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POWER AFTER POWER: ARENDT ON POWER ACCUMULATION IN *LEVIATHAN*

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Abstract. Hannah Arendt claims that Thomas Hobbes argued for power accumulation, offering what she describes as the "blueprint" for 19th-century imperialism. Her reading is often criticized for being biased and hostile towards Hobbes. Yet the paper contends that her interpretation has one advantage. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes fails to deduce the need to acquire "power after power" from his theory of desire. Arendt bridges this gap by proposing that Hobbes tied power accumulation to capital acquisition: when power is seen as supporting economic growth rather than our natural desires and social ambitions, its accumulation can become limitless. On the other hand, the paper argues that Arendt overlooks the upper boundary of Hobbesian power accumulation. As shown by his discussions on popularity and colonial expansion, Hobbes thinks that both private subjects and states ought not to accumulate power indefinitely.

Introduction

Hobbes uses the English term "power" in at least two senses. Hobbesian power can denote political authority or sovereignty, especially when coupled with adjectives such as "absolute," "coercive," and "sovereign" (Hobbes, 1998, pp. 119, 122, 372). Power in this sense can be held only by the sovereign. It emerges with authorization; the sovereign wields authority over his subjects because they have authorized him to do so. In the Latin version of *Leviathan*, power in this sense is usually rendered as *potestas* (Field, 2014, p. 68; Hobbes, 1668). But Hobbes also uses the term power in a broader sense, denoting the capacity of an agent to do something that she finds desirable (for this kind of power, the Latin text uses *potentia*). Thus, in chapter X of *Leviathan*, Hobbes suggests that power consists of "present means to obtain some future apparent good" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 58). Examples of such power include having wealth, allies, or good looks, as all these things enable us to achieve something desirable. Evidently, it is not only the sovereign or the state that can have this kind of power. Hobbes argues that "it is a general inclination of mankind" to acquire "power after power" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 66). He apparently thinks that human beings in general desire forms of power (*potentia*) for their own sake, acquiring it seemingly to an indefinite degree. We as individuals constantly desire friends, allies, weapons, money, and good looks as forms of powers; and states tend to do the same.

The notion of power in this second sense (as *potentia*) was of special interest to Hannah Arendt in her interpretation of Hobbes. Arendt first presented a reading of Hobbes in the article "Expansion and the Philosophy of Power" (Arendt, 1946), later to be elaborated in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt, 1973, pp. 139–147). Following her reading, thirst for power is the central feature of the Hobbesian man and the cornerstone of Hobbes's political thinking. Furthermore, Arendt suggests that Hobbes's theory of power should be read as an argument for unlimited power accumulation in the state. Thus, in a recent paper on Arendt's take on Hobbes, anthropology according to *Leviathan* is presented as follows:

> "The individual as sketched by Hobbes is in a sense nothing other than an accumulation thrown back upon itself. … All action is reduced to amassing

> power. For Hobbes, power is a means of acquiring and securing goods in the form of property, thus becoming the primary goal of accumulation. Arendt emphasizes that every other ambition—wealth, knowledge, honor—is subordinated to the underlying passion for power in the individual who is guided only by private interest." (Redecker, 2021, p. 907)

But Arendt sees more than a theoretical description of human nature in Hobbes's notion of power accumulation. She claims that Hobbes's account of thirst for power also anticipates later political developments in European history. "Hobbes, indeed, is the only one among the great philosophers to whom the bourgeoisie can rightly and exclusively lay claim" (Arendt, 1946, p. 608). More radically still, she reads *Leviathan* as offering a premonition or "blueprint" (Arendt, 1946, p. 612) for the power accumulation process unleashed in late 19th-century imperialism (i.e., the New Imperialism). While she does not take Hobbes to be an outright apologist for imperialism, she suggests that his views on power accumulation become intelligible only with the later expansionist politics of European imperialist and totalitarian states. Thus, she profoundly historicizes what is otherwise an ahistorical account of power in Chapter X of *Leviathan*.

The aim of the paper is to reexamine Arendt's treatment of power accumulation in Hobbes by addressing two questions. In Sections 1 and 2, I examine the reasons that led Arendt to recognize in Hobbes a precocious champion of European imperialism. I attempt to reconstruct her historical argument linking *Leviathan* to the imperialist potential of European politics. Then, in Section 3, I examine whether *Leviathan* really argues for (indefinite) power accumulation, first in individuals and then in states, and whether Hobbes's thinking is aligned with imperialist politics as alleged by Arendt. My answer is negative. I argue that Hobbes recommends that the sovereign should limit power accumulation in private citizens and refrain from amassing excessive power of the state. In the concluding section, I offer some reasons for Arendt's exaggerated interpretation of Hobbes's doctrine of power.

Arendt on New Imperialism

Arendt's approach to New Imperialism relies on exemplary figures. She examines Cecil Rhodes as the embodiment of imperial thirst for power, citing his annoyance over "not being able to annex the planets" (Arendt, 1973, pp. 124, 147). In Kipling's literature, she recognizes the adventurism that made Imperialism attractive for young Europeans of the late 19th century (Arendt, 1950, p. 304). And in T. E. Lawrence, she finds the underside of the imperial character: guilt, camaraderie with the subjugated peoples, and the desire for self-effacement (Arendt, 1950, p. 314).

Among the heralds of the imperialist spirit, she counts Thomas Hobbes (Arendt, 1946, p. 609). How does Hobbes, a 17th-century thinker, belong in the

company of 19th-century adventurers? Arendt does not think that Hobbes—a lifelong tutor and scholar, often boasting of his own lack of courage—personally foreshadows the imperialist character. Rather, she recognizes an imperialist strand in his thought. There is an association between Hobbes's theory of power and late-19th-century imperialism. As will become clear, this association rests on the idea of unchecked power accumulation. According to Arendt, Hobbes proposed a novel analysis of power accumulation that is not limited by any definite goal (such as a military conquest of a coveted territory), but is rather limitless; centuries later, Hobbes's vision materialized in the unchecked expansionist politics of New Imperialism. We will first examine her narrative of the driving reasons for New Imperialism; the next section will see how this narrative fits the alleged Hobbesian theory of power.

Arendt begins her analysis by noting that, in the 1870s, European bourgeois financiers had no profitable investment opportunities left in their home countries. They could no longer profitably lend money to governments as taxes had secured regular income for European states. Additionally, national economies were too constrained to provide sufficient returns. Thus, they had in their hands what Arendt describes as immense "superfluous wealth" (Arendt, 1946, p. 604), echoing J. A. Hobson's and Lenin's earlier analyses of "surplus capital."[2] Their only option was to invest it abroad. But the endeavors in Africa and Asia were too risky without protection of the state. Thus, to back their capital investments abroad, European countries started to export their military and police forces to foreign territories, launching what is now known as New Imperialism—and paving the way for the thirst for power embodied in figures such as Cecil Rhodes.

For Arendt, this narrative holds two important points. The first concerns the novelty of late-19th-century imperialism. In earlier empires, the growth of "[the] body politic beyond the limits of its territory had so far taken two forms: it was either conquest followed by incorporation; or it was colonization. In the latter case, the body politic was not expanded but transplanted; its result was the founding of a new people that ultimately would aspire to independence from the mother country" (Arendt, 1946, p. 602).

In both cases, the expansion was primarily political, through either enlarging the frontiers of the empire or setting up a new community. The novelty of late-19th-century imperialism, for Arendt, was that it subordinated political expansion to economic growth. First came the drive for "unending permanent accumulation of money that begets more money" (Arendt, 1946, p. 607). The governments responded accordingly. To support economic interests, they exported

[2] "Overproduction in the sense of an excessive manufacturing plant, and surplus capital which could not find sound investments within the country, forced Great Britain, Germany, Holland, France to place larger and larger portions of their economic resources outside the area of their present political domain, and then stimulate a policy of political expansion so as to take in the new areas" (Hobson, 2018, p. 80).

state forces to the territories targeted by investors. Hence, following Arendt's analysis, the goal of New Imperialism was not the expansion of political community per se. Rather, the export of state forces was only a means for ensuring economic growth. In a prior analysis, J. A. Hobson had similarly concluded that "[I]mperialism, as we see, implies the use of the machinery of government by private interests, mainly capitalists, to secure for them economic gains outside their country" (Hobson, 2018, p. 94).

The second point of the analysis—which helps Arendt link New Imperialism to Hobbes—is that New Imperialism made unlimited state expansion possible. When exported abroad, state forces such as the police, judiciary, and administrative apparatus ceased to function as political institutions. They no longer served to uphold civil peace or enforce law, which are political goals. Rather, they began to serve as a means of overwhelming native populations and outcompeting other European empires. They turned into power reserves. Thus, "[P]ower became the essence of political action and the political thought when it was separated from the political community which it should serve" (Arendt, 1946, p. 608).[3] This dramatically changed the nature of state forces. So long as they carried out political functions such as upholding civil peace, there was a natural limit to their expansion. No matter how large a state was, it needed a limited number of police to ensure peace at home. However, once the imperial state began to export its forces to ensure economic growth, there was no longer any boundary to the expansion of state forces—for there was no boundary to economic growth either. Serving economic growth unleashed limitless expansion of the state.

Arendt on Hobbes

How is Hobbes relevant to this narrative? Arendt thinks that there is an association between New Imperialism and Hobbes's theory of power, which primarily relates to the idea of power accumulation. By putting state forces in the service of enabling economic growth, imperialism seemingly unleashed their unlimited growth. Similarly, Hobbes claims that accumulating power is a major feature of human life. In a remarkable line previously quoted in the Introduction—which also forms the cornerstone of Arendt's interpretation—Hobbes writes: "I put for a general inclination of mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceases only in death" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 66).[4]

[3] One should keep in mind that in 1946, Arendt had not yet developed her characteristic concept of power as opposed to strength (Arendt, 1998, p. 201). I briefly comment upon this in the concluding section.

[4] In a 1946 essay, Arendt misquotes Hobbes, putting "life" instead of "a general inclination of mankind" (Arendt, 1946, p. 610). In addition to this line, the text cites the following passages from *Leviathan:* "Reason … is nothing but Reckoning" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 28); "A free

For Arendt, this claim is significant because it rests on a hidden assumption that is not clearly stated in Hobbes's text. How does Hobbes ground the idea that people tend to accumulate power after power? At first sight, power accumulation seems to follow directly from Hobbes's theory of desire. In a preceding discussion, he argues that we are subject to a constant influx of new desires. "Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 65). We quench our thirst—and after a brief respite, we become restless anew, desiring food, shelter, or human companionship. Hence, we can never satisfy our appetites definitively. Rather than being a permanent state of bliss, happiness is a recurring cycle of desires and their fulfillment. And since we desire one object after another, we must also perpetually acquire new powers that help us acquire these objects.[5] We must procure means such as tools, money, and social prestige to get the food, shelter, and companionship we want. Thus, Hobbes's reasoning seems to proceed as follows:

Perpetual influx of desires → Perpetual acquisition of objects
→ Perpetual power accumulation

However, this reasoning is incomplete and needs additional suppositions. To see why that is, consider the following objection. For the fulfillment of our daily desires, we do not need to constantly acquire new objects. It is true that our natural desire for sleep arises each night. But to satisfy it, we do not acquire a new object each time we become tired. Having an apartment—or as much as a bedroom—will enable us to satisfy it night after night. Even in the case of desires that do require a new object each time they arise (e.g., hunger), we can perpetually acquire the desired objects using a fixed quantity of power. For example, having a source of income, which counts among Hobbesian powers, will enable us to acquire food perpetually. Thus, it appears that our ever-emerging desires can be satisfied by (1) permanent objects in our possession and by (2) objects of daily

subject, a free will … (are) words without meaning; that is to say, absurd" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 29); "the value, or worth of a man, is as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 59); "honour consisteth only in the opinion of power" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 62); "Good fortune (if lasting) is honourable" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 61); all passions "may be reduced to the first, that is desire of power" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 48); "felicity of this life consisteth … in a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 65). The last line is misquoted in Arendt's text to read: "Felicity of this life consisteth not in the desire from one object to another."

[5] Note that, for Hobbes, having a desire to do X is the same as being sufficiently motivated to do X: "When desiring, one can, in truth, be free *to act*; one cannot, however, be free to *desire*" (Hobbes, 1978, p. 46). For an agent to act upon a desire, all that is needed is her power to act upon it in the physical world—and not the approval of her will, which for Hobbes is a nonsensical conception. The Hobbesian desire is hence closer to what we usually call need. I thank a reviewer for reminding me to clarify this issue.

consumption that we acquire using a fixed amount of power.[6] It seems, then, that Hobbes commits a non sequitur. The fact that we perpetually experience new desires does not entail that we must constantly acquire new powers. There is a gap between what our desires demand and Hobbes's thesis on unlimited power accumulation.

It is on this point that Arendt's reading comes into play. When Hobbes claims that our desire moves from one object to another and that we are forced to seek power after power, he does not describe the fulfillment of the desires we experience as embodied beings, e.g., hunger or lust. Nor does he refer to more complex social needs, such as the desire for recognition. Instead, Arendt contends, Hobbes describes capital accumulation:

> "Since Hobbes was a philosopher, he could already detect in the rise of the bourgeoisie all those anti-traditionalist qualities of the new class … The so-called accumulation of capital which gave birth to the bourgeoisie changed the very conception of property and wealth: they were no longer considered to be the results of accumulation and acquisition but their beginnings; wealth became a never-ending process of getting wealthier. The classification of the bourgeoisie as an owning class is only superficially correct, for a characteristic of this class has been that everybody could belong to it who conceived of life as a process of perpetually becoming wealthier, and considered money as something sacrosanct which under no circumstances should be a mere commodity for consumption." (Arendt, 1973, pp. 144–145)[7]

Hobbesian felicity, following Arendt, is thus not a rhythmical process of satisfying our daily human needs. It is the thrill of an investor, or an "adventurer" in Hobbes's terminology, who acquires new assets only to sell them later at a profit, in a perpetual process of capital accumulation. Unlike our natural desires that are limited by our capacity to use and consume objects, capital accumulation has no upper boundary. We can quench our thirst by drinking a glass of water or satisfy our need for shelter by acquiring a safe home, but there is no amount of capital

[6] The groundlessness of Hobbesian power accumulation led Leo Strauss to distinguish between rational and irrational (deriving from vanity) striving after power: "We here clearly see that rational permissible striving after power is itself finite. The man guided by it would remain 'within modest bounds', would 'be content with a moderate power'. Only the unpermissible, irrational, lustful striving after power is infinite" (Strauss, 1996, p. 11).

[7] For a similar point, see the German version of Arendt's 1946 essay: "Die Bezeichnung der Bourgeoisie als einer besitzenden Klasse ist nur in einem oberflächlichen Sinne zutreffend; es hat sich herausgestellt, daß nicht jeder zu ihr gehörte, der Besitz hatte, aber daß jeder in ihr willkommen war, der den Prozeß der Akkumulation des Besitzes mitmachen wollte und konnte. Und dies hieß, Geld unter keinen Umständen als ein Mittel der Konsumption zu betrachten und auf keinen Fall seinen Besitz einfach zu verzehren" (quoted in Redecker, 2021, p. 904). Arendt retains this reading in *The Human Condition*, speaking of "a society relentlessly engaged in a process of acquisition, as in Hobbes" (Arendt, 1998, p. 31).

that we would recognize as sufficient. Its accumulation proceeds indefinitely.[8] Now, *this* understanding of Hobbesian felicity indeed entails constant power accumulation. To acquire object after object, the adventurer—or the bourgeois investor—needs an ever-growing power network. He must accumulate associates, manpower, armed protection for his ships, letters patent, and political allies (to use examples from Hobbes's time). Once power accumulation is tied to capital accumulation, it is also without an upper boundary. Following Arendt's suggestion, we can now rewrite Hobbes's inference as follows:

Perpetual need for capital accumulation → Perpetual acquisition of objects → Perpetual power accumulation

This is no longer a non sequitur. A perpetual need for capital accumulation does entail perpetual acquisition of objects and, therefore, perpetual power accumulation. Thus, following Arendt, the need for constant capital accumulation is the hidden supposition in Hobbes's theory of power. Also, the analogy between New Imperialism and Hobbes's analysis of power now becomes clear. In Arendt's analysis of New Imperialism, state forces were no longer limited to fulfilling political functions (e.g., administering justice) as European countries moved them to Africa in support of their capital investments, making possible their accumulation in colonial territories. Arendt discovers a similar breaking point in Hobbes. When we use power not to satisfy our natural desires and social ambitions but to uphold our capital accumulation, there is no longer any boundary for how much power we need. The "bourgeois man" can begin to acquire power after power.

The suggestion that Hobbes grounds his theory of thirst for power on the hidden assumptions of market economy was also later proposed by C. B. Macpherson (1962). For Macpherson, "the question is how Hobbes moves from the neutral definition of power to the desire of every man for ever more power over other men" (Macpherson, 1962, p. 35). His answer is that it is only "the possessive market society" that "meets Hobbes's requirements" (Macpherson, 1962, p. 59). So, Macpherson's reading is much in line with that previously proposed by Arendt. They both support the idea that Hobbes's theory of power becomes truly intelligible in the social context of competitive power accumulation.[9]

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[8] Again, Arendt offers a similar analysis in *The Human Condition:* "It is the permanence of a process rather than the permanence of a stable structure. Without the process of accumulation, wealth would at once fall back into the opposite process of disintegration through use and consumption" (Arendt, 1998, pp. 68–69).

[9] This is not the only way to ground Hobbesian power accumulation. In a widely read introduction to his edition of *Leviathan* (1968) written after his study on possessive individualism, Macpherson adopts a different approach. According to this reading, two key premises from which Hobbes derives power accumulation are that "every man's power hinders and resists the effects of other men's power" and that "all acquired power consists in command over some of the powers of other men" (Macpherson, 1985, p. 35). Hence, power accumulation follows from the fact that power is relational, forcing us to constantly outcompete other

The Limits of Power Accumulation in Hobbes

I contend that Arendt's reading involves a major flaw. As argued, she proposes that when power is tied to capital accumulation, its growth becomes limitless: "[Hobbes] foresaw that a society which had entered the path of never-ending acquisition had to engineer a dynamic political organization capable of a corresponding never-ending process of power generation" (Arendt, 1946, p. 616). The Hobbesian agent can then start to acquire power after power, indefinitely. But this inference is flawed.[10] The fact that Hobbes divorces power from satisfying some obviously limited goal, e.g., providing sustenance, does not mean that there is no longer any limit to power accumulation. What it means is that such a limit—provided there is one—is placed higher. So even if Arendt is right in arguing that it is capital accumulation that drives the Hobbesian agent to acquire power after power, she may still be mistaken in claiming that the ensuing power accumulation is limitless. Indeed, Hobbes affirms that power accumulation ought to be restricted. In fact, he offers two classes of arguments for such restriction, of which the first applies to private agents and the second to states.

Regarding the restriction of power accumulation in private agents, the case of popularity is instructive. In Hobbes's terminology, popularity denotes both the popular appeal and folksiness of a person, like populism in modern-day parlance. Hobbes thinks that popularity is a vehicle for power accumulation. He goes so far as to compare "the popularity of a potent subject" to "the effects of witchcraft" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 220), as both popularity and witchcraft grant us control over other people. Why is popularity so conducive to power accumulation? Let us

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people. For a different, more recent take on Hobbes's thesis on power accumulation, see Field (2014). For Field, there is one type of instrument that is universally conducive to *all* types of good, namely, social power. "In other words, although I may also desire linguistic capacity in case I should want to converse, grain in case I should want to farm, a lawyer in case I should want to go to court, above all I want the single thing that allows me to live well now and to be able to satisfy whatever desires may arise in the future. But is there a single thing that supplies this general power, a single means to this general end? My preceding analysis has shown that there is: for humans living in a social world, socially constituted power constitutes a general means to future apparent goods" (Field, 2014, p. 74). The point, then, is that acquiring more social power should be desirable no matter the good that we desire—we should therefore always strive for social power. Other modern interpreters ground power accumulation in our desire for glory (Birmingham, 2011, pp. 6–7; Keedus, 2012, p. 331). The variety of approaches shows that there is no trivial way of deducing power accumulation in *Leviathan*, as it does not follow clearly from the premises set out by Hobbes (i.e., from his definition of felicity).

[10] Arendt's reading has been criticized for other reasons. Her interpretation was labeled as "biased" (Straehle, 2019, p. 73), "dubious" (Arendt & Voegelin, 2015, p. 32), and "crude" (Bazzicalupo, 1996, p. 53). The main point of contention is Arendt's apparent hostility to Hobbes. Indeed, she goes so far as to suggest that Hobbes is not only a precursor to New Imperialism but also to 19th-century racism (Arendt, 1973, p. 157). However, there is no evident potential for racism in Hobbes (Blau, 2023; Sreedhar, 2023).

assume that the only thing I know about a person is the fact that she is popular, i.e., that she enjoys a good reputation among a significant number of people. Is it profitable for me to become allies with her? It is indeed profitable because a popular person has many other allies—and being allies with a well-connected person will enable me to access her network. Thus, I may reasonably seek her friendship to further my own interests. By allying with her, however, I also extend *her* ally network, making her marginally more influential. Popularity is therefore self-accumulating. The more popular a person is, the more likely it is that people will seek her favor, making her more popular still.[11] To extend Hobbes's metaphor, popularity is like witchcraft, conjuring up social influence out of thin air.

Naturally, Hobbes does not suggest that the sovereign should jealously punish every private citizen enjoying a good reputation. However, he does propose doing so when popularity is joined with other powers. Thus, popularity can become noxious in a non-sovereign military commander such as Julius Caesar during the Gallic Wars (Hobbes, 1998, p. 220). If the commander is popular, soldiers want to "recommend themselves to his favour" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 234) by showing courage and staying in line even as he punishes "the mutinous." The "love" that soldiers show for their commander is not dangerous in itself; rather, it resembles the Aristotelian love of virtue in another person. But because it is joined with the instrumental power of military force, it can drive the formation of a rebellious militia. Thus, popularity becomes "a dangerous thing to sovereign power," as popular subjects can challenge political authority by avoiding punishments (Hobbes, 1998, p. 208) and instigating rebellions (Hobbes, 1998, p. 221). Therefore, the sovereign should be wary of popular subjects, preventing them from overextending their power network. Otherwise, public peace is put in jeopardy. It is unlikely, then, that Hobbes would welcome the rise of Cecil Rhodes and other potentates of 19th-century imperialism. He would advise caution against them at the very least.

Popularity is only one mechanism of power accumulation in private agents that Hobbes thinks the sovereign should restrict. Forming defensive leagues should be prohibited as well (Hobbes, 1998, p. 157). Moreover, Hobbes thinks that the state should be wary of any independent religious organization, since it may grant significant power to the "ecclesiasts," i.e., clerics.[12] In fact, controlling power

[11] Hobbes thinks that all power is self-reinforcing as if by a natural law, comparing it to a falling object that will only go faster the further it travels (Hobbes, 1998, p. 58; see also Field, 2014, p. 78). The modern reader will likely recognize this idea as the "Matthew Effect." The classical reader, however, will think of Thucydides' suggestion that it is by nature of things that the powerful dominate over the weak (5.105.2): "For of the gods we think according to the common opinion; and of men, that for certain by necessity of nature they will every where reign over such as they be too strong for" (Thucydides, 1843, p. 104). I thank a reviewer for this helpful reference to Thucydides.

[12] "Secondly, that all other bishops, in what commonwealth soever, have not their right, neither immediately from God, nor mediately from their civil sovereigns, but from the Pope, is a doctrine, by which there comes to be in every Christian commonwealth many potent

accumulation in churches is arguably Hobbes's chief concern in the second half of *Leviathan*. As for amassing wealth, Hobbes recognizes the need for limiting the power of corporations, likening them to "worms in the entrails" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 221) of the commonwealth.

In sum, even if Hobbes affirms that man is driven to amass power after power and even if civil condition makes it easier for the individual to engage in industry, commerce, ecclesiastical politics, and other forms of gaining *potentiae*, this does not entail that limitless power accumulation in individuals is desirable for Hobbes. Ultimately, power accumulation in the civil state is self-defeating. By subverting the sovereign's authority, it threatens to draw us back to the condition of mere nature—in which all differences in power are cancelled, everybody having the capacity to mortally endanger everyone else, as famously stated in Chapter XIII (Hobbes, 1998, p. 82). The sovereign should thus control power accumulation in individuals, though without any hope of fundamentally stripping human nature of its thirst for power.

Now, Arendt does recognize that, ultimately, the Hobbesian sovereign takes control over power accumulation in private citizens. However, she thinks the reason the sovereign does this is to transfer their power to the state itself: "For a commonwealth which is based on the accumulated and monopolized power of all its individual members necessarily leaves each person powerless, deprived of his natural and human capacities. He is degraded to the function of a mere cog in the power-accumulating machine which itself is constructed in such a way that it can devour the globe by only following its inherent law" (Arendt, 1946, p. 613).[13]

According to Arendt, then, rather than restricting the power of private agents, the state accumulates it and reroutes it to the global theatre. Yet, this account of the Hobbesian state is mistaken on two counts. First, it misses the fact that the (Hobbesian) ultima ratio for controlling individual power accumulation is peace rather than the usage of individuals' strength in global warfare. Second, it does not consider that, according to Hobbes, the sovereign should also follow moderation in accumulating state power.

Hobbes advises imperial moderation in the remarkable Chapter XIX of *Leviathan*, setting down various causes for the failure of a state, likening each one to a sickness. He compares "the insatiable appetite" for new territories to "bulimia," and exclaves to "wens" (or cysts) in a natural body (Hobbes, 1998, p.

men (for so are bishops,) that have their dependence on the Pope, and owe obedience to him, though he be a foreign prince; by which means he is able, as he hath done many times, to raise a civil war against the state that submits not itself to be governed according to his pleasure and interest" (Hobbes, 1998, p. 459).

[13] "Hobbes's commonwealth is a 'vacillating structure' which needs wars and external props in order not to fall into the chaos of the private interests from which it springs. The perpetual war shifts from a war between individuals in a natural state to wars between states" (Bazzicalupo, 1996, p. 54).

158). A classic example—familiar to Hobbes—of self-destructive imperial appetite is given by Thucydides in his account of the motives driving the Syracuse expedition.[14] The idea is that giving in to imperial thirst will eventually lead the empire to become too large to govern, prompting its collapse. Thus, Hobbes thinks that there is a practical limit to how much territory an imperial state can reasonably control, warning against what is now called an "imperial overstretch" (Kennedy, 1987). Note, however, that the advice against expansion of the state is only prudential, as there is no superior instance that may oblige the sovereign to act in one way or another.

Thus, Chapter XIX directly contradicts Arendt's thesis on the imperialist nature of *Leviathan*.[15] According to her, "the Leviathan … is the only State that can overcome all political limitations which are given with the existence of other peoples and its natural end coincides with the limits of the earth" (Arendt, 1946, p. 614).[16] But surely, this account is hardly compatible with comparing state expansion to bulimia.[17]

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[14] See especially 6.42 of *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. In Hobbes's translation, the passage reads: "But the Athenians gave not over the desire they had of the voyage for the difficulty of the preparation, but were the more inflamed thereby to have it proceed; … And every one alike fell in love with the enterprise: the old men, upon hope to subdue the place they went to, or that at least so great a power could not miscarry; and the young men, upon desire to see a foreign country, and to gaze, making little doubt but to return with safety" (Thucydides, 1843, pp. 138–139).

[15] Hayes (1998, p. 61) notes the same problem: "Hobbes's description of war *as a last resort* becomes, for Arendt, his whole account of foreign affairs. Such a view disregards Hobbes's diagnosis that a state which pursues unlimited expansion is a diseased form of commonwealth, one suffering from bulimia. Hobbes explains that the wars fought by an expansionist state leave permanent wounds, and that a state is often better off without the dangerous burden of conquered territories as these do not become part of the body of the state but fester upon it like wens. This argument against war cannot be reconciled with Arendt's thesis that Hobbes is willing to pursue his assumptions to their most extreme conclusions regardless of the violence they entail. Rather, it provides further evidence that Hobbes counselled restraint and moderation against excess."

[16] Ten years before Arendt, Joseph Vialatoux also recognized (mistakenly, I argue) the potential for global domination in the Hobbesian state, warning against "Leviathan terrestre suprême et unique qui absorberait tous les Leviathan de la terre" (Vialatoux, 1935, p. 184).

[17] McCormick notes that Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss likewise miss that the prime reason of the Hobbesian state is protection, *and* that this reason can remain operative only by allowing a degree of individuality to the subjects: "Had Hobbes originally formulated the state in the way in which Schmitt and Strauss wished in 1933—by not granting to the individual the subjective right of self-protection, even for the sake of better insuring that individual's life—the logic of the Leviathan would have broken down. It is only the retention of some of that subjectivity regarding self-preservation that rules completely in the state of nature that encourages 'Hobbesian man' to make a compact and submit to the state" (McCormick, 1994, p. 641). In Arendt's terms, turning individuals to mere cogs in the state power machine undermines the ultima ratio of the state, i.e., individual protection.

Even when Hobbes does consider colonial expansion, he leaves open the possibility of eventual secession. In Chapter XXIV of *Leviathan*, he likens colonies to the children of a commonwealth. At first, they extend the original political community. But just as a child may eventually become independent of her mother, so can a colony seek political independence. In fact, some scholars read Hobbes as admitting a "de facto right of secession" to colonies (Ward, 2017, p. 880).[18] A colony is not a vehicle for power expansion or capital accumulation but a potential seed of a new commonwealth. Hobbes's vision of colonialism fits the world of Thucydides rather than that of Conrad.

Conclusion

In sum, Arendt is right to point out that Hobbes's thesis on power accumulation rests on an explanatory gap. She bridges it (speculatively) by linking power accumulation to capital accumulation. Yet, the fact that the Hobbesian agent acquires power after power does not entail that there are no limits to such accumulation. No matter what its driving cause is, Hobbes claims that power accumulation has an upper boundary. That boundary is set by considerations for civil peace and the integrity of the state. Arendt does not recognize these restrictions, reading Hobbes as arguing for unlimited power accumulation. However, Arendt was not alone in trying to find in Hobbes a precursor to 19th- and 20th-century power politics. In the 1930s and 1940s, a debate on Hobbes and totalitarianism was taking place in Western Europe and the Americas (Foisneau, 2005; Gangl, 2018; Soubbotnik, 1997; Tarlton, 1998). Thus, the Mexican philosopher Antonio Caso alleged that "the real author of the totalitarian state is the celebrated materialist philosopher Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury … who left to the posterity the conception of a social totalization in which the individual, the human person, relinquishes his autonomous will, his liberty, and simply converts himself to an element of the body politic" (Caso, 2016, p. 206). Similarly, the French catholic thinker Joseph Vialatoux argued that "communism and national socialism … are concrete manifestations of the totalitarianism that finds its purest theory in Hobbes's political philosophy" (Vialatoux, 1935, p. 209). While these interpretations do not necessarily overlap with Arendt's on a conceptual plane, their rhetorical import is similar, suggesting that Hobbes is a major precursor to the noxious politics of the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, Arendt's reading might have

[18] The fact that Hobbes was not particularly interested in the economic aspect of colonialism is confirmed by his discussion of Rome's government over Judea (Hobbes, 1998, p. 128). What interests him is whether Judea is democratic in virtue of its being governed by a democratic Rome (Hobbes's answer is no). Hence, the point of the analysis is the legal and governmental status of a colony rather than any opportunity it may provide for property and power accumulation.

been influenced by other attempts to ground the power politics of the time in the European philosophical tradition.[19]

There is, I submit, another reason that might have contributed to the exaggerated interpretation of Hobbes at the time. Hobbes is undoubtedly *the* theorist of absolute power. For him, the power of the sovereign should not be checked by any opposing force (e.g., a church, faction, or corporation). Yet, Hobbes ascribes the absolute character to power in the sense of *potestas*. It is political authority that is absolute for Hobbes, meaning that the commands of a sovereign carry a normative force that cannot be annulled by any other putative source of normativity (e.g., independent judiciary, religious leaders, private conscience, or scholarly authorities). The absolute character of power as *potestas*, however, is not equivalent to the idea of limitless accumulation of power in the sense of *potentia*. There is an upper boundary to the quantity of forces that the state, as the instrument of the sovereign, should accumulate, according to Hobbes. Should the sovereign overstep that limit, he runs the risk of destroying the commonwealth by overextending the power network. It is likely that the distinction between absolute political authority (*potestas*) and limitless growth of state powers (*potentiae*) was missed not only by Hannah Arendt but also by a generation of Hobbes's critics writing in the wake of the totalitarian state. In the 1930s and 1940s, the idea of absolute political authority went hand in hand with the limitless growth of the state forces, as both were materialized in the totalitarian state. Thus, it was easy for authors such as Arendt, Caso, and Vialatoux to read into Hobbes's text the idea of limitless accumulation of state forces. Indeed, in the presence of National Socialist Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union, any system of thought arguing for absolute authority could be read as championing limitless state growth. We have seen, however, that Hobbes does not fit this pattern.

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[19] Compare Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche from 1936: "Power itself only is inasmuch as, and so long as, it remains a willing to be more power. As soon as such will disappears, power is no longer power, even if it still holds in subjection what it has overmastered. In will, as willing to be more, as will to power, enhancement and heightening are essentially implied" (Heidegger, 1991, p. 60). Ten years later, in her 1946 reading of Hobbes, Arendt notes that "power left to itself can achieve nothing but more power" (Arendt, 1946, p. 607). Both Nietzsche and Hobbes seem to fit the pattern of an intellectual precursor to 20th-century power politics.

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Моћ након моћи: Арент о акумулацији моћи у *Левијатану*

Резиме

Хана Арент тврди да је Томас Хобс заговарао акумулацију моћи, нудећи оно што она описује као „нацрт" за империјализам XIX века. Њено читање често се критикује као пристрасно и непријатељски настројено према Хобсу. Ипак, рад сугерише да њена интерпретација има једну предност. У делу *Левијатан* Хобс не успева да из своје теорије жеље изведе потребу за стицањем „моћи након моћи". Арент премошћује овај јаз сугеришући да је Хобс повезао акумулацију моћи са стицањем капитала. Када се моћ схвата као подршка економском расту, а не нашим природним и друштвеним жељама, њена акумулација може постати неограничена. С друге стране, рад тврди да Арент занемарује горњу границу хобсовске акумулације моћи. Као што показују његове расправе о популарности и колонијалној експанзији, Хобс сматра да ни појединци ни државе не би требало да акумулирају моћ неограничено.

Кључне речи: Арент; Хобс; *Левијатан*; моћ; империјализам.