polities originate in violent conquest.
validity of Hobbes’s teaching for the proper foundation and ordering of a commonwealth, then
the practical outcome for this would be a world (or at least a region) of Hobbesian
commonwealths. But this same universalism yields a seeming impossibility: a world of nations
without nationalism.

Every people is fundamentally alike (in the way that every individual is fundamentally
alike). Thus, a given commonwealth should exhibit no distinctive cultural markings—at least
insofar as they interfere with the prime directive of ensuring peace and stability. The
predominant culture is the culture of the Leviathan itself.

This is not simply a problem in Hobbes’s theory. It has real practical implications for the
ways that citizens understand themselves in relation to one another and in relation to the citizens
and rulers of other polities—especially given Hobbes’s resolute denial of universal ties. Hedley
Bull is worth quoting at length here:

The ideas with which countless writers and statesmen have justified resistance to
a potentially dominant power—the need to maintain a balance of power, "the
public law of Europe," the legal rights of states or I think of nations to
independence—have no place in Hobbes's intellectual inventory. Hobbes's theory,
indeed, does not provide any reason why an individual person should prefer his
own sovereign to a foreign one. In the Dialogue between a Philosopher and a
Student of the Common Laws of England the latter asks why, if the king has
absolute powers over the people and can take from them what he pleases, they
would be any worse off under a foreign conqueror. This, given Hobbes's
premises, is a very reasonable question. The Philosopher answers that the people
should remember in how much worse a condition they were at the time of
William the Conqueror, "when it was a shame to be an Englishman; who, if he
grumbled at the base offices he was put to by his Norman masters, received no
other answer but this, 'Thou art an Englishman.'" The Philosopher's answer is a
good one, but it is not, I think, one that could be drawn from the argument of
Leviathan.\footnote{Bull 1981, 726-727.}
It is difficult to escape the atavistic ties of a prepolitical community, but no thinker before Hobbes (and few since) had gone as far to deny their reality or their normative significance, even as those same ties necessarily provide the contours of the new state.

The establishment of a collective body as a political community draws our attention to and places particular emphasis upon the prepolitical community that makes it possible. Yet Hobbes accords no significance whatsoever to that prepolitical community, nor to the ways that it might continue to manifest cultural distinctiveness within the now-established commonwealth.

One can see both problems reflected in the famous image on the frontispiece of *Leviathan*. The first problem is negatively demonstrated by what we don’t see. The literal body of the people (who nonetheless retain their minute individuality, albeit facelessly), is so concretely depicted, that one’s mind is led away from wondering why it should manifest itself in precisely this fashion. Why should we imagine that the tiny figures within it might belong to any other group than this one? Conversely, by seeing the body defined in such literal terms, we don’t suppose any individuals might have been left out. The image wards off any sense of the historical arbitrariness of this particular grouping.\(^98\)

The second problem is clearer here. The “mortal god” on the cover has a particular face—indeed, Hobbes’s face. But Hobbes’s philosophy is universal; it is difficult to imagine that this visage is unique to a single commonwealth. Rather one is led to imagine a world of states in which all states are Hobbes’s commonwealth. A world in which the “person” of every state looks like Hobbes.\(^99\) In effect, a world of nations without nationalism, or indeed any of the distinctive features of individual nations. The irony is clear: Hobbes has employed the model of a singular, arbitrary from the standpoint of social contract theory.\(^98\) To a certain degree, this is in fact what we have today. Structural isomorphism is also a key tenet of most systemic theories of international relations (see chapter 1 of this work).\(^99\)
chosen people to develop a universalistic teaching. Yet by abstracting from the particular practices of the Hebrews—circumcision, kosher laws, the jubilee, etc.—he has retained only what is most needful for his work: the generic image of a people made manifest by their covenant.

We must wonder, however, at such a world in which liberal reason makes all peoples alike, just as geometric reason demonstrates that all triangles must formally resemble one another. What kind of allegiance would one have to the particular state that looks identical to all other states? As Alasdair MacIntyre quipped, “being asked to die for it would be like being asked to die for the telephone company.” Indeed, the one thing the individual under the commonwealth is not obliged to covenant is to lay down the right to preserve his life. Hobbes even allows that both ordinary subjects and soldiers of a commonwealth may rightfully submit to a foreign conqueror, should the integrity of their commonwealth be fundamentally compromised. That such submission would itself contribute to that compromise is a problem that Hobbes allows to stand. To return once more to that frontispiece, is that great sword just for show?

This is the logical culmination of Hobbes’s instrumental interpretation of the Hebraic model. He borrows their cohesion, their separateness, their equality as individuals against the majesty of God. Yet he rejects their fanaticism, their prescientific attachment to particular folkways and customs, their peoplehood as an independent reality. In the absence of the covenant—or of the “state” it produced—there would be no rational reason to adhere to the

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100 In this way, Hobbes’s teaching ironically mirrors Christianity, universalizing the Judaic model. Yet, unlike Christianity, he remains practically committed to a world of distinct, separate peoples.
101 MacIntyre 2006, 163.
102 Hobbes 1985, 199.
103 Ibid., 719-20. This problem is a major theme in the scholarly literature on Hobbes—see, inter alia, Hampton 1986, 198–201; Sullivan 2004, 108-109.
Hebraic laws.\textsuperscript{104} Nor, for that matter, was there any reason for the Hebrews to fend off their Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman invaders, at least past a certain point.

As we have said, Hobbes presents perhaps the clearest original account of the modern state we have. And, as his use of the Hebrew Bible demonstrates, a concept of peoplehood was instrumental for producing that account. Yet uncertainties regarding the origins and national character of the people are inherent in Hobbes’ treatment—and these problems continue to bedevil modern international politics in both theory and practice. We can more closely grapple with those problems by turning to the writings of Machiavelli and Spinoza, and their own respective uses of the Hebrew Bible. For the former can help us more clearly think about the origins of peoples, and the latter can show us how peoples become nations.

\textsuperscript{104} The logical implication being that diaspora Judaism was as much an error as universalist Christianity.
Chapter 5: Of Machiavellian Peoples and Fatherlands

Every day I discover you to be a greater prophet than the Hebrews or any other people ever had.

- Filippo Casavecchia to Niccolò Machiavelli
  Barga, June 17 1509

In one of his more famous pronouncements, Niccolò Machiavelli claimed that one’s patria ought to be defended, whether with ignominy or with glory. Similarly, in one of the last letters he ever wrote, he declared that he loved his patria more than his own soul. And in the Florentine Histories, he voices praise for those Florentines who exhibited that same preference.

Conversely, in his Dialogue About Our Language, he likens actions that harm one’s patria to parricide.

Though hardly obscure, these passages are incongruous with the cool, calculating image Machiavelli otherwise enjoys. And insofar as they are referenced, they are usually adduced as evidence for a “Machiavellian” commitment to the political over the ethical or theological. Sometimes this is framed as a turn toward a genuinely political science, unencumbered by moral

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1 Machiavelli 1997 II, 190. Direct quotations throughout are from Machiavelli 1997; translations are my own. General passages are noted by work, book and/or chapter, for ease of reference. Major works are abbreviated as follows: $P =$ The Prince; $D =$ Discourses on Livy; $FH =$ Florentine Histories.
2 Machiavelli 1997 I, 515. See relatedly $D$ III.47.
5 Machiavelli 1997 III, 261.
6 Gilbert 1954 has noted the same of $P$ 26.
or religious strictures. Other times it is framed as a kind of counter-morality that prioritizes the good of the political community over that of the individual soul.  

But the concept of the patria, which appears throughout his work, is not strictly political: it does not implicate any of the institutions or practices of the polis, republic or state. It is more primordial than that. Viewing Machiavelli in this light creates a strange double image: on the one hand, the romanticism inherent in this view seems alien to him; on the other, it is precisely a commitment to a larger national body that is often used to justify “Machiavellian” policies. It is no accident that romantic nationalists like Fichte and Mazzini looked to Machiavelli as an influence.

Neither of these readings is sufficient, though they are strangely complementary. The romantic view is qualified by Machiavelli’s penetrating reading of the origins and refoundings of political communities. The realist view presupposes an objective understanding of statehood as the basis for political action—ragione dello stato—but this is anachronistic to Machiavelli in relation to later thinkers like Botero. In neither case does Machiavelli’s unique understanding of the patria receive adequate attention. We might be forgiven for overlooking this point, given that Machiavelli nowhere presents a systematic account of the patria or the people who resides there that is to enjoy such pride of place in his thought. But insofar as Machiavelli remains a profoundly unconventional thinker—given to write sanza alcun rispetto—we should not assume

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7 This interpretive tradition has a lengthy pedigree. See Croce 1946; Chabod 1958b, 116 ff.; Wolin 1960; Gramsci 1996, 10-24. Gramsci may be unique in connecting Machiavelli’s concept of the “political” with nationalism.


9 See Fichte 2016[1807] and Mazzini 1972, respectively. Mazzini tends to hold Machiavelli at arm’s length, discerning a certain lack of faith in him; the true believer is wary of the ironist. Meinecke 1957 and Brown 1993, 72 call Fichte a “Machiavellian,” though this somehow manages to be unfair to both Fichte and Machiavelli.

10 At the risk of pretentiousness, I mostly leave the term “patria” untranslated to avoid some of the 19th and 20th-century connotations of “fatherland.”
that his understanding of these categories is in any way conventional or that he relies upon convention to interpret them.

If it is ultimately the patria and not the state, city, or republic (cf. D I.10) to which one owes loyalty, then what exactly is Machiavelli’s understanding of the patria? By what standard does one define one’s patria? And what is the nature of one’s allegiance to it in practical terms? Such an examination is warranted, because nations, peoples, and patriae emerge almost by default as the entities on behalf of which political action is exercised unencumbered by moral strictures. Because of Machiavelli’s emphasis on new foundings, both of principalities and republics, it is insufficient to treat, for example, a republic as a preexisting polity on behalf of which the dark arts of politics are practiced. What, then, is the raw stuff of political life which gets molded into particular political orders?

While it initially appears elusive, the concept of the patria is ultimately not a function of land or territory so much as peoples. Exploring the different ways that Machiavelli discusses peoples sheds light on the important connections between populism and patriotism in his thought. Finally, we might consider what actions produce this self-conception. To do so, it is necessary to examine Machiavelli’s use of the Hebraic example.

**The patria and lo stato**

Most of the existing literature that touches upon these questions concerning Machiavelli’s patria has largely focused on the matter of nationalism. The reading of Machiavelli as a proto-nationalist has its own lengthy pedigree. But contemporary scholars have largely eschewed this

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11 Noted especially by Strauss 1958; Vatter 2000; McCormick 2011a; and Zuckert 2014.
12 Baron 1961 provides a good overview. See also Althusser 2011.
interpretation, not least because they do not themselves tend to share the nationalist commitments of Machiavelli’s 18th and 19th-century readers. Felix Gilbert concludes of Machiavelli that “nationalism had no definite and prescribed place in his system.”\textsuperscript{13} Harvey Mansfield writes disparagingly of those who see in Machiavelli a harbinger of nationalism.\textsuperscript{14}

The foremost contemporary exception is Maurizio Viroli, who reads the controversial final chapter of \textit{The Prince} as a justification for the rest of work.\textsuperscript{15} Viroli’s overall reading of Machiavelli, however, is unclear, as he elsewhere exonerates Machiavelli of nationalism.\textsuperscript{16} Chapter 26 of \textit{The Prince}—Machiavelli’s “exhortation to take Italy and free her from the hands of the barbarians”—is an obvious place to begin in evaluating Machiavelli’s concept of patriotism.\textsuperscript{17} There he appeals to his readers’ attachment to a patria of uncertain boundaries and provenance that would not, in the event, come into existence for 350 years.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, most past treatments of this theme in Machiavelli’s work have been hampered by the insistence that his patria is necessarily one thing or another.\textsuperscript{19} It is necessary then to underscore the strangeness of Machiavelli’s Italian patriotism.\textsuperscript{20} “The temptation to read the nationalism of the modern world back into the sixteenth century must be resisted. Italians—Neapolitans, Genoese, Milanese,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{13} Gilbert 1939, 483.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Mansfield 1996, 220. See also Strauss 1958, 10-11.
\item\textsuperscript{15} Viroli 2013. See also de Grazia 1989.
\item\textsuperscript{16} Viroli 1995, 36-37. See also Benner 2009.
\item\textsuperscript{17} Machiavelli employs similar language in the penultimate paragraph of Letter 308 to Francesco Guicciardini (1997 II, 426-427). He appears to be paraphrasing Livy. See also \textit{D II}, preface.
\item\textsuperscript{18} It is ironic to read these passages in light of Machiavelli’s famous remarks about “imagined republics and principalities” in \textit{P 15}. The strangeness of chapter 26 has led to debates over its dating—cf. Baron 1991 with Viroli 2013—as well as a variety of sometimes farfetched contextual interpretations—see de Grazia 1989 and Nederman 1999. On Machiavelli’s own judgment on Italian unification, see his letter to Francesco Vettori, dated August 10, 1513; see also Black 2013, 98.
\item\textsuperscript{19} E.g., Chabod 1967b argues that Machiavelli’s true patria is Florence; Landon 2005 argues that it is Italy.
\item\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Ilardi 1956.
\end{itemize}
Florentines, Mantuans, and others—fought for France, for the empire, and for Spain against one another, but without any sense of betraying a homeland.”

Might it be that Machiavelli’s Italian patriotism is formally but not conceptually original? That is, he merely seeks to do for Italy what has already been accomplished in Spain and France—two of Italy’s principal despoilers? There are two problems with this conclusion. First, if correct, Machiavelli has adopted an extraordinarily roundabout method of arriving at this thesis. Second, and more importantly, he includes both France and Spain amongst those already corrupted.

Our interpretive problem is that Machiavelli presents an account that is original, as compared with existing practices, and yet distinct from how we have come to think about the relationship between states and nations today. When we speak of states, we have in mind an abstract, impersonal entity that exercises sovereignty over a given territory. The nation is the broadly-established population on behalf of which the state exercises that sovereignty, or an entity in search of such a state. Either one can help ground the other. But in Machiavelli’s account, both terms are fluid.

Machiavelli’s stato is not the equivalent of our own “state.” Throughout Machiavelli’s works, lo stato is nearly always associated with a particular figure or figures; that is to say, it is

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21 Martines 1988, 288. See also Mackenney 1993, 222-223. Consider also Machiavelli’s use in Art of War of Fabrizio Colonna, the famed condottiere whose greatest exploits were on behalf of a foreign conqueror of Italy.
23 D I.55.
24 These terms and concepts are discussed at length in the first two chapters of this work.
25 See Chiapelli 1952; Hexter 1957; Mansfield 1983; Skinner 2002, 378; Black 2013, 100. Though cf. Descendre 2008. See Rubinstein 1971 for a contextual consideration of Machiavelli’s use of stato. For treatments that situate Machiavelli’s conception of the state within his own historical milieu, see Shennan 1974 and Mackenney 1993 (esp. ch. 3). Arendt 1990, 287 argues that Machiavelli’s stato refers to the underlying political unity of a people that survives changes in government. Finally, see Ardito 2015 for an interesting attempt to connect Machiavelli’s understanding of the state with the subsequent emergence
conceived in terms of a personal possession—closer to the Latin *status*—to aggrandize, to hold, to take, or to lose. As such, it is not depicted in abstract terms, whether as an idea to be realized or an enduring structure existing beyond the whims of particular political actors (much less as an actor unto itself).

Admittedly, in some of his letters, Machiavelli appears to assign the state a meaning closer to one we would recognize. In his letter dated April 9, 1513 to Francesco Vettori, he speaks of “*ragionare dello stato*”—reasoning about the state.\textsuperscript{26} In his letter dated December 10th of that same year, he notes “*che quindici anni, che io sono stato a studio all’arte dello stato*”—for fifteen years I have devoted myself to studying the art of the state.\textsuperscript{27}

Such passages seem to lend support to the views of those like Friedrich Meinecke, that Machiavelli saw the state as a viable entity in its own right: “His passionate interest was the State, the analysis and computation of its different forms, functions and conditions for existence”\textsuperscript{28} But this interpretation discounts the very different understanding that predominates in his works. Furthermore, it fails to account for problems of allegiance and loyalty, which the states of princes and peoples have difficulty commanding, except provisionally.

It is little surprise, then, that the state does not make an appearance in chapter 26 of *The Prince*. Instead, he relies upon the more rarely used (in that work) “*patria.*” The apparent incongruity of *The Prince*’s final chapter has in part to do with the shift in emphasis from the state to the patria. If modern nationalism holds that nations and fatherlands are the only suitable bases for establishing states, and it is Machiavelli’s provisional intention to establish some kind

\textsuperscript{26} Machiavelli 1997 II, 241
\textsuperscript{27} *Ibid.*, 297. See also his remarks on the French in *P 3*.
\textsuperscript{28} Meinecke 1957, 31.
of state (in his sense of the term) coextensive with the patria of Italy, then it would be useful to
gain a clearer understanding of his understanding of the patria.

The origins of peoples and fatherlands

When Machiavelli uses the term patria, it is noteworthy that he employs it instead of cities,
republics, principalities, governments or states (all terms he employs elsewhere). These are all
distinctly political terms. Further, Machiavelli’s patria is distinct from its classical usage.29
Charles Taylor characterizes the latter understanding as follows: “I love my fatherland, and what
makes it essentially mine is its laws. Outside of these, it is denatured and no longer really mine.
There is no reference to a prepolitical identity here; on the contrary the patria is politically
defined.”30

What Machiavelli calls a patria might be understood to be an ancestral land or territory.
The word derives etymologically from patrius—viz. relating to father. It thus links in one word
the inheritance (principally in the form of land) received through one’s bloodline with the
bloodline itself.31 Given the shifting significance of Machiavelli’s “state,” noted above, one
might be tempted to conceive of the patria as a more sturdy foundation of the otherwise mutable
state. A closer examination of the texts rules out this interpretation.

In D I.1, Machiavelli distinguishes at the outset between natives and foreigners, before
eroding the distinction between the two by examining the phenomenon of founding. For, at the
moment of founding, that distinction is collapsed. Moreover, Machiavelli fails to provide a clear

29 The word is the same in both Latin and Italian.
30 Taylor 1999a, 229.
31 Machiavelli makes poetic use of this etymological connection when he speaks of fathers and patrimony
in P 17.
example of a native population. The examples he provides are of people constrained to flee from their ancestral place into a new one.\footnote{Machiavelli 1997 I, 199-200. Though in \textit{FH} I.1, not desperation but plenty, leading to overpopulation, compels men to find new lands to inhabit. Machiavelli tells us that this is the origin of the populations that destroyed the Roman Empire (1997 III, 312-314).} And those who drove them there were themselves fleeing conditions of war.\footnote{See also D II.3, II.8; FH I.29.} Thus he quickly corrects his distinction by making clear that all natives were once foreign (either the possibility of an “original” people is ruled out or they are so archaic as to be irrelevant). Machiavelli does claim that one can understand Rome as having a foreign founder (Aeneas) and a native one (Romulus), yet according to his own definition, Romulus, being from Alba, remains foreign himself.\footnote{Cf. D II.3 with Livy, \textit{Ab urbe condita}, I.30.}

Machiavelli similarly makes use of his ambiguous conception of patria in \textit{P} 6, when within the same paragraph he speaks of Romulus founding the patria of Rome, and then writes that the \textit{patrie} of all the founders were ennobled by their virtue. Thus, he seems to blur the distinction between the patria as created and the patria as ancestral or traditional.

Though the latter understanding might appear to lend greater legitimacy to the actions of the founder (or as Machiavelli might put it, “excuses” them), insofar as they work on behalf of a preexisting polity to which he is loyal, this is the harder interpretation to sustain.\footnote{Benner 2009, 353-360 argues that Machiavelli’s ambiguous use of patria indicates that there are ethical limits upon acceptable political action on its behalf. But while Machiavelli’s patria is indeed ambiguous, it isn’t clear that he requires a firm ontological basis for action. Benner seems to be presupposing an extratextual (and possibly anachronistic) ethical framework that must apply in such cases.} The patria is not merely made glad by the founder’s worthy actions; those actions are the precondition for the patria altogether. Its felicity is contingent upon its existence in the first place.

To the extent that “patria” might refer to a preexisting thing, or prepolitical community, one might more plausibly interpret it in terms of people rather than of land. That is to say, the
founder is a founder by virtue of establishing an existing and ancestral people upon new land.\textsuperscript{36} For example, after finding ill fortune in Alba, Romulus brings the people who will come to be called Romans to a new location on the Tiber.\textsuperscript{37} It is the geographical and political entity known as Rome, which he founds, rather than the Romans as such.\textsuperscript{38}

This claim too becomes harder to substantiate the closer one looks. For these proto-Romans are not all of a piece but (as Machiavelli and Livy both show) rather an ethnic admixture of Latins and Trojans. Moreover, this founding group does not remain unmixed for even a generation, as they must look to the neighboring Sabines for the women who will beget the next one.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the basis for the concord of these original proto-Romans is not that of a “natural” prepolitical community (which would necessarily include women, children and elderly). The reason for their concord and the reason for their apparently consisting exclusively of eligible bachelors is the same: they are chiefly a military company. Romulus’ status as a founder is bound up with his status as a captain. Thus, we might say that good arms are not only the basis for good laws but the basis for the people who might receive those laws.

The strangeness of these discussions comes to light in comparison with the anthropology provided by Aristotle in Book I of the \textit{Politics}, in which more or less coherent prepolitical communities merge with one another over time to form a polis for mutual (and largely material) gain.\textsuperscript{40} It is striking how Machiavelli’s account is in its way more insistently ideological and less “realistic.”

\textsuperscript{36} See \textit{D I.1.}
\textsuperscript{37} On the difficulties of describing the origins of the Roman people, see Rousseau, \textit{Du Contrat Social} IV.4.
\textsuperscript{38} Similar statements might be made of Theseus with respect to Athens and the Athenians, or Cyrus with respect to Susa and the Persians. Though, n.b., Machiavelli drops these two figures in his discussions of founders in the \textit{Discourses}.
\textsuperscript{39} This is admittedly a euphemistic account on Machiavelli’s part—cf. Livy, \textit{Ab urbe condita} I.9.
\textsuperscript{40} Aristotle 1252b17-27.
This problem of origins extends to “mixed” principalities (and presumably republics) as well. In chapter three of the *Prince* he makes the following remarkable claim:

I say then that these states, which upon being acquired are added to an old state of the one who acquires, are either of the same province and language, or not. When they are, it is of great ease to hold them […] because, in other things [apart from extinguishing their prince’s line], maintaining their older conditions and there being no distortion of customs, men live quietly; as it may be seen that Burgundy, Brittany, Gascony, and Normandy, which have been with France for so long a time, have done; and although there may be some difference of language, nonetheless the customs are similar, and they can easily engage with one another.41

At first glance, this would appear to place a ceiling on expansionary possibilities. Or rather, it suggests natural, or at least customary, limits to both nation-building and empire. That is to say, imperial expansion is easier done where assimilation is feasible, and assimilation is easier done where language and customs do not differ overmuch.42 But Machiavelli does not actually offer independent proof of the relatedness of the provinces to the “state” of France. As is frequently the case for Machiavelli, it is only the success of the outcome that confirms the claim at hand.43 Indeed, Machiavelli’s use of this example leads the reader to ponder whether the complementarity of customs is cause or effect of successful conquest and assimilation. As for language, Machiavelli elsewhere makes it clear, as in the example of the Romans and Etruscans, that successful conquest can wholly eliminate and replace an ancestral language.44 That is not to say that he claims this is easily done: such an act he likens to a natural cataclysm. In fact, Machiavelli uses the same terminology (*inondazione, inondare*) to describe the great flood(s) as he does to describe the movement of one people whose invasions overwhelm another.45

41 Machiavelli 1997 I, 121.
44 *D* II.5. See also Shell 2000.
45 Cf. *D* II.5 with II.8.
In the case of France, meanwhile, Machiavelli’s use of “so long a time,” must at least raise eyebrows; given his willingness to refer to ancient sources and events, the reader may wonder just what constitutes a long time in his eyes. As it happens, only one of the provinces mentioned had belonged to France for more than 60 years before the time of his writing. Thus, what would appear to indicate Machiavelli’s acknowledgment of the importance of history and custom (in the manner of Rousseau’s advice in Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne), in fact reveals something about the mutability of such traditions and customs. A successful conqueror’s foreignness is of lesser account than his success.46 In sum, for Machiavelli, one’s patria, like treason, is largely a matter of dates.

As noted above, many scholars have read Machiavelli as being specifically concerned with Italian “nation-building.” We might ask whether Machiavelli attributes to nations unique characteristics that do not transfer across ethnic or national groups. Is his use of Roman examples only applicable to their heirs in the Italian peninsula? The answer seems to be “no”: he notes for example that “in diverse peoples one often sees the same accidents.”47

While Machiavelli shared his [civic humanist] predecessors’ Roman-inspired view of the Republic as having two aims or ends – to preserve its liberty internally and to expand its empire externally – he did not, in contrast to them, regard the republican and imperial legacy as an exclusive Florentine birthright. To him, the Roman heritage was instead to be seen as a political and strategic model, which any state, or any ruler, could adopt and use as a blueprint for success.48

Thus, Machiavelli’s examples are broadly applicable across both time and space.

Finally, in Discourse I.21, Machiavelli makes the extraordinary statement: “And it is more true than any other truth that if where there are men there are no soldiers, it is born through

46 D III.21.
47 D I.39, though cf. D III.43.
a defect of the prince and not through any other defect, either of the site or of nature.”

There are no essential national or ethnic or geographical constraints on the actions that mobilize a people. That patria as such is superfluous; it is the act of mobilization that establishes it. What then are the political ramifications of this understanding?

**Two ways of defining a people**

As noted above, the conception of peoplehood as a unified, preexisting national entity is ruled out by Machiavelli. Yet the concept of the people has a double meaning, and the two meanings are conceptually linked. When we speak of a “French” or “American” people, for example, we have in mind both a national and a popular idea of peoplehood. As Walker Connor notes, “The nation, to be a mass phenomenon, must refer to the entire mass, ‘the masses’ and elites alike.”

The same is true for Machiavelli: “people” can have a demotic or a national connotation. Machiavelli uses the term people (*popolo*), nation (*nazione*), and race (*gente*) apparently interchangeably. The major exception here is that he never refers to the Romans as a “nation” or a “race,” only as a “people.” Relatedly, Machiavelli almost always uses the terms “plebs” (*plebe*) or “multitude” (*moltitudine*) and rarely or only ambiguously uses *popolo* to refer to the poor of Rome. His use of “people” with respect to Rome most often seems to mean the entire Roman people. As with the patria, then, Machiavelli’s idea of peoplehood is complex: he

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49 Machiavelli 1997 I, 251.
50 Connor 2004, 42.
51 The same is true in Italian: Machiavelli uses *popolo* to refer to both the many and what we would call a nation or ethnic group.
52 E.g., “people” and “race” in D II.1, and “people” and “nation” in D II.16.
53 Indeed, he rarely uses the term “nation”—see Chabod 1967a.
54 Cf. with P 9, where Machiavelli refers to the “people” and the “great” as two constituent parts of a principality (1997 I, 143-145).
sometimes appears to mean the whole people; other times, he is referring to the people as the popular part of the political structure (against the great).

In *Discourse* I.58, he offers his strongest statement of the notion of the people, likening its voice to that of God.55 Yet he refers here not to “the people” but to “a people.”56 His discussion initially concerns the multitude—meaning the many—but then shifts to something more ambiguous, as though to speak of the entire nation.57 Similarly, in *Discourse* III.6, he speaks of two kinds of conspiracies. The first is conducted against a prince. We might expect the other kind to be directed against the people or the multitude or even a republic (all contrasts he makes elsewhere), but instead he defines it as those directed against the patria.58 The implication is that the people may be understood not just as a popular faction, but as the nation entire. To attack the prince is to attack a man, but to attack the people is to attack one’s country itself.

Although less has been written of Machiavelli and the nation in recent years, much has been said of Machiavelli and the “people.” John McCormick has gone so far as to speak of “Machiavellian Democracy”: a concept in which the many asserts its prerogatives with greater audacity and ferocity, under Machiavelli’s tutelage (and with his approval).59 McCormick, however, does not mention the patria, and his conception of the people in Machiavelli is exclusively demotic.

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55 This is not to say that Machiavelli’s endorsement is sincere or straightforward—cf. Balot and Trochimchuk 2012.
56 Machiavelli 1997 I, 318. See also *D* I.29.
57 This link will become explicit in the writings of the *philosophes*—see chapter 3 of this work.
58 Machiavelli 1997 I, 426.
59 McCormick 2011a.
More importantly, McCormick’s reading overlooks the importance of aggressive foreign policy as both cause and effect of this populist shift. The populist shift at home signifies intensified imperialism abroad, and vice versa: for each one fuels the other. That is to say, successful imperial policies require a sufficiently large reserve of armed manpower to be directed toward conquest. This in return requires an engaged citizenry with a stake in the success of those endeavors. “A republic dedicated to aggrandizement or acquisition needs the voluntary cooperation of its armed plebs; and armed and virile plebs will naturally demand a considerable share in political power and in the fruits of conquest.” Moreover, the shift in power toward the popular requires a violent turn against the great, both as a means of satisfying the people and of enriching the public weal. But the great are only so many. For this reason, if no other, a popular state is an expansionist state. In place of the mutual antagonism of the few and the many, Machiavelli’s state features what Markus Fischer aptly describes as “a tyranny of citizens over foreigners.”

So far, so good. But this state of affairs does not come about spontaneously. It requires the action of a particular kind of prince. As Machiavelli puts it succinctly in chapter 20 of the Prince: “It has never been, then, that a new prince has disarmed his subjects: rather, when he found them disarmed, he has armed them; because, in arming them, those arms become yours,

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60 D I.43; P 12-14. Sullivan 2004, 55 argues (referring to an earlier version of his argument) that McCormick’s exclusive focus on domestic politics prevents him from rendering a complete account of Machiavelli’s solicitude for the people.
61 D II.3-4.
62 Strauss 1958, 260. See Sobek 2005 for an attempt to verify this empirically.
63 P 9; D I.16.
64 On the argument that growth (and power) is the true end of the republic for Machiavelli, see Connell 2001; Hörmqvist 2004; and Rahe 2007, 38-39.
65 Fischer 2010, lx. This is not least possible because the people come to share in the “humors” of the great—see Mindle 1985, 216.
66 D I.1, I.21, I.30, I.40, I.43, II.24, III.13, III.29; P 9-10, 12-13. See also Machiavelli’s discussion in D I.44 of the uselessness of a headless multitude; relatedly see D I.57.
those who were suspect to you become faithful, and those who were faithful remain so, and from subjects they are made your partisans.\textsuperscript{67}

A particular relationship, then, arises between the people and the prince. As Benedetto Fontana puts it

The new prince embodies a new form of rule whose characteristic signature is the popolo, without whose support and active consent the Machiavellian prince is transformed into a mere feudal lord. Prince and people presuppose each other, for both emerge from the political knowledge…that addresses the very subject – the people – that gives such knowledge meaning and that is defined and formed by it.\textsuperscript{68}

But this new condition, in which the people is no longer merely the popular part of a given polity (or feudal state) but the entirety of it, indicates a radically different conception of peoplehood. It cannot be understood as simply “national,” partly because this would be anachronistic, but partly because Machiavelli’s interest in conquest militates against fixed, national boundaries. Moreover, Machiavelli’s populism is well-served also by his flexible understanding of nationality. In \textit{D II.26} he praises the Roman refusal to countenance scorn against slaves-turned-soldiers.\textsuperscript{69} In \textit{D II.3}, he praises the Roman ability to make soldiers out of foreigners.\textsuperscript{70} One makes use of men regardless of their origins.

Many readers of Machiavelli who are attuned to his populist imperialism do not sufficiently note what this means for his conception of “peoplehood.” Machiavelli’s “military populism treats the militia not simply as an instrument of defending and maintaining existing orders but as a dynamic political and social force and a potential catalyst for popular revolt and

\textsuperscript{67} Machiavelli 1997 I, 176.
\textsuperscript{68} Fontana 1993, 146-147.
\textsuperscript{69} Cf. the Spartan treatment of the helots in Thucydid es IV.80.
\textsuperscript{70} As compared with the Athenians’s treatment of the metics.
upheaval.” This dynamic force reaches a peak in chapter 26 of the *Prince*, which combines the
two understandings of peoplehood: the popular and the patriotic; indeed, they are mutually
constitutive. It is the goal of redeeming the patria that will unite the many into a military order,
and their arms that will redeem it. Machiavelli’s nation is by definition the “nation in arms.”

If, then, Machiavelli’s conception of the people in the populist sense is linked to his
conception of a people in the national sense—even if only instrumentally—a problem still
remains. The unification and militarization of the people appears to be predicated upon the
development of a patriotic or national consciousness. But as Machiavelli’s treatment makes
clear, there is little in the way of a firm basis for supporting such a consciousness. “All things of
men being in motion,” there is no fixed point of origin, nor consistent ancestral tradition to which
one may refer.

And whereas Hobbes emphatically warns us against attending to the (necessarily
illegitimate) historical origins of polities, Machiavelli returns to such origins time and time
again. Yet there is only one example of origins in Machiavelli’s account that, at least
 provisionally, corresponds to a coherent understanding of peoplehood. It is worth examining this
example to see how Machiavelli connects the armed people with their patria.

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71 Winter 2014, 180.
72 This chapter also presents the solution to the problem in *D* I.44
73 Tarcov 2003, 121. See also *P* 26; *D* III.12.
74 Machiavelli 1997 I, 216.
Machiavelli and the Hebraic example

The religious resonances in the nationalistic final chapter of *The Prince* have been well-noted, as has the possibility that Machiavelli’s treatment of religion is essentially a form of what will come to be called nationalism. It is noteworthy then that Machiavelli makes much use of a notionally religious people: the Israelites. Indeed, they might appear to be the closest example of a true people in search of a patria that appears in Machiavelli’s work.

Machiavelli treats Moses as a kind of amalgam of Romulus and Numa Pompilius, accomplishing in a single stroke what was done separately by two separate kings of Rome: giving their people laws and religion. In fact, Moses may be seen in Machiavelli’s reading as correcting each figure’s defects. Machiavelli subtly leads us to find each one wanting: Romulus made an imperfect founding; Numa’s weakness jeopardized the city. Moses corrects Romulus’ error by giving laws under the guise of religion; he corrects Numa’s with his ferocity.

All of which would appear to suggest that the Mosaic/Hebraic example is in fact distinctive for the way in which it presents a coherent prepolitical nation or people who receive their laws and religion in one measure. This, though, would be a misreading. In the Hebrew Bible, after all, the Israelites are presented as a true nation in the genealogical (though not the

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76 See Strauss 1958, 80-82. Though cf. *D* I.56, which echoes the connection of great portents and extraordinary human action while explicitly labeling these as natural accidents (there’s also the wonderfully Machiavellian aside that to discuss natural or supernatural calamities any further would invite tedium).

77 Beiner 2011, 303. Haas 1986 also claims that nationalism is effectively a form of civil religion. For other relevant passages, see *D* I.55, I.58, III.41.

78 Vatter 2013 makes similar claims here, but argues that Machiavelli was influenced by an authentic tradition of Jewish thought, a claim for which I can find no textual (or extra-textual) evidence. More importantly, Vatter assumes but does not demonstrate compatibility between that tradition and Roman republican principles.

79 Viroli 2012, 61 goes so far as to declare that Machiavelli’s true hero is Moses, though he provides little textual evidence for this claim.


81 This would bring his reading closer to that of Hobbes and Rousseau, among others.
modern) sense: they are the multiplied descendants of the children of Israel (alias Jacob): the
*bnei yisroel*. But Machiavelli in fact makes no mention of this. His references to the “Hebrews”
place them alongside other ancient peoples (such as Persians or Goths). Rather, Machiavelli’s
focus is on Moses. Moses provides the clearest example of a founder who founds a people rather
than a city. For, Moses of course never reaches the Promised Land. Moses stands apart from
the other founders in important ways, but this one is I think little discussed. Though each of the
other founders is linked to a classical city (and even Hiero has Syracuse), Moses has none. It will
be several hundred years, on the biblical timeline, before the Israelites will take Jerusalem.

Machiavelli’s account of Moses thus appears highly original, at least compared to that the
biblical account. But there is at least one ancient source to which his treatment bears striking
resemblance. In Book V of Tacitus’s *Histories*, we find an extremely strange account of the
Mosaic moment—one in which a number of distinctly Machiavellian themes make an
appearance.

According to this account, after they are expelled from Egypt, Moses addresses the
Hebrews, warning them “not to hope for help from gods or men, for they were deserted by both,
but to trust to themselves, regarding as a guide sent from heaven the one whose assistance should

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82 *Exodus* 1-7.
83 *P* 26; *D* II.8.
84 Scott and Sullivan 1994, 898 claim that Moses is in fact Machiavelli’s archetypal prince. For more on
the significance of Moses for Machiavelli, see Brown 1988; Geerken 1999; Colish 1999; Lynch 2006;
Hammill 2012, 31-66; and Viroli 2012.
85 Fontana 1999, 644.
86 *2 Samuel* 5-9. Besides which, they are first a nomadic and then an agrarian people; they are not linked
with any particular city. Thanks to Clifford Orwin for pointing this out to me.
87 See *P* 6 and 26; *D* I.1, I.9, II.8, III.30.
88 I am grateful to Nathaniel Gilmore for pointing me in this direction. There has been surprisingly little
discussion on this point, however. For discussions of how Machiavelli was read alongside Tacitus, see
Kahn 1994. For useful discussions of Tacitus’s broader influence on Machiavelli’s age, see Momigliano
first give them escape from their present distress.”  

They then seize another country (on what appears to be the Sabbath, no less), expel the inhabitants, and found a new city. “To establish his influence over this people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions.”

This appears to be the origin of Machiavelli’s innovations: that Moses is a founder like the founders of cities, that they war against other peoples so early in the narrative, and that Moses’s actions create the people. Yet Machiavelli goes beyond this in describing those actions.

In his discussion in *Discourse* III.30, he compares Moses to the Roman Marcus Furius Camillus: both men were founders of a kind, and both men successfully eliminated “envy” amongst their political enemies. The latter did so by manifesting virtue in all his actions, and the former by simply eliminating the enemies themselves. One might even say that for Machiavelli, the biblical Moses is insufficiently bloodthirsty: he scales up the number of Israelites slaughtered in the episode of the Golden Calf from 3,000 to “infinite men” (*ammazzare infiniti uomini*). 

But Machiavelli suggests another important, if troubling, distinction between Moses and Camillus: Camillus’s excellence became both salient and indispensable thanks to an external shock, namely the arrival of the Gauls. In other words, Roman unity, otherwise threatened by the envy of ambitious men, was upheld through the common recognition of a dangerous common enemy. By contrast, Moses (in Machiavelli’s telling) upheld his own authority (and by extension that of the order he has created (*a volere che le sue leggi e che i suoi ordini andassero*).

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89 Tacitus 1925, 179.
91 Cf. the similar contrast between Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvinus in *D* III.22.
92 Cf. *Exodus* 32.
innanzi) by identifying and then destroying a domestic enemy—an enemy which is potentially limitless, given Machiavelli’s use of “infiniti.” Tellingly, there is no mention of the ostensible crux of the dispute (the worship of the golden calf).

These two ancient examples are contrasted with unsuccessful, modern ones, both quite close to Machiavelli himself. He labels Piero Soderini and Girolamo Savonarola—respectively, the dominant secular and dominant religious political figure in Florence’s governo largo—as having failed to deal properly with envious men.94 Savonarola is particularly apropos here.95 It is striking how many “Machiavellian” themes are first sounded by Savonarola: the use of religion for political ends, the use of stupefying spectacles (e.g., public immolations in the great piazzas), the “merciful” application of violence in a judicio us manner, the explicit reference to the Mosaic model of authority, and the engagement with the broader citizenry in defiance of conventional modes and orders.96

Savonarola’s (not to say Soderini’s) failure to successfully eliminate envy is linked to the failure of his political goals: to establish a broader popular basis for political rule in Florence. The elimination of envy is coupled with the elimination of divisions in the city. This is the precondition for establishing the continuous veneration of the patria, unfettered by parochial attachments to class, party or political figures.97 The question is whether a Camillus is sufficient for bringing about that condition, or whether something like a Moses is required. That is to say, if religion is necessary to instill a common love of the patria and to unmake the divisions that

94 Machiavelli also compares Savonarola unfavorably with Moses in P 6.
95 Apart from the explicit comparison of Savonarola with Moses, Machiavelli notes again his failure to maintain authority in D I.43.
96 Brown 1988 provides an excellent overview.
97 See also Wolin 1960, 202, 228-235.
obstruct that goal. The Mosaic example opens up the question of the political uses of religion in Machiavelli—a topic far too large in its own right for sufficient consideration here.\footnote{Though see Orwin 1978, 1227; Fontana 1999; Lynch 2006; Peterson 2008; Beiner 2011; and Kahn 2013, 83-114.}

When Machiavelli declares in Discourse II.2 that a proper understanding of religion permits the exaltation and defense of the patria, we might then wonder whether religion has value beyond this point. Conversely, however, we might ask what leads men to exalt the fatherland without it? Does Machiavelli hold that Christianity permits the exaltation of the fatherland? To the extent that it might, must we see a shift from New to Old Testament, as appears in the conflation of the two in P 26? It is in that chapter that Machiavelli links the Italians of his day, not to the Romans, but to the Jews as Moses found them. That is to say, that Machiavelli makes this association in the chapter that is conventionally treated as Machiavelli’s extolling of nationalism avant la lettre. Machiavelli precedes this claim with a stunning indictment of Christian faith, perhaps most noteworthy for being his closest engagement with the actual teachings or doctrine of any religion. Thus, it is the closest he comes to claiming that the problems posed by Christianity for political life are fundamental and not circumstantial.\footnote{Though cf. Colish 1999, 616.}

The difficulty comes in reconciling this indictment with his claim that Christianity, rightly-understood, permits the “exaltation and defense of the patria.” Here, it may be worth noting that the Roman religion (of which Machiavelli tells us almost nothing apart from the incidents concerning the “chicken-men” (pullari)) was not intrinsically martial in Machiavelli’s telling.\footnote{See Najemy 1999.} Indeed, both Machiavelli and Livy inform us that the Roman religion was intended in part to pacify an already bellicose people.\footnote{Cf. D I.11 with Livy, Ab urbe condita I.19.} Further, Machiavelli’s examples of the Romans’
efficacious use of religion do not in fact rely upon specific doctrine or belief, nor did the
Samnites’ use of (presumably similar beliefs) avail them in battle against the Romans. It would
seem that paganism’s chief virtue in this regard is not the beliefs or practices associated with it,
but its great flexibility.102

Christianity obviously does not enjoy the same flexibility, but properly modified, may
play the same function of serving the patria. This question is whether Christianity, like other
religions, is sufficiently malleable to be redirected toward the disguised self-worship103 that
might serve Machiavelli’s goals. McCormick also notes the possibility of the instrumental use of
Christianity for state- or nation-building, claiming evocatively that “Machiavelli draws the
blueprint that statebuilders like the Tudors, Bourbons, Hohenzollerns, and their illustrious
ministers would follow in creating the national dynastic states of Europe.”104 But dynastic states
and national states are really different (if overlapping) forms, both conceptually and historically.
Moreover, it is difficult to see what Christianity adds in this account or why the would-be
statebuilder would need to emulate Cesare as opposed to the many more successful figures
depicted in Machiavelli’s works.

Finally, though McCormick highlights the importance of Moses as a politico-religious
exemplar, he does not attend to the problem that the figure of Moses poses for an aspiring
Christian reformer. Should such a reformer work his labors on behalf of a single people, this
would unite the two meanings of “people” (exalting both a single nation and the many), but at
the cost of the universalism inherent in the Christian message.

102 D I.11-15. Though we might say that paganism is doctrinally superior simply for what it doesn’t
uphold. On the Romans’ instrumental use of religion, see Coby 1999. 66-77. One should not, however,
103 This was Ernest Gellner’s (1983, 55) description of pre-national religious communities.
104 McCormick 2011b, 9. He also curiously focuses on the figure of Cesare Borgia for this purpose.
One might say that Christianity takes away from the singular focus upon enhancing the political community’s capacity for war-making and conquest.\textsuperscript{105} The difficulty is tying Christianity down to a single, if potentially expansive, patria. The “tough, muscular, territorial Hebraism of the Torah” is not just preferable for being more bloody, but because its bloodiness serves the interests of a particular people, rather than the more diffuse goals of the Christian princes and polities.\textsuperscript{106} At the same time, in Machiavelli’s treatment, peoplehood is not a complete or preexisting thing. The same acts of violence that serve their interests—and in which they are always complicit—also serve to create and maintain them.\textsuperscript{107} In this manner are the two conceptions of peoplehood, popular and national, united in Machiavelli’s work.

**Machiavelli and nationalism**

What, then, does it meant to speak of Machiavelli’s “nationalism”? The flexibility of Machiavelli’s understanding of nations distinguishes him from a 19\textsuperscript{th}-century nationalist like Mazzini. Mazzini conceives of the world as made up of nations. The political task is for them to achieve a statehood that fully represents them. But their very naturalness forestalls geopolitical competition; each nation’s place is already assigned, so to speak. But Machiavelli’s use of patria is far more slippery than that. His true patria could be Florence, Italy, or something else entirely, and these possibilities exist in some tension with one another. The citizens of Florence may plausibly become citizens of Italy, but at what cost to

\textsuperscript{105} This is not to suggest that this is the whole of Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity, but it is an overlooked aspect.

\textsuperscript{106} Cited in Geerken 1999, 595.

\textsuperscript{107} Apropos Machiavelli’s project is the line attributed to Massimo d’Azeglio: “Fatta l’Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani” (“Italy is made; now it is necessary to make Italians”). For Machiavelli, peoples are made much the way states are: through acts of extraordinary violence.
Florence as an autonomous political community? Machiavelli’s ambiguous usage poses two related questions: 1) is our true patriotism owed to an existing polity or a future one? And 2) will the attempt to realize our future patriotic hopes result in conflict, given the preexisting attachments that others may have to those territories?

Colonialism aside, the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century nationalists tended to believe that such conflict was not a necessity. Their 20\textsuperscript{th}-century counterparts, on the other hand, positively sought it out. Machiavelli does not really remind us of either variety, partly due to the coolly ironic tone of his writings, and partly due to the fact that his conceptions of political life are too fluid. Many contemporary scholars find Machiavelli highly congenial for precisely this reason: the contingency of his understanding and the permeability of his categories.

In our world of ossified Weberian states, contingency may have its charms. But it is worth attending to the ways in which such contingency is the precondition for geopolitical conflict and imperial domination. Even if one reads his “exhortations” sincerely, Machiavelli nowhere claims that the Italian borders (which lie where, exactly?) provide a natural stopping point. Rome, after all, had conquered most of the peninsula by the time of the first Punic War.

Apropos, one might turn to chapter 3 of the \textit{Prince}, on “mixed principalities,” in which Machiavelli dispassionately records the depredations of foreign invaders on Italian soil, noting their errors where they appear and generously offering advice for improvement to future aspiring

\textsuperscript{108} Antonio Gramsci’s work \textit{The Southern Question} examines this very problem with respect to the Mezzogiorno. By contrast, Hörnqvist 2004, 263 argues that Machiavelli’s “Italian” patriotism is merely a mask for Florentine imperial goals. Strauss 1958, 80 demonstrates the mutability of Machiavelli’s concept of “fatherland.”

\textsuperscript{109} These problems pose particular difficulties for Viroli 1995, who seeks to maintain an ethical distinction between patriotism and nationalism. See also George Orwell’s essay “Notes on Nationalism.”

\textsuperscript{110} Walker 1993; Onuf 1998; Vatter 2000.

\textsuperscript{111} Though the \textit{Discourses} are nominally concerned only with that part of Livy’s history that ends with Rome’s Italic conquests, the actual text ranges a good deal further. See Strauss 1958, 89.
conquerors. Tellingly, he never once uses the term “patria”; the word he employs throughout is *provincia*—from the Roman term for territorial possessions outside of Italy.\(^{112}\)

The fact that Machiavelli’s account defies a “primordialist” reading of nations might lend support to republican interpretations of Machiavellian patriotism.\(^{113}\) According to this reading, one’s attachment to one’s patria is due not to ancestral ties—blood and soil—but to its conduciveness to political liberty. The problem is that this requires a particular reading of freedom as necessarily indicating republican or popular rule. It is true that Machiavelli repeatedly refers to the preservation of freedom of the city.\(^{114}\) But there are at least two possible interpretations of freedom here: freedom from princely rule and freedom from foreign rule. Consider, for example, the distinction between the German *freie städte* (free of princely but not imperial rule) and *Freistaaten* (free of imperial but not princely rule) under the Holy Roman Empire. Machiavelli uses “free” in both senses.\(^{115}\) Where he speaks of defending the patria by any means necessary he is talking of maintaining its liberty. But the context of that passage refers to foreign threats, and the repeated emphasis on patria rather liberty as such, would suggest that the liberty of the patria amounts to its freedom from foreign rule or domination. Though the two senses of freedom are not mutually exclusive, it is on this point that princely rule gains its strongest rhetorical justification: as instrumental—perhaps even necessary—to the good of the patria.

Furthermore, Machiavelli nowhere makes political liberty the precondition for one’s attachment to the patria. That is to put the cart before the horse. It is the cultivation of such

\(^{112}\) In fact, the chapter of the *Prince* in which “patria” appears most frequently is P 8, on principalities attained through crimes.

\(^{113}\) E.g., de Grazia 1989; Viroli 1995.

\(^{114}\) *D* I.1-10, I.16-18, I.49, III.49.

\(^{115}\) For an example of the first, see *D* II.2, where the Syracusans gain freedom from a domestic tyrant.
attachments that might create political freedom. Similarly, it is the (religious?) intensity of that attachment which may lead one to disregard the distinction between the two meanings of “freedom” discussed above. And while a committed republican might indeed wish to institute a republic in his homeland, it is strange to speak of one’s passionate attachment to a land simply because it might one day feature a republic. Republicans, no less than liberals, have to face the problem of origins—both the origins of one’s people and patria, and the origins of one’s attachments to them.

As we concluded in the previous chapter, the problem of origins is one that bedevils much of contemporary political liberalism. Machiavelli usefully compels us to look past the necessary assumptions of liberal theorists from Hobbes to Rawls to acknowledge the violent constitution of the people who in turn constitute the state. As Machiavelli has no “state” this is not a problem for him. At the same time, it must be noted that the absence of foundations (so beloved of—who else?—anti-foundationalists) does not conduce to political moderation in his account, but rather to aggressive military expansionism.

For Machiavelli, the formation of not only republics or principalities but of peoples and fatherlands always occurs against the backdrop of “international” conflict. Most modern political theorists, by contrast, envision a provisional condition of isolation from which to construct the state. Much of this will seem quite familiar to anyone acquainted with “bellicist” theories of state formation – war made the state and the state made war.\footnote{116 Tilly 1985; see the relevant discussion in chapter 1 of this work.} But unlike contemporary historical sociologists, Machiavelli is highly attuned to the problem of creating willing soldiers.\footnote{117 See Sambanis et al. 2015.}
Indeed, war remains central to Machiavelli’s conception of nations and peoples.\textsuperscript{118} Whatever one’s preferred reading of Machiavelli, this should not shock anyone familiar with the events of the last century. Yet Machiavelli’s unique account of peoplehood raises problems of its own. It must be asked: why is the patria praiseworthy or choice-worthy? There is little in Machiavelli’s thought of the sentiment encapsulated in \textit{ubi bene ibi patria}; for there is no (explicit) comprehensive account of the good in his thought. Perhaps it might be better rendered \textit{ubi potens ibi patria}. In light of his endorsement of immigration, one cannot interpret his understanding of patriotism as ancestral piety; in light of his endorsement of political and territorial expansion, one cannot interpret it as attachment to the land.\textsuperscript{119} And, \textit{pace} the republican interpretations, engagement in political life is not a precondition for patriotism.\textsuperscript{120}

\section*{Conclusion}

Many influential contemporary works of political theory presuppose an essentially static political community. This is due less to the limitations of modern political thought per se then to its heavy reliance upon liberal social contractarianism to generate its central themes and concepts.

As noted at the outset, because Machiavelli stands outside this tradition, he can remind us of the essentially contingent character of both the political and the prepolitical community. Of course, Machiavelli is commonly lauded for precisely this quality, but taking his writings seriously means acknowledging the dark side of that contingency: invasion, conquest, and empire.

\textsuperscript{118} P 14.
\textsuperscript{119} Recall G. K. Chesterton’s remark that the true patriot only boasts of the smallness of his country...
\textsuperscript{120} And cf. \textit{D} I.6, where Machiavelli seems to claim that the true political way of life is in fact impossible.
For the prepolitical community can never truly be “given.” As Nietzsche wrote, only that which has no history can be defined. Machiavelli reminds us that prepolitical communities are only provisionally coherent entities. And that, like the original Romans, the places they come to occupy are largely achieved through conquest. Conversely, the constituent parts of an existing nation are assimilated through efficacious policies, rather than due to any “natural” propensity.

Machiavelli may be unique in acknowledging the terrifying ethical implications of prioritizing peoplehood, and using it as a political and rhetorical tool for changing the status quo. His predecessors among the medieval jurists cannot deal with the question, “who are the people,” because they do not wish to open the door to a pure empiricism that would justify the independence of any community where imperial or ecclesiastical authority was sufficiently weak. His successors among the contract theorists cannot do it, because the power political basis for delineating populations clashes with the rights-based account they are otherwise propounding.

Recognizing this fact is not a spur, however, to merely accepting the “constructed” character of nations and peoples, but to seeing in this malleable landscape an opportunity to found a conquering people in a new patria. Nations, then, ultimately appear as highly fungible quantities. Ernest Gellner mocked the “sleeping-beauty” rationalization, according to which nations were not modern inventions, but only lay dormant until they were awakened by the historically late emergence of ideological nationalism. With Machiavelli, we might say that

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121 Ryan 2000, 87-89.
122 See Stilz 2011 for an interesting, if unpersuasive, recent attempt to parse this problem.
123 The attempt by certain Northern Italian ideologues to found “Padania” is apropos here, if a tad farcical.
any assortment of political and social orders might be formed into a nation: they await only the arrival of someone “rare in brain and authority” to not awaken but transform them.¹²⁵

For this, the Mosaic/Hebraic example provides the clearest precedent in Machiavelli’s oeuvre, owing to its greater theological proximity to a Christian milieu and to the way the uniform action of its creation surpasses the successive accidents that generated Romanitas. That this quasi-religious exaltation of the people and the patria can be wholly reconciled either with the political practices of the classical republic or the rights of the modern state is far from certain.

¹²⁵ Geerken 1999, 586.
Chapter 6: Spinoza’s Nation-State

Durkheim taught that in religious worship society adores its own camouflaged image. In a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly... - Ernest Gellner

More than the other two figures examined in this work, Spinoza’s presence may warrant a defense. Indeed, few thinkers occupy as ambiguous a position in the history of political thought as Benedictus (Baruch) Spinoza. And this ambiguity cuts across several planes. He exercised an undeniable influence upon the following two centuries of Western philosophy, particularly over the French Enlightenment and both the German Enlightenment and subsequent Romanticism. As late as the end of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche would still call him “the purest philosopher.”

Yet, Spinoza casts a smaller shadow over contemporary discussions than similarly-statured early-modern thinkers, including those discussed in this work. He is less likely to appear on syllabi for introductory courses on political thought, and social scientists do not engage with his writings as frequently as they do with other early-modern thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes and Francis Bacon, or more recent philosophers, such as Carl Schmitt and Jürgen Habermas.

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1 Gellner 1983, 55.
2 References throughout this chapter are abbreviated as follows: TTP = Tractatus Theologico-Politicus; TP = Tractatus Politicus. I mostly follow the translations by Silverthorne and Israel (2007) and Shirley (2000), respectively. Original references are to Opera III, Gebhardt edition (1925).
3 Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human, aphorism 475. See also his letter to Franz Overbeck, Sils-Maria, July 30, 1881.
Moreover, unlike Machiavelli and Hobbes, he is not generally viewed as a significant source of international political thought. This is especially peculiar given the pride of place granted to him by Kenneth Waltz in his magisterial survey of the causes of war: Man, the State and War. Spinoza in fact has more to say about what we might anachronistically call “international politics” (defined as the relations between kingdoms or commonwealths) than does Hobbes.

Waltz’s attentiveness to Spinoza is not merely idiosyncratic. For there is something remarkably modern (if not postmodern) about Spinoza’s thought. Spinoza presents what would remain for some time the most radically democratic political teaching in his or any tradition. Spinoza is also arguably the first political philosopher to make the now ubiquitous subject of power (potentia, potestas) a central and explicit theme in his thought.

Thus it should not surprise us that Spinoza would prove a valuable resource in investigating the significance of popular sovereignty and its relationship to nationalism and the sovereign state. I specifically identify three aspects of nationalism that Spinoza highlights via

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4 He is not, for example, discussed in Beitz 1979 or in Armitage 2013, nor does he receive an entry in Brown et al. 2002. He’s not altogether absent, however: Forde 2002, 77-78 places him among the classical realists. More importantly, so does E. H. Carr (1946, 64-65, 153); see also Molloy 2013.
5 Waltz 1959, passim, though see esp. 21-32.
6 On Spinoza’s own reflections on international politics, see TTP 16 and TP 2.13, 2.15, 3.13-14, 3.17. See also Hampshire 2005, 150.
7 Spinoza’s modernity is emphasized in the work of Jonathan Israel (esp. 2002) and Rebecca Goldstein (2006), inter alia; his postmodernity in the essays in The New Spinoza (1997), and in Negri’s recent Antonio Negri, Spinoza for Our Time: Politics and Postmodernity.
8 On Spinoza’s radical influence on radical democracy, see the discussion in chapter 3.
9 This theme forms the basis of Antonio Negri’s study, The Savage Anomaly (see esp. translator’s foreword). Contrary to much received opinion, Machiavelli has little explicitly to say about power.
10 In contrast to Machiavelli, Spinoza does not actually use the term “state,” using instead three terms interchangeably: civitas, respublica, and imperium. I can find little evidence that the use of one over the others denotes a particular significance. Like Hobbes, Spinoza appears to use them to signify what we would term a state—an impersonal form of rule premised upon the representation of a collective body—but Spinoza goes beyond Hobbes in his creative adaptation of these terms. It was common to employ civitas and respublica synonymously in this respect. Imperium, however, referred in its original context to command, of the sort a consul might exercise over a conquered province (see Richardson 1991). By the
his extended use of the Hebrew example: 1) the unity of the body politic as precondition for institution of the state; 2) the tension between the particular and the universal, and the capacity (or not) of religion to resolve it; and 3) the relationship between nationalism and democracy. In this regard, Spinoza’s presence is merited not only by the substance of his thought, but also in the ways that he bridges Machiavelli and Hobbes, employing their ideas for his own purposes.

Though the relationship between Hobbes and Machiavelli is textually obscure, Spinoza references Machiavelli directly—calling him “most acute”—as well as obliquely.

Spinoza has practically written by having in front of him the text of the Discorsi...

One will conclude that, for Spinoza, Moses fulfilled in the Hebrew state exactly the same function as Numa Pompilius in the history of Rome: that of the true organizer of the state’s continuity. Yet it is no less important to see how Spinoza, who projects Machiavelli’s historical schema onto the biblical text, at the same time leads to a profound transformation of the latter.

Like Machiavelli, Spinoza focuses on Moses as a principal figure, giving short shrift to the patriarchs (Abraham receives but a single dismissive mention in the TTP). Another bond early modern period it had come to acquire an association with legitimate sovereign power (Koebner 1955). Hobbes, for example, so uses it in De Cive V.11 (see also Silverthorne 1996). Spinoza takes the further step of applying this concept of mastery and rule to signify the state itself.

Nadler 2002 and Goldstein 2006 both highlight the importance of Jewish sources for Spinoza’s philosophy, but do not discuss the political or national dimension.

See the relevant discussion in the previous chapter.

TP 5.7. See also Strauss 1965, 15, 226-228; Calvetti 1970; Mulier 1990; Curley 1996; Morfino 2002; Del Lucchese 2009a. Hammill 2012 argues (against Strauss) that Spinoza broke with Machiavelli in his treatment of both Moses and scripture, presenting a reading of scripture as effectively true owing to its ability to inspire devotion. Hammill does not actually explain why a devotional understanding is “truer” to the nature of things.

Spinoza frequently employs specific, if not idiosyncratic, terms that are found throughout Machiavelli’s writings. Cf. TP 1.2 with chapter 15 of the Prince. During a discussion of God’s disappointment with the Hebrews in TTP 17, Spinoza references Jeremiah 32:21 to claim that this disappointment went to their origins. But the actual phrase he uses is “ab urbe condita”—anachronistically referencing the title of Livy’s history (G III/217). Spinoza’s equation of virtue with power (Ethics IV, definition 8) is certainly evocative of Machiavelli’s virtù. Finally, cf. Spinoza’s discussions of praise and blame—laus et vituperio—(Ethics I, appendix; III, definition 29; IV, definition 37) with Machiavelli’s (P 15; D I preface, I.10, II preface).

Balibar 1997, 181-182. Of course, Moses plays this role for Machiavelli as well; and Numa’s status for him is ambiguous to say the least—see the relevant discussion in chapter 4 of this work.

linking Spinoza to Machiavelli is their mutual reliance upon Tacitus’ *Histories*, especially with respect to Tacitus’ depiction of the ancient Hebrews, but Spinoza makes explicit what is implicit in Machiavelli in the way that he employs Tacitus as a source for his discussions of the Hebrews.  

Spinoza was also evidently influenced by the Hobbes of *De Cive*. As Hobbes himself supposedly recognized, Spinoza’s rhetoric considerably outpaced his in daring. Yet though Spinoza goes a length further than Hobbes in his treatment of scripture, his conclusions are surprisingly similar: that he alone, and in contravention to established religions, is able to provide a faithful interpretation of what scripture really tells us. Finally, if Hobbes presents the most fully realized depiction of the “person of the state” along with the covenant that creates it, then Spinoza demonstrates how that unity is best achieved: via the qualified embrace of the multitude. Spinoza thus draws out the latent elements of democratic thought in Hobbes’ philosophy. As we shall see, however, Spinoza’s democratic thought is distinct from that of both modern democratic theorists and classical political thinkers.

**How We Read Spinoza**

What makes Spinoza stand out not only within this work but within the history of international political thought is the intensity of his focus upon the Jewish Question; amongst the three thinkers examined in this work, he is the one who most fully engages with the Hebraic example.

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17 See esp. chapter 17 of the *TTP*. See also Wirszubski 1955; Strauss 1965, 16; Malcolm 2003. Melamed 2002, 167-183 intriguingly posits the Venetian Jewish thinker Simone Luzzatto as a possible link between Machiavelli and Spinoza, emphasizing the Tacitean connection.
18 See the essays in *Studia Spinozana* (Volume 3, 1987); chapter 18 of Malcolm 2003; Verbeek 2003.
20 On the idea that Spinoza arrives via opposing moves at a similar position to that of Hobbes, see Skalweit 1961, 109; Gildin 1979; Matheron 1997.
Emil Fackenheim goes so far as to describe the *Theologico-Political Treatise* as “the only major work recognized by the history of philosophy in which Judaism appears so prominently that, were the references to it excised, the work would be destroyed!”

Here Fackenheim seems to be drawing an implicit distinction between political philosophers who make use of Jewish themes (e.g., Thomas Hobbes or James Harrington) and Jewish philosophers who are concerned with political matters (e.g., Moses Mendelssohn or Simone Luzzatto), with Spinoza in the former camp. Thus, no other “Jewish” thinker stands so prominently in the larger Western tradition, and no contemporary gentile thinker concerned with Hebrew themes could engage so competently with the Bible, not to say the Talmud and the Midrash.

But this leads to yet another point of contention about Spinoza: in what sense was he part of a Jewish tradition (if at all), either one that he himself recognized or one that later recognized him? In his history of Jewish thought, Julius Guttmann argued that Spinoza was an exclusively European (i.e., non-Jewish) philosopher. By contrast, Shlomo Pines places Spinoza within a certain tradition of Jewish thought, albeit an unconventional one.

Basic ambiguities about the status of Spinoza’s thought—not to say his beliefs—extend beyond his life as well. His engagement with the Judaic tradition exerted a negligible influence upon Rabbinic Judaism while being of foundational importance for the modern (originally gentile) tradition of biblical criticism. He is hailed by many as the progenitor of modern

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21 Fackenheim 1994, 37.
22 On Spinoza’s philological bona fides, see Harvey 2002.
23 Schwartz 2012 provides a fine overview of the myriad ways in which Spinoza has been interpreted and reinterpreted by different strands of modern Jewry.
24 Guttmann 1964, 265-266. See also van Bunge 1997.
25 Pines 1987. He nonetheless highlights the originality of Spinoza’s account of the first (pre-exilic) Hebrew commonwealth.
26 See, e.g., Levenson 1993; Gignilliat 2012.
Zionism, yet he was excommunicated from his own Jewish community, and manifested little affective connection to the Jewish people thereafter.  

The contentiousness of Spinoza’s place within a Jewish tradition of thought certainly owes much to the different ways in which that tradition might be construed. But an even simpler explanation lies in the uncertain status of Spinoza’s deployment of the Hebrew Bible. Two distinct but related questions pervade much of the literature on Spinoza and bear specifically on our discussion: who was Spinoza actually writing for, and what was his final evaluation of the Hebrew Bible as a text? How one answers the first question almost necessarily affects (if not determines) the answer to the second.  

To oversimplify, there are two common explanations for the consistent use of the Hebrew Bible by (principally gentile) seventeenth-century writers. The first is simply that it represented a sincerely pious belief that Holy Scripture could offer substantive teachings on how best to organize a political society—especially in the wake of the theological and geopolitical upheavals of the time. The second is that such uses of scripture are largely instrumental; biblical language was the discursive coin of the realms, and no writer who sought to reach a wide audience (or wished to avoid a reputation for impiety) could do without it.  

Spinoza does not readily fall under either rubric. Part of the difficulty in interpreting Spinoza stems from what Steven Smith aptly describes as his simultaneously “subversive and

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28 Though not always straightforwardly—Frankel 1999, for example claims Spinoza’s intended audience was primarily priests and theologians (as opposed to philosophers or everyman), without claiming that his interest is principally religious.
29 See especially Boralevi 2002 and Nelson 2010. As discussed in chapter 3, such readings dovetail with a broader cultural willingness by certain reformationist communities to view themselves as the heirs of the ancient Israelites.
30 E.g., Strauss 1997; Smith 1997.
an accommodating” approach to biblical criticism. In the first place, within the (substantial) literature on Spinoza’s own “election” of the Hebrews, there is not even consensus as to whether his account is ultimately positive or negative. Those who read Spinoza’s treatment of the ancient Hebrews in a positive light have tended to place Spinoza within a larger tradition of political Hebraists for whom the ancient Israelites provide a usable political model—and an especially salient one for the Dutch Republic. But such accounts do not make clear what Spinoza gains from drawing upon the Hebraic example. He could have after all utilized the example of the Dutch Republic itself, or extended the focus he applies to Amsterdam in the final chapter of the Theologico-Political Treatise throughout the work as a whole. One can even accept that Spinoza remained concerned with contemporary political conditions in Amsterdam in writing the TTP, without reducing the Hebraic example to analogy.

Meanwhile, for those who read Spinoza’s account negatively, one strand maintains that Spinoza could say of Moses and the Jews what he could not say of Christ and Christians. Many commentators have attributed prudential motivations to Spinoza’s selection of the Jewish commonwealth for his investigations, rather than any Christian one. Simply put, it was far safer to attack a minority confession than the majority. But, without denying this impetus, if one attends to the substance of Spinoza’s biblical criticism—a tradition he largely inaugurated—it becomes clear that it would not have been possible to submit any Christian polity to this kind of

31 Smith 2005, 7.
32 Rosenthal 1997; Nadler 1999, 283. For more on existing interest in ideas of Hebrew commonwealth in the Dutch Republic, see Boralevi 2002; Bodian 2006; Sutcliffe 2011. See Preus 2001, 204-205 for a useful discussion distinguishing Spinoza from contemporaries, though Preus goes too far in simply dismissing the value of the Bible for Spinoza.
33 Cf. Machiavelli’s discussion of “blaming Catiline” in D I.10.
34 E.g., Curley 1992; Fackenheim 1994; Strauss 1997; Nirenberg 2013, 336-337.
scrutiny and derive the same teaching.\textsuperscript{35} That is to say, the Hebrew commonwealth shorn of its prophetic trappings remains a distinct kind of political community (in Spinoza’s account)—one that is now fitted for more generalized use. But a Christian polity without Christ or Christianity is nothing.

Other interpreters simply treat his critical account of the Hebrews as sincere, presaging a genuine if idiosyncratic preference for Christ over Moses. But Frankel notes of Spinoza’s preference for Christianity over Judaism (and Christ over Moses), that “a careful reading of these passages reveals that Jesus’ teachings are superior only in terms of philosophic rather than their political content.”\textsuperscript{36} More importantly still, Spinoza makes clear that Christ’s anti-political teachings may be held impious should they jeopardize the state.\textsuperscript{37}

What none of these interpretations allows is the possibility that the Hebrew example may have more than instrumental significance—that it may contribute something intrinsic to Spinoza’s thought without disclosing a pious intention. This is not to say that Spinoza’s use of the Hebrew Bible is necessarily more faithful. Indeed, he freely deviates from or modifies the text according to his own lights, beginning with his express denial of Moses’ status as Torahic author (like Hobbes, he identifies Ezra as the likely compiler of biblical sources). Of course, this serves to elevate Spinoza’s own position. If one need not perform the miraculous deeds of Moses

\textsuperscript{35} A presupposition of many “esoteric” readings of Spinoza’s work seems to be that Judaism functions as an adequate substitute for Christianity, given the goals of his philosophy. To put it in Straussian terms, much depends then on how one interprets “Jerusalem” within the Athens-Jerusalem dyad. Does Jerusalem stand for all revealed religion, or is it necessarily Jewish insofar as Christianity represents an (impossible) attempt to bridge the two cities?

\textsuperscript{36} Frankel 2001, 301-302. For an extended refutation of the claim that Spinoza was any kind of Christian, or even a disinterested endorser of Christianity, see Misrahi 1977.

\textsuperscript{37} See \textit{TTP} 19; see also \textit{Ethics} IV, definition 37.
or claim his unmediated communication with God in order to shape and interpret scripture, then this places Spinoza in a much different position.\footnote{Yaffe 1995. Assigning this significance to Ezra has its own hermeneutic benefits for Spinoza. First, it associates scripture with a priest rather than a prophet, thus reducing the theological authority of the sources. Second, scripture is written or compiled by a figure already centuries removed from the events being chronicled, thus limiting the empirical and historical authority of the sources. Spinoza (and, by extension, his readers) is not in a qualitatively different position than the priests with respect to his ability to evaluate the situation of the Israelites.}

Ultimately, Spinoza upends the prevailing explanations for his use of scripture. On the one hand, he is explicitly dismissive of the intrinsic authority of scripture, insisting that unaided reason must be sole standard for evaluation. To the extent that he finds it necessary to work within its bounds, he is not subtle in indicating the myriad ways in which scripture (both Christian and Hebrew) is necessarily tailored to the rhetorical (read: superstitious) context of the times, so as to appeal to the minds of their respective audiences. That is to say, one must read the Bible “judiciously” to separate the true and timeless teaching from the rhetorical ephemera. In other words, scripture is secondary to human reason. Indeed, one does not in the end even need scripture to reach a realization of its most important teachings, it being not more valuable than “the Koran or a poetic drama or at any rate ordinary history.”\footnote{TTP 5/19. Nor are these claims buried in some esoteric manner, appearing as they also do right in the Preface of the work. In other words, Spinoza unabashedly undercuts any claim to an even superficially pious use of the Hebrew Bible at the outset.}

Accordingly, he goes beyond the biblical text in freely criticizing the actions and political arrangements of the Hebrews. On the other hand, his sustained engagement with this example and the unique role it plays in his political philosophy (one that, as will be discussed below, cannot be performed by the classical Greek and Roman examples) defies a merely instrumental interpretation.
Further, though he is surely critical, he is not merely critical in his interpretations. Spinoza’s antagonism to Judaism is certainly quite real. Yet his antagonism is not free-standing; it requires a position from which to evaluate and order the claims of Judaism (and of revealed religion, generally). That position is that of the state, the establishment of which is both cause and effect of the diminution of the status of religion (beginning with its reduction to the status of religion, as opposed to a comprehensive way of life). Ironically, however, Spinoza relies heavily upon the Jewish tradition to generate his particular and radical conception of political community. As Ronald Beiner notes, “the religion of the Old Testament is emphatically not a universal religion but the national religion of a particular people.” This national religion and the customs that flow from it provide the raw material with which Spinoza builds his version of the modern state.

Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews

The closer we examine Spinoza’s chronology of the Hebrew polity, the clearer it becomes that the Hebrews as model is more notional than truly textual. The pure theocracy (or democracy) is premised upon the fundamental equality of all Hebrew “citizens” when measured against divine supremacy—what Martin Buber calls the “kingship of God.” But Spinoza makes clear that this pure state was broken by the ascendancy of Moses, who enjoyed both unique communication with God and hence sole rulership over the Hebrews. Thus Spinoza claims (extra-textually) that

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40 And while the other thinkers discussed above do not share his antagonism, coming as they do from outside the tradition, they nonetheless disregard that which is most sacred to the tradition.
42 Beiner 2011, 94.
43 See also Beiner 2011, 127
44 Something similar may be said of Joshua’s judgeschip, though Spinoza indicates that this is a further step down the ladder from Moses, as Joshua required priests to act as intermediaries with God (TTP, 216-217).
Mosaic leadership was a subsequent development following a true and equal covenant. Like the midrashic claim that the period from the creation of man and woman to the Fall lasted but six hours, Spinoza posits a democratic moment in the Hebrew genealogy even before the intervention of Moses. By this point, the theocracy under Moses is at least partly a monarchy. Some of Spinoza’s criticisms of the Hebrew commonwealth under Moses have been interpreted as criticisms of theocracy. But he acknowledges that in fact this was only notionally a theocracy, given the supreme authority surrendered to Moses (and not God) in practice.

The problem with monarchy for Spinoza is not principally that monarchic authority might be exercised tyrannically (or that monarchic legitimacy is but a mask for power politics), but that monarchic rule is never truly unified. Although notionally collected in a single figure, Spinoza makes clear that the monarch always relies upon counselors and subsidiary lords in the practice of ruling, thus effectively dividing what is nominally centralized. True unity (and thus power) is to be found in Spinoza’s particular conception of democracy: “to be truly one, it is necessary to be many.”

Spinoza, in a way that Hobbes never would (and which only certain later interpreters of Hobbes have sought to draw out), makes explicit that the totality of the state—the incarnation of the “person of the state”—presupposes democracy. “There is no other way, [Spinoza’s argument] suggests, to conceive of such una mens or “state spirit” other than as the democratically

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45 Spinoza, TTP 17/207. Cf. with Exodus 19:8. Spinoza seems to associate this with the covenant (which is sealed several chapters later). There is no mention of how swiftly the Israelites break this promise. It is curious to consider that Machiavelli is in some ways a more faithful reader of the Bible than is Spinoza, with respect to how he maintains Moses’ crucial role in securing God’s faith with the Israelites.

46 Cf. TP 6 for Spinoza’s criticisms of monarchic rule.

47 TTP 17.

48 Cf. Spinoza TP 7 with the Prince, chs. 22 and 23. See also Hoekstra 2006, 202.

49 Del Lucchese 2009b, 345.
perfected realization of the political power of the multitude." He defines it thus at the conclusion of his Political Treatise: "the completely absolute state [omnino absolutum imperium] which we call democracy." Thus Spinoza also most explicitly distinguishes his (modern) definition of democracy from the classical one. Spinoza’s extensive discussion of regimes (organized around one, few or many) in the Political Treatise may remind one of Aristotle’s Politics (especially book III), but the distance between the two should be evident. Whereas Aristotle treats the regime as fundamental, such that a change in regime is a comprehensive change, Spinoza treats right-as-power as fundamental, such that all regimes are contingent expressions of an underlying democratic conatus.

Spinoza in many respects supplies the answer to a much-discussed problem in Hobbes’s thought that can be expressed as follows: if the mass of people can both successfully associate with one another and deliberate together to choose a sovereign, why do they require a sovereign in the first place? In Spinoza’s account, the multitude is (as in Hobbes) in some way prior to the sovereign state. This will most “naturally” produce a democratic regime, in the absence of supervening external factors. Spinoza of course allows that such factors are quite prevalent and do not in principle produce a less “legitimate” regime; all one can say is that it produces a less “absolute” one.

But hasn’t Spinoza already defined the original Hebrew polity as theocratic? Here it has to be noted that, in Balibar’s words, “Theocracy...is already a form of democracy: this characteristic corresponds to the sacralization of the soil and the election of the entire people,

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50 Goetschel 2004, 76.
51 TP 11.1.
52 Cf. the discussion in chapter 1 of this work of classical regimes and the modern state.
53 Cf. TP 7.5.
who maintain in it the “theological hatred” of foreigners.” Balibar 1997, 204. This neatly corresponds with Spinoza’s definition of democracy as the “absolute” regime. In contrast to complacent references to the “age of absolutism,” Spinoza makes abundantly clear that the most absolute state is the most representative one—cf. his discussions of the weakness of monarchies in TP 6.

56 TTP 16/195.

57 Cf. the preface to the TTP, in which Spinoza expresses his preference that the “multitude” will simply avoid his work altogether.

58 Verbeek 2003 also links theocracy with democracy in Spinoza’s thought, but draws the opposite conclusions: viz, that democracy is impossible

foreign. Spinoza’s account thus also represents a significant break with the “Josephan” tradition of political Hebraism that otherwise prevailed in the 16th and 17th centuries, according to which the Israelite polity was compatible with the categories of Greek and Roman political thought and practice.62

Spinoza is of course harshly critical even of the superior theocratic (i.e., democratic) Hebrew regime, yet he concludes that it “had many things worthy of being noted at least and perhaps advisable to imitate.”63 Though he does not explicitly name them there, he does caution his readers against seeking to imitate them by way of forming an actual covenant with God—i.e., the most salient and central facet of their existence. Spinoza thus infers certain political principles from his analysis of the Hebrew commonwealth. But in his foregoing discussion, he has already disclosed the secrets of the Hebrew state’s success: its common religion was bound up with myriad other institutions and practices that both consecrated and unified the Hebrews. These included a citizen army, equal ownership of lands and fields, the celebration of feastdays and other rituals, and the common veneration of their national temple. In sum, “the Hebrew people were established as a nation and their nation prospered because in their regime piety and patriotism were taken to be identical.”64

[T]he love of the Hebrews for their country was not simple love but piety, which along with hatred of other nations, was so nourished and inflamed by daily worship that it must have become second nature. For their daily worship was not only completely different (which made them altogether unique and utterly distinct from others) but absolutely contrary to that of other peoples.65

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61 The Modern Hebrew word for democracy (דָּמוֹקְרַטְיָה) is a phonetic transliteration of the Greek.
62 See chapter 3 of this work.
63 TTP, GIII/221. Note the Machiavellian language here – cf. Machiavelli, P VI; D I preface, II.4. This qualified view of imitation seems to characterize all the thinkers discussed in this project: they do not view the Hebrews as providing a straightforward blueprint for political organization, but as a template subject to alteration and improvement.
64 Bagley 2008, 231.
65 TTP 17/215.
Notably, none of the most important features of the Hebrew state were directly implicated by the covenant itself, and all of them are fully replicable—in one form or another—by other political societies. More importantly, Spinoza’s praise for these customs has more to do with their good effects than with the piety they represented. “Admittedly, the coherence and solidity of the state of the Hebrews rested...upon the unity of faith. But the faith of the Hebrews is reduced strictly to obedience.”66 And this too is replicable; as Spinoza tells us two chapters later: “There is no doubt that devotion to country is the highest form of piety a man can show; for once the state is destroyed nothing good can survive....”67

The theological dimension of Spinoza’s pure and absolute democracy is then remarkably reducible to what we call nationalism in its modes and effects.68 By denying the possibility of recreating the covenant, but also denying that Jewish chosenness endures in any true sense, Spinoza makes it possible to examine the Hebrew experience (always through his own interpretations) as the model for new democratic states. As Etienne Balibar puts it, “the history of the Hebrew people...is the laboratory for the analysis of nationalism, of its contradictory causes and effects.”69

In his reflections upon the Hebrew nation, Spinoza necessarily engages in blasphemy. After all, apart from those elements that he himself regards as distinctive, he treats the Hebrews like any other nation, subject to the same causes and effects.70 In justifying his claim that the Israelites were no more “stiff-necked” than other people, Spinoza provides a general account of the origins of nations. Spinoza’s method of proceeding subtly shifts our attention away from the

66 Zac 1979, 175-176.
67 TTP 19.
69 Balibar 1997, 197. The interpretive element would be lost on early Zionists like Moses Hess (1918, 64) who simply claimed: “Spinoza conceived Judaism to be grounded in Nationalism.”
70 Cf. 1 Samuel 8:5, 8:20. See also Machiavelli’s taxonomy of Christianity as a “sect” in D II.5.
divine origins of the Hebrew nation, leaving us to choose between only two available possibilities: nature and convention. Thus, he does not deny the divine as much as he ignores it altogether. The natural basis of nations he does deny (haec sane nationes non creat, sed individua...), arguing that nations are divided only by language, law and custom.

But surely nature creates individuals, not nations, and it is only difference of language, of laws, and of established customs that divides individuals into nations. And only the last two, laws and customs, can be the source of the particular character, the particular mode of life, the particular set of attitudes that signalize each nation. So if it had to be allowed that the Hebrews were stubborn beyond other mortals, this would have to be attributed to the defectiveness of their laws or of their established customs.

Spinoza does allow that God was the source of their laws, but concludes that such laws were defective, owing to God’s manifest anger at the Israelites, resulting in the curtailed duration of their state. By attributing the existence of the nation to God’s communicated law rather than his will and wisdom, Spinoza indicates that humans too can make nations—especially as nations are fundamentally alike. Spinoza knowingly departs from the biblical text here by arguing that God’s wrath against the Hebrews was not due to their breach(es) of the covenant, but in fact predated the giving of the laws, as evidenced by the very defectiveness of the law itself! Thus does Spinoza depart from conventional political Hebraism by focusing upon the role that the law as such played in the establishment of the Hebrews, rather than the efficacy of particular laws as a model for future polities.

And law is where the focus appears to be. For Spinoza first removes language from his trifecta of sources of nationhood. He does not adequately justify this removal, insofar as languages are as particular as any other factor in a nation’s life. The implication seems to be that

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72 TTP, 200.
the observable distinctions between languages are ultimately trivial: every language is different only because every language is the same.

One might argue that Spinoza has to make this move because, of his three non-natural factors, language is the closest to nature and the furthest from direct human agency. That is to say, language is the most evident expression of a pre-political community’s substance, and the least subject to manipulation on a large scale. By placing custom alongside law, Spinoza appears to be engaging in a certain proto-anthropology. In fact, he may initially appear to prioritize custom, in light of his attributing the great longevity of the Jewish people to their intensely particularistic customary practice of circumcision. But it is apparent that circumcision is only a custom by way of law.

This is not to say that he denigrates custom. Indeed, one might almost say that he denigrates law. For the law that holds the strongest effect in Spinoza’s eyes is famously one concerning a particular custom. It is noteworthy (and in keeping with Spinoza’s materialism) that this custom is both physical in nature and moreover its effects are readily apparent to any person, Jew or Gentile, and does not require special knowledge of the Hebrew scripture. Indeed, he compares it to the Chinese custom of the pigtail. Needless to say, this latter example has no relation to scripture – indeed it does not require any set of beliefs or theological commitments. As Victoria Kahn notes, “the Theological-Political Treatise presents scriptural hermeneutics as a process of reading that turns sacred Scripture into stories and religion into culture.”

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73 Cf. Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues.*
74 *TTP* 3/12.
75 *Genesis* 17:10-14; *Leviticus* 12:3; *Joshua* 5:2-3.
76 Kahn 2014, 126. Sheehan 2005 argues that this is in effect what happened with respect to the Bible throughout the Western world in the post-Enlightenment era.
Two points follow from this: first, the seemingly particularistic customs of the Jews are in fact replicable from the standpoint of establishing and maintaining nations, provided that one understands their true purpose. If circumcision is already taken, another unique custom will do in its stead. Second, such a custom can be described without recourse to moral teaching or theological belief (Spinoza provides neither in discussing the Chinese pigtail). It is in this sense that Spinoza denigrates law: by drawing out its most instrumental features and making it into the handmaiden of custom. That is, law is the point of leverage by which one shapes custom, in the process forming and preserving the nation.

To this one must add that, for Spinoza, group-formation is necessarily a dyadic process: the observable exceptionalism of the Jews (or any other group) must be recognized by outsiders, who will respond in kind. “It is gentile hatred more than anything else that has preserved the Jewish nation through the centuries.” Spinoza is at any rate consistent on the extent to which Jews share the blame for the enmity between them and other peoples. He is reported to have called his excommunication from Amsterdam’s Portuguese community “more innocent than was the exodus of the early Hebrews from Egypt.”

In modern terms, Spinoza is evidently not an essentialist or primordialist when it comes to nations and peoples. It is noteworthy that these reflections upon the “constructedness” of nations represent one of the earliest explicit treatments of the nation, in the modern sense of the word, which is to be found in Western political thought. That is to say, Spinoza’s nation is not a

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77 Smith 1997, 101. Levene 2004 argues that the overriding effect of practicing the unique rituals and obeying the unique laws of the Hebrew nation was to engender a hatred for gentiles. This is strikingly similar to Carl Schmitt’s famous (1996a) claim for the friend-enemy distinction as constitutive of political life (see also Evrigenis 2008). Schmitt (1996b, 57-58) subsequently accuses Spinoza of effacing this distinction for his own purposes, but it is frankly difficult to know how much Schmitt’s newfound antisemitism infected his analysis in that work.

78 Quoted in Nadler 1999, 154.
stand-in for the state or the people which constitutes it, as it is for Hobbes or Locke. Nor is it the predetermined outcome of a particular confluence of geography and climate as it is in book five of Jean Bodin’s *Les Six Livres de la République.* This is the reason that Spinoza focuses so heavily upon the concept of chosenness: “a *natio* just is this choice”—that is, a choice peoples themselves make.

Spinoza’s interpretation of the chosenness of the Jews is remarkably Machiavellian in how he interprets the fortune of the Hebrews. According to him, the Jews could be said to be chosen only insofar as their laws and actions enabled them to find good fortune, defined as the "material success and prosperity of their state.” Good fortune equates with the favor of God. But the God of the Hebrew Bible proves to be a remarkably fickle deity. In Spinoza’s account, He does not turn His favor away from the Jews as punishment for their impiety, but disfavors them as a natural consequence of their own actions in the post-Mosaic/pre-exilic era. Moreover, God has bestowed both favor and disfavor at other times upon other nations. Spinoza’s God (as opposed to the biblical one) is of course inseparable from nature (*deus sive natura*). But guided to a “correct” apprehension of scripture by Spinoza’s writings, the biblical God (which is not the same as the one understood by either the ancient Israelites or the later compilers of the Bible) bears a striking resemblance to another deity: *Fortuna*. Two points follow from this: 1) chosenness is not the sole provenance of the Jews—any number of nations at any given time may be said to be “chosen” or “elect”; and 2) the Jews, though noticeably extant as a people, are no longer chosen and have not been for literally thousands of years.

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81 See the discussion of Machiavelli and Tacitus in chapter 5 of this work.
82 For an investigation of the meaning of Jewish chosenness in modern terms, see Novak 1995.
It is difficult to overstate how radical (from a Jewish perspective) is Spinoza’s revaluation of the concept of election. For, what otherwise might seem merely logical—banal, even—is wholly subversive. He presents a seemingly reasonable claim: we can measure the status of Jewish election by examining the overall conditions of that people. Hebrew election clearly ended with the beginning of the Diaspora, and—if we follow Spinoza’s reasoning—can probably be said to have ended with the Babylonian exile (the Second Temple period being one of significant diminution compared to the pre-exilic one; plus, it featured the lamentable ascendance of the priests...).\(^83\) Like Hobbes, Spinoza presents the history of the Jewish people as recorded in the Hebrew Bible as one of evident decline from the original Mosaic founding, thus distinguishing both from other political Hebraists.\(^84\) Perhaps ironically, this parallels the biblical narrative itself along with most rabbinic interpretations, wherein the newly homed Jews consistently fall away from God, with attendant reversals of fortune, and enter a declining spiral that culminates in the Babylonian exile.

Yet, Spinoza’s account is ultimately subversive of that tradition, because the Hebrew Bible significantly incorporates narratives and lessons of defeat into its central messages.\(^85\) This is not to say that Jewish defeat is celebrated, but it is nonetheless a fundamental feature of the Hebrews’ often-difficult relationship with the divine, and it never jeopardizes the status of Jewish election.\(^86\) Rabbinic Judaism is in many ways a continuation of this older tradition. Spinoza’s revaluation is not merely the rational recognition of the contemporary (and not only

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\(^{83}\) Nietzsche appears to follow Spinoza in *Anti-Christ* 25-26, with his account of the decline of the Hebrews from sturdy belligerents to a priest-ridden mob. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche was a reliable interpreter of Spinoza (a point I owe to Ronald Beiner).

\(^{84}\) E.g., Selden, Cunaeus, Sigonio, and Grotius.

\(^{85}\) See Aberbach 2005, 227-228

\(^{86}\) See Novak 1995. In Julius Wellhausen’s (Spinoza-influenced) typology, the Deuteronomic source for the Torah is principally concerned with clarifying the theological significance of the many calamities inflicted upon the Hebrews.
contemporary) fortunes of the Jews, but an undermining of a foundational element of Judaism. It
goes beyond textual criticism (with which the *TTP* is rife) to challenge the practices of diaspora
Judaism—above all the acceptance of separation from gentile communities without acquiring
sovereignty of their own—which practices form a response to a particular apprehension of
Jewish fortunes vis-à-vis the will of God. That apprehension is in turn broadly understood to
reflect a correct and enduring understanding of the meaning of the Bible, the Torah very much
included.

If the chosenness of the Jews lapses, why do the Jews still exist as a people
whereas other ancient peoples have disappeared without a trace? Spinoza has an
answer to this question: They stubbornly clung to customs such as circumcision
specifically for the purpose of keeping themselves separate from host nations.
Spinoza blames the Jews themselves for the failure to assimilate, and this failure
of assimilation has resulted in the collective survival of the Jews far beyond that
of contemporaneous peoples.87

Here, Spinoza in fact draws out a fundamental paradox of modern nationalism. For modern
nationalism incorporates memories of defeats and insists upon the endurance of nations even (or
especially?) in the face of defeat.88 Moreover, a status quo of statelessness cannot be taken as
dispositive but as a catalyst for action to gain (or regain) a state.89 But Spinoza all but insists that
the breaking of political power should put paid to such notions. The endurance of national
identity beyond or without political rule can only be owed to the endurance of superstitious
practices (e.g., circumcision), which lack all rational justification. Yet, the desire to form and live
under the protection of a state, despite being the sole rational cause of its constitution, does not

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87 Beiner 2011, 97. See relatedly Rousseau’s discussion in part II of his *Considérations sur le
gouvernement de Pologne*. For a discussion of the ways in which Jewish persistence was interpreted after
Spinoza, see Geller 2005.
88 Consider how memories of the Confederate defeat became constitutive of postbellum Southern identity
in the United States, or how the Battle of Kossovo was reinterpreted by modern Serbs.
89 The Palestinians since 1948 provide a particularly striking example.
appear to be sufficient in and of itself to constitute the people who will constitute that state. One might say that such nations are caught between two opposing definitions of election: the Biblical one, which justifies endurance even in defeat and calamity, and the Spinozan one, which justifies the acquisition of a state.\textsuperscript{90}

Insofar as Spinoza denies the uniqueness of the Hebraic example, one might wonder whether it occupies more than a circumstantial role within his thought. But by denying its uniqueness, Spinoza in fact elevates its importance for him, rather than reducing it. His denial of Jewish “chosenness” at the conclusion of chapter 3 of the \textit{TTP} is in fact the precondition for his treating the ancient Hebrew Commonwealth as the ideal model for a democratic polity in chapter 17. Whether this in fact amounts to an adequate valuation of the ancient Israelites is another matter. First, there is the anachronistic appellation “\textit{respublica}” to the ancient Hebrews.\textsuperscript{91} Second, what makes this example noteworthy is precisely its general applicability, which in turn means denying the chosenness of the Jewish people. Finally, Spinoza makes clear only a chapter later (in \textit{TTP} 18) that the particular institutions of the “Hebrew commonwealth” cannot at all serve as a model for modern polities, thus distancing himself from conventional political Hebraists.

Heidi Morrison Ravven claims that “Spinoza envisioned a modernity in which all enlightened polities would become \textit{Jewish}—in institutional and governmental structure and ethico-political values, and so all citizens of modern liberal polities would, ironically, be

\textsuperscript{90} Not incidentally, these together illustrate the most common and basic claims of contemporary nationalism: 1) that national groups really exist even in the absence of state institutions; and 2) that such groups can and should constitute states where they are lacking.\textsuperscript{91} See Gribnau 2014. Spinoza’s \textit{respublica} (frequently translated as “commonwealth,” à la Hobbes) is not Ciceronian, but rather functions, also anachronistically, as a stand-in for our “state.” He thus differs from, e.g., Petrus Cunaeus, who held that the Jews of the First Temple in fact did have a republic in the true sense of the term, featuring institutions that divided power in the interest of governing a common civic body.
enacting a *Jewish* identity—although of course not in name.”92 But this claims too much for any genuinely Jewish aspect that might be retained in the translation to modern states.

Fackenheim, on the other hand, acknowledges that Spinoza’s imposition of limitations upon the political authority of religion applies just as well to Christianity as to Judaism, but maintains that this “operation has the unequal result of making orthodox into liberal Christians while robbing Jews of every incentive...to remain Jews at all.”93 That is to say, by replacing universal Christianity with the even more universal religion of liberalism, Spinoza accomplishes the final eradication of Judaism.94

The exact status of the Hebrew commonwealth appears to be enigmatic. Spinoza must undertake a complex maneuver to fit this example for his purposes: he must indicate the particularity of only those elements—particularly the most concrete theological ones—that detract from his purpose; he must disclose the universality of those elements that serve it. In brief, Spinoza is compelled to dismiss or refute everything that is most particular about the Hebrews – that is to say, everything that is most important about them as reflected in scripture – save for particularism itself. “The project of political theology as Spinoza conceives of it is therefore conflictual, seeking to retrieve as much as possible from the historical religions for the very purpose of undoing the institutions their beliefs traditionally supported.”95

True, many readers of Spinoza have treated his more critical discussions as evidence for his preference for universalism over particularism. But while Spinoza is, for example, undeniably scathing in his treatment of the Pharisees, his chief complaint against them is not

92 Ravven 2008, 215; emphasis original.
93 Fackenheim 1994, 49. Fackenheim’s treatment of Spinoza in this work bears some resemblance to Hermann Cohen’s more severe critique.
94 One might almost arrive at an understanding of Spinoza’s thought by combining Ravven’s claims with Fackenheim’s.
95 Lorberbaum 2006, 207.
their ethos of particularism but rather their steady accretion of particularistic laws that only served to further separate the Jews from other nations without actually augmenting their power or restoring to them their state (the implication being that the subsequent tradition of Rabbinic Judaism is really a continuation of this legacy).

It is also true that Spinoza indicates another option: assimilation. But assimilation is not per se an abandonment of particularism. As Antonio Gramsci remarks, “For Jews, religious cosmopolitanism becomes particularism at the level of the national states.” 96 That is to say they would become citizens of nation-states that retain their own form of national particularism, which supersedes the attachment of Jews to their religion. 97 This is in fact Spinoza’s solution for all religious confessions, as well as the true import of his regime of religious tolerance. The particular attachments of members of preexisting religious sects are sacrificed upon the altar of nationalism avant la lettre. And religious toleration need not represent a significant limitation upon state power. “The very word toleration derives from the Latin for strength: to stand up, support, sustain. No surprise, therefore, that the doctrine of toleration could be incorporated smoothly into the political program of power-seeking absolutism. Religious liberality strengthens the state...” 98

But is not Spinoza the most liberal early modern thinker? More liberal than Hobbes or Bodin, more committed to the establishment of states upon the basis of freedom of thought, expression, and faith? And doesn’t this commitment necessarily militate against the closure and parochialism that nationalism entails? Here, one must distinguish between Spinoza’s aims and his expectations for free states. As Alexandre Matheron notes: “If the multitude desires to live in

96 Quoted in Momigliano 1994, 229.
97 Indeed, this was the experience of many Jews in World War I, where some fought on behalf of the Allied Powers and others on behalf of the Central Powers.
98 Holmes 1995, 125.
political society...it is not under the auspices of reason, but under the influence of a common fear or common hope.”

Certainly, Spinoza appears to doubt whether philosophy could ever fulfill the function of religion, given the impossibility of writing philosophy to be read by an entire people. This is not to say that religion is merely vulgar for Spinoza, but that it has a strong component that may be understood by the vulgar. The Rabbinic tradition contains an elite discipline of interpretation in the form of the Midrash, but philosophy is all Midrash.

Theocracy, then, is the closest to true democracy of all existing regimes, as well as the one which best satisfies a certain human need for imaginative expression that provides a (non-philosophic) comprehensive account of collective life. If, according to Spinoza, we were collectively capable of transcending this need, or of satisfying it with the austere practices of philosophy, then theocracy would be otiose. That we are not is the principal justification for theocracy. And in the absence of a meaningful (or, in contemporary terms, desirable) framework for realizing it, some mythopoeic equivalent will have to suffice. Our term for this equivalent is nationalism.

Conclusion

Given all that has preceded it, the final chapter of the TTP can come as a surprise (at least until one recalls the full subtitle of the work). This chapter can hardly be called an afterthought given how, more than any other part of the TTP, it links up with his Ethics (esp. part V of that work),

100 Smith 2005 argues that one can derive a very different, more hopeful understanding of Spinozan democracy via the Ethics, but admits that key substantive questions about the political community are not dealt with in that account.
not to say the clear centrality of its themes to his own life. How, then, to reconcile this powerful plea on behalf of individual liberty, with his hard-headed insistence on the importance of state unity and even something like nationalism?

As Spinoza makes clear, his ultimate preference for religious freedom is no less instrumental than it is principled. It derives from the sovereign’s practical inability to publicly control religion à la Hobbes. Spinoza’s solution is to effect a theologico-political situation that renders this approach superfluous. As Idit Dobbs-Weinstein notes, “the ‘secular’ civil state is never the overcoming of religion but its usurpation.”

Many of the more laudatory readings of Spinoza are premised upon readings of him (along with his reputation) as a democrat—a radical one, even. This he certainly is. But such readings fail to note two important features of his democratic theory. First, his account of democracy represents a radical break with the classical one. It must be evaluated on its own terms. Second, those terms are not necessarily the ones that theorists today would employ or endorse. It is difficult for us democrats not to assign some normative value to democracy as such. But Spinoza’s account of democracy is inseparable from his account of right-as-power. His democracy represents the collective will of the people, but this is most salient not just because of an independent moral claim that their rights must be taken into account, but also because of the fact of their aggregated power.

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102 For a not-wholly-persuasive attempt to do so, see Freeman 1993.
103 Gildin 1979, 383.
104 Cf. TP 3.10 on religion as but the “obligation of a private man” (viri privati officium).
106 Hence his claim in TP 3.2 that the individual has that much less right than the commonwealth as far as it exceeds him in power.
Moreover, because of the way that Spinozan democracy differs from the classical version, as well as the way in which his contractarian account aligns with Hobbes’s, he cannot and does not posit a set of existing political interests that joins the people together. This is not least the case because Spinozan democracy represents the totality of the state, rather than the many at odds with the few. If “the people” are the multitude, and the multitude is the entire civic body, then the political implications of class differences vanish.\(^{108}\)

What is left to bind them together? In Spinoza’s account, it was once religion, hence the theocracy-democracy nexus (as well as his significance for subsequent theorists of “political theology”). But, as he makes clear throughout the *TTP*, scripture is to be read in cultural terms, not theological ones. We cannot actually return to the original state of the Hebrews, and Spinoza does not actually write (or suggest writing) a new scripture that would recreate those conditions. What is needed is a recognition of the utility of scripture to generate precisely those cultural (or national) bonds that genuine religion did in the Hebrew case.\(^{109}\)

This kind of proto-nationalism is often overlooked by latter-day readers, not so much because it is clearly instrumental in character, but because of the end for which it is instrumental: democracy. But this presupposes that Spinoza—whose connection to democracy, even radical democracy, is clear enough—endorses it for the same reasons as present-day democratic theorists do. It is noteworthy that Spinoza never indicates a commitment to a vision of democracy in anything like the way that he commits to the value of free speech and thought—as presented in both the full title and the final chapter of the *TTP*.

\(^{108}\) In fact, the “Hebrew commonwealth” lacks a true oligarchic class, hence the substitution of the priestly class in many such accounts: Spinoza, of course, treats the emergence of this class as a late and wholly undesirable development.

\(^{109}\) This is precisely the lesson that many of Spinoza’s 18\(^{th}\)- and 19\(^{th}\)-century German readers drew.
More fundamentally, our embrace of Spinoza presupposes a shared understanding of democracy itself. But as he makes clear, his version of democracy deviates from the classical mode as well as the egalitarianism that underpins the modern one—even radical visions of it. But this egalitarianism is fractured in the Spinozan account by his pointed reminders of what actually animates the people: fear and the drive for survival. Even that commonwealth that allows for the individual pursuit of unimpeded reason (as proclaimed in the final chapter of the *TTP*) is not itself consecrated to reason.

Such commonwealths are instead bound together by what we now call nationalism: a mediated form of collective self-worship that binds the masses together and sharply distinguishes them from other collectives. The experiences of the past two centuries would seem to give the lie to the hope that nationalism (under whatever name) would be more well-disposed to reason than would the transcendentalist claims of religion. But while there is little in Spinoza’s brief on behalf of a free state that would seem to presage the nationalist furies that drove the wars of unification, great power conflicts, and decolonization, he nonetheless remains clear-eyed about what actually constitutes the sovereign state.

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111 Cf. *TTP* 20 with Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. 
Conclusion

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.

- Carl Schmitt

Concerns about nationalism’s power and dark appeal are not unique to the present moment. Two decades ago, Rogers Brubaker criticized the contemporary preoccupation with nationalism’s resurgence: “Nationalism is not a “force” to be measured as resurgent or receding. It is a heterogeneous set of “nation”-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available or “endemic” in modern cultural and political life.” The conditions for nationalism’s continuous availability in modern politics are most plausibly ascribed to the norms of popular sovereignty.

This is due to the way that the sovereign people is conceptualized not only as the comprehensive body politic, but also as a prepolitical entity that is necessarily distinct from all others. As this work has tried to show, one cannot adequately describe the movement of this idea of peoplehood to a central place in our understanding of political life without examining how early-modern thinkers made use of the Hebrew Bible.

Across a wide intellectual firmament, we can see constellations of ideas revolving around this central concept of peoplehood, some closer than others, without quite arriving at this thesis.

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1 Schmitt 1988, 36.
Democratic political theorists have tended to complacently treat it as the unproblematic basis of the legitimate modern state. Those concerned with the “boundary problem” meanwhile have not fully investigated its strange origins. International Relations theorists have assigned greater importance to concepts such as borders and territory, without investigating the key roles played by peoplehood and popular sovereignty in substantiating them.

Meanwhile, historians of political thought who have taken up the theme of popular sovereignty have focused almost exclusively on the Roman tradition, while ignoring or downplaying the biblical factor, which in turn precludes fully articulating how the political language that grew out of classical institutions was overtaken by novel formulations. Scholars of nationalism who look to the Hebrew Bible as a literary or cultural touchstone for modern nationalism overlook the role that early-modern political thought played in interpreting and modifying it, which leads them to read anachronistic political elements into the biblical text. The development of the idea of the people was itself an act of interpretation, and we who remain in a world of peoples cannot adequately think about our own situation without a clearer understanding of the process by which the most original thinkers—above all Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Spinoza—made use of the Hebrew Bible in installing this idea of peoples within the modern political imaginary.

Conversely, those scholars who focus on the phenomenon of political Hebraism are largely preoccupied with republican ideas, and more broadly they have too-readily assimilated it to an existing body of classical (and medieval) political thought and practice. For if the Hebraic connection exists, it really indicates another way of describing the distinction between modern political thought, broadly-conceived, and its medieval and classical antecedents, with their reliance upon Greek and Roman accounts of politics and law. Indeed, there is little trace in the
biblical narrative of “an autonomous or distinct political realm, nor of an activity called politics.” This does not preclude biblical concepts from becoming “politicized,” as some argue effectively occurred with the idea of the covenant. But metaphors have power over our minds, and it is worth thinking reflectively upon the ways that biblical metaphors shape our understanding of what politics entails, especially given their real distance from the “intensely political association” of the Mediterranean cities.

What then is the significance of the biblical element? Does it suggest that modern political life is in fact religious at its core, as this chapter’s epigram has it? This remains a common view, either that we cannot fully describe the modern order without a genealogy which traces back to religious origins, or that otherwise secular modern politics retains an ineluctable theological element.

I am not so sure. I myself am not persuaded by such accounts, nor do I think this work provides fodder for them. I do, however, agree that there are genuine lacunae in how we ground modern politics, and the problems of peoplehood are not small ones. It seems questionable, however, that “theology” is doing very much work with respect to the constitution of the modern state system or its leading liberal democratic states. Or, at any rate, what exactly is it doing? Is there a sense (beyond the allegorical or metaphorical one) that active concepts like state, people, nation, legitimacy, and so on have a necessary theological dimension, without which we cannot

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3 Walzer 2012, xii.  
4 Wolin 1960, 69.  
5 Nietzsche 1989, esp. the first essay.  
6 Nelson 2010; Kahn 2011.  
7 Obviously, religion remains very much with us as a powerful phenomenon, but I think it is not incidental that this largely takes the form of reaction to the status quo, rather than of a dominant force within it.
fully explain or understand them? And, if so, what exactly is it that makes them theological in the present context?\(^8\)

It is true that the account presented in this work complicates the secularist narrative of modern politics—what Mark Lilla calls the “Great Separation.” Indeed, a number of political scientists have recently begun calling attention to the place of secularism at the origins of modern politics and international relations (as well as the ways that secularist assumptions continue to inform how we think about modern political life).\(^9\) We might say, then, that the role of biblical interpretations in producing a key element of modern political life indicates certain limits of secularism. Specifically, it may be that—in the absence of uncommon historical and geographical fortune—we cannot on secular grounds alone account for the “legitimate” origins and contours of our national political communities premised upon the idea of peoplehood. Indeed, we apparently cannot even make sense of it conceptually. Certainly, this account indicates the difficulties that early-modern political theorists had in finding grounds for their political concepts like “the people” in either existing political practice or classical political categories. That idea required a certain “purity” found in the biblical account. The recurrence to the Hebrew Bible provided a way of describing and picturing this idea, which does not arise readily out of the classical tradition or observable practice.\(^10\) Even today, there is a strong need to make determinations about peoplehood by force or fiat—for the definitions of peoples are not simply “given.” It is for such reasons that contemporary scholars make use of the language of

\(^8\) It is an unfortunate tendency in the literature on political theology that it does not merely describe eschatological thinking but frequently exemplifies it.


\(^10\) As I have reiterated throughout, this does not invalidate claims for the instrumental purposes of employing biblical imagery during the early-modern period; it means that such uses are not only instrumental.
political theology when it comes to certain political questions; resolving them becomes a matter of religious or faith-like commitment.

This account does not, however, insist upon the necessity of political theology; for, the Hebrew Bible is not a political text in any straightforward sense, nor were the thinkers who I have discussed most extensively engaged in a project of deriving political doctrines from biblical exegesis. They were rather trying to find new (in fact, very old) imagery with which to describe a novel political form, which came to center around the idea of the people. But peoplehood itself is not a theological concept in any obvious sense. If anything, it would be more accurate to describe it in opposite terms. For while the original Israelites were given form by the reception of (literally) divine law, the people by itself holds no intrinsic “theological” significance. And this model emerges in the early-modern period as an idea shorn of its theological trappings. Many of the practical difficulties associated with it stem from the need to ground the idea of peoplehood in the absence of any observable connection to the divine. The decoupling of this image from the divine principle left it conceptually unmoored.

This is in many respects the answer to those scholars who seek to “solve” the problem of peoplehood—to establish borders and foundations to a concept that seems to have neither.\footnote{Espejo 2011; Stilz 2011; Abizadeh 2012; Miller 2012.} The biblical image of the people was grounded by the God of the Bible. As this image was repurposed in increasingly convergent ways by early-modern thinkers (to produce the idea of the people as we understand it today), it necessarily lost those grounds. For there was simply no plausible way to replicate the conditions described in the Torah.\footnote{This was so even for those thinkers who did not lack pious intentions (a description that would exclude the three thinkers discussed herein).}
This problem is perhaps most clearly present, for our purposes, in the work of Thomas Hobbes. Contemporary theorists rightly point to the weaknesses of the essentially ahistorical concept of the people, of whom far less is written than of the state that they themselves constitute. But this is precisely the point. When Hobbes recurs to an account of the people, he looks not to contemporary events nor to history but to the Hebrew Bible. History as such does not supply such images of peoplehood, and Hobbes (along with other thinkers who employ the Hebrew Bible in this manner) indicate an awareness of this problem through their choice of examples.

Democratic theorists have tended to have difficulty facing this. John Rawls, for example, has been much criticized for complacently presupposing a self-contained national community that provides the framework for instituting just laws.\(^{13}\) For such boundaries are not infrequently the source of real contention in world politics. Even where they are relatively stable, meanwhile, they were ineluctably shaped by warfare, “population transfer,” and the collapse of past empires.\(^{14}\) But this is really a problem for an entire tradition of political thought that traces its ancestry back to Hobbes. That tradition maintains a primary focus on rights, with the national basis for establishing rights-protecting institutions being relegated to secondary status.

Yet accounts such as Machiavelli’s that face the origins of peoples more squarely carry their own problems for us. Machiavelli highlights the created nature of nations. This is of course a central tenet of much modern scholarship on nationalism—so much so that it is inspired a number of influential revisionist reactions. But recognizing that states create nations or peoples, at least in some measure, only leaves us in a bind, as the supposed existence of a people with a

\(^{13}\) Cf. Rawls 1971, 457 with Beiner 2002, 195 and Canovan 1998, 32-33. Though Rawls would abandon many of his earlier theory’s premises, he remained committed to this one—see, e.g., Rawls 1993, 41.

\(^{14}\) These need not be distant events: the borders of states as dissimilar as Germany, India, and Israel have been shaped by them all within living memory.
reasonable territorial claim is our principal evaluative standard for judging the legitimacy of particular states. Because Machiavelli’s “state” is such a fluid entity, we can imagine the creation of a people as a political act in its own right rather than as a stable, preexisting, prepolitical, and legitimating entity. Like Woody Allen’s joke about comedy, most established nations or peoples can be viewed as tragedy plus time. Of course, the positions of many peoples in the world are not so firmly established. Just as no national question can ever be wholly settled, the emergence of new nations remains subject to concrete decisions and contingent events.\textsuperscript{15}

The fixed character of the modern state system constrains the possibilities of what Albert Hirschmann called “exit.” But as Machiavelli along with so many events of the past century remind us, exits not infrequently have the character of expulsions, or result in the displacement of a third party (or both).\textsuperscript{16} That is to say, the chain of events that we retrospectively link to the process of state formation whether in the 16\textsuperscript{th}-17\textsuperscript{th} centuries or the 19\textsuperscript{th}-20\textsuperscript{th} centuries is really the recurrence of a much longer chain that has no known beginning. In this way, we see the essentialist claims of nationalism running headlong into the historical claims of \textit{uti possidetis}.

Prior to the advent of peoplehood as the ordering principle of political communities (loosely defined), various ethnic, religious and kinship groups lived under conditions of greater uncertainty but also greater flexibility.\textsuperscript{17} But the same practices that have produced secure and commodious living for so many have also created pressure-cooker situations for others. As many

\textsuperscript{15} Beissinger 2002, 458-459.
\textsuperscript{16} These include, \textit{inter alia}: the murderous expulsion of the Armenians in 1915; the postwar expulsions of ethnic Germans from neighboring eastern European states; the mutual expulsions of Hindus and Muslims from Pakistan and India (respectively) during partition in 1947; the mutual expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Israel and its neighbors (respectively) from 1947-1949; the flight of the \textit{pied-noirs} from Algeria in 1962; the displacement of Armenians and Azeris from Nagorno-Karabakh in 1990; and finally the mutual expulsions throughout the Balkan Wars of the 1990s.
\textsuperscript{17} Albeit in a highly notional sense; between the development of agriculture and the late modern era, the vast majority of humans were not especially mobile.
scholars have noted, the intensity and duration of contemporary civil wars is partly owed to the unavailability of either exit or expulsion. This is conventionally attributed to the fact of established territorial lines, which is surely true, but it is really the national principle of citizenship in its relation to territory that produces this inflexibility. We can see this all the more by contrasting cases of homed refugees with homeless ones. The status of Mizrahi Jews after 1949 differed from that of Palestinians not because of territorial principles but because of national ones. To put it bluntly, the former group had an available home under a particular understanding of themselves as part of a larger people, as the latter did not.¹⁸

None of this is to presuppose the naturalness or inevitability of these particular outcomes. There are highly contingent reasons—some owing to the particular accounts of nationhood in these cases, others to the strategic concerns of regional great powers, and still others to local and historical path dependency—why certain groups were eligible for reception into a new nation but not others.¹⁹ “Nationalism as such is fated to prevail, but not any one particular nationalism.”²⁰

Of course, when we talk about nationalism we have in mind not just the set of political claims made on behalf of a particular nation; we also understand this to carry with it a set of cultural symbols which identify that nation and distinguish it from all others. Yet culture in that sense is not a feature of Machiavelli’s (or Hobbes’s) political landscape. It is Spinoza who has, via the Jewish example, thought more deeply than any previous thinker about the matter of differentiating one’s state from other states. Judaic religious law provides a model for the kind of comprehensive patterns of collective life that we have come to call culture. And establishing

¹⁸ The same applies to the postwar ethnic Germans in Europe: the settlement of millions of ethnic German refugees after World War II was not a border problem; it was a problem of peoples.
¹⁹ Nor does this presume easy integration even in broadly successful cases.
²⁰ Gellner 1983, 47.
practices of national culture is basically unavoidable for modern states—even liberal ones.\textsuperscript{21} This raises problems of its own.

In order to guarantee that the civil pact will hold, it is necessary to double it up with a religious pact, that is, with an agreement on those demands of faith which are common to all theological tendencies. A religious pact in turn supposes some common bond of passion. Spinoza identifies this bond as patriotism. But the notion of a democratic patriotism would inevitably be torn between nationalism (the ideology of the divine election of a people) and universalism (the assertion of the identity of citizen and neighbor).\textsuperscript{22}

In other words, the identity of a people remains very much up for grabs. The absence of a coherent understanding of the nation in this tradition deriving from Biblical interpretation is not a bar to the flowering of nationalism—indeed it may have contributed to the flexibility with which nationalism has been adopted and adapted. At the same time, attempts to unambiguously define the particular character and form of a given people tends to give vent to aggressive—sometimes violent—passions.

Our own problem is that, in bringing to bear a critique upon this troublesome aspect of the people, it is not so easy to separate from those things we might wish to keep: the preservation of rights, the rejection of imperial conquest, the theoretical basis of distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate government, and so on. Even if many (a majority?) of political theorists insist on framing legitimate political demands in terms of the preservation and expansion of individual rights, this is \textit{not} how many engaged actors in the world today frame their own demands, whether made on behalf of Muslim minorities in Europe, the emerging Hispanic plurality in the United States, or any number of group actors who require something more than individual citizenship in a multicultural polity.

\textsuperscript{21} This is the problem faced in Kymlicka 1995.  
\textsuperscript{22} Balibar 2008, 119.
We democrats are especially stuck with the people, and with the parameters of the nation-state. This is both because it provides the structure within which democratic policies can logically be made (i.e., on behalf of a given people) and because, viewed historically, the democratic state forms a whole in a way that dynastic states and composite states never could.23 This grants the idea of the peoplehood a twofold character which can be described as follows: membership in the people is the most successful guarantee of individual rights and security, and at the same time the affective dimension of that membership in a comprehensive body is also the source of enormous power for those states that might employ it efficaciously (if not always wisely or decently). The attempt to elucidate the emergence of the idea of peoplehood does not provide a solution to the problems delineated above, but it may help clarify them.

To sum up, taken together, the three thinkers discussed herein do not only indicate new possibilities for thinking about the historical emergence of nationalism; they also sharply clarify key problems for contemporary discussions, both normative and analytical, on that topic. Hobbes posits the bounded, unified community as the sole guarantor of individual rights. Spinoza affirms that only the democratic body can truly be called absolute and treats nationalist sentiment as its sinews. Machiavelli reminds us that the prepolitical entities that sustain political organization are themselves the product of political—that is, conflictual—action.

It is hardly necessary to view these thinkers as consciously engaging in a common politico-philosophical enterprise. Indeed, each has his own priorities. For Hobbes, it is the establishment of commodious commonwealths upon scientific principles of government. For Spinoza, it is ensuring a political arrangement in which religious passions do not threaten liberty

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23 Cf. Navari 2007
of thought and expression. For Machiavelli, it is animating the complex body that can withstand the vicissitudes of political life, principally through domination and mastery.

Might they share anything in common as a matter of substantive interpretation? If there is one common feature of their ideas as discussed in this work, it is that all three thinkers are deeply skeptical—even hostile—to established religious institutions and doctrines, yet each has some interest in appropriating religious trappings for the purposes of statecraft. None of this amounts to a simple logical precondition for the elevation of *raison d’état* over competing moral and theological considerations, but it is possible in hindsight to view *raison d’état* as conditioned by this understanding of state unity in which a comprehensive view of peoplehood became supercharged with religious intensity over time. Today we call this nationalism.

**Final Thoughts**

In one of his last works, Ernst Haas, who contributed a great deal to our understanding of nationalism, made the following prediction:

[S]ocietal actors, in seeking to realize their value-derived interests, will choose whatever means are made available by the prevailing democratic order. If thwarted they will rethink their values, redefine their interests, and choose new means to realize them. The alleged primordial force of nationalism will be trumped by the utilitarian-instrumental human desire to better oneself in life, materially and in terms of status.  

In other words, the atavistic impulses of nationalism are basically separate from those combinations of values and interests that provide the wellsprings for social action. But this presupposes that the norms and incentives of the “prevailing democratic order” are orthogonal to nationalism.

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24 Haas 2001, 23.
In fact, as this thesis has sought to show, they are in many ways co-constituted, via the common idea of peoplehood. As much as our political institutions are conceived and operated according to rational principles, they are sustained by a “nonrational act of political definition (determining who belongs to ‘We the People’).” There is, admittedly, no essential reason for nations to remain the repository of particular loyalties. But because of the way that our “values and interests” are bound up with such loyalties—and of the difficulty of decoupling them without real costs to what we seem to want—nations retain a privileged status.

Nationalism (and perhaps statism as well) is frequently viewed as either an ephemeral contemporary phenomenon or an unwelcome throwback from an earlier age. This is due to unquestioned assumptions about its historicity: nationalism has a historical beginning and thus an historical end. For some, it will or soon be replaced by something else (ideally, something better); for others, its time has already passed though too many political actors today seem not to know it. But one of the tasks of political theory is or should be to articulate what that “something else” might look like and why. The vagueness of claims for nationalism’s demise and replacement as an ordering principle of international politics is bound up with those unquestioned assumptions. If we understand nationalism not simply as an historical phenomenon, but as a constitutive feature of the modern state, one that is premised upon an abstraction—“the people”—its endurance becomes easier to understand. For we are still building our politics upon that same abstraction today.

Finally, this work may help clarify the intellectual rupture that took place in early-modern Europe. If Andreas Wimmer is right about the world-historical significance of the emergence of the idea of the people during that time, then it appears to be neither the restoration of a classical

tradition of political community, nor the continuation of medieval ideas and practices. That novel concept instead derives from an alternative tradition that draws upon even as it heavily modifies the Hebrew Bible.

And though scholars continue to predict or declare the irreversible decline of the nation-state, it is not evident that we have found anything to replace the concept of peoplehood in the way that it replaced the medieval ecclesia, which itself took the place of the cities and empires of the classical world. Until we do, it is likely that the need to define the origins and character of peoples will continue to bedevil both domestic and international political life for some time to come.

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