

**The Western Philosophical Tradition as the Prime
Culprit: a New Interpretation of Hobbes's Diagnosis of
the English Civil War**

by

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ABSTRACT

There is little question that Hobbes's *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* are largely responding to the civil conflicts that were tearing seventeenth-century England apart, but scholars disagree in their interpretations of Hobbes's diagnosis and prescription for the civil war. Complementing previous interpretations, my MA thesis suggests that Hobbes also traces the source of the civil conflicts to Western philosophical tradition (WPT) itself both methodologically and substantially. Methodologically, ancient Western philosophers do not start their ratiocination process with definitions of the terms used, and Hobbes argues that this lack of adequate method leads to all kinds of absurdities and consequently a whole false reference world. This critique is largely based on Hobbes's materialist accounts of philosophy and mind. Substantially, Hobbes suggests that Aristotle's natural, moral and civil philosophies in particular contribute to the chaotic opinions and the civil conflicts. After detecting this source, Hobbes undertakes perhaps the most ambitious endeavor to exorcise the demon of the tradition in Western history, by radically scientizing the philosophical tradition and establishing a science of politics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
DEDICATION.....	V
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. HOBBS'S CRITIQUE OF THE WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION.....	5
HOBBS'S ACCOUNTS OF PHILOSOPHY, SPEECH, AND REASON.....	5
HOBBS ON ABUSE OF LANGUAGE.....	10
III. THE GRECO-ROMAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION AS THE SOURCE OF THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR.....	14
JUMBLED OPINIONS: CHALLENGES FROM NATURAL AND MORAL PHILOSOPHIES.....	14
DIRECTED MINDS: CHALLENGE FROM CIVIL PHILOSOPHY	17
THE NECESSARY WEAKENING OR DISSOLUTION OF COMMONWEALTH	20
IV. HOBBS'S MULTI-LEVEL DIAGNOSIS AND ULTIMATE SOLUTION.....	28
V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	31
WORKS CITED.....	34

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Dedication

To All Those Who Love Peace and Care about the Survival of Humanity in the 21st Century.....

I. Introduction

There is little question that Hobbes's *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* are largely responding to the civil conflicts that were tearing seventeenth-century England apart, but scholars disagree on Hobbes's diagnosis and prescription for the civil war. Quite a lot of literature has been written on this theme of Hobbes's political philosophy, but little has engaged systematically with Hobbes's critique of the philosophical tradition inherited from the ancient Greco-Roman thinkers as the deepest source of the English Civil War.¹ This paper seeks to fill this gap by examining Hobbes's detection of this enduring Western philosophical tradition as the "prime culprit" for what Hobbes calls the "death" of the commonwealth (9).²

There are three main interpretations of Hobbes's diagnosis of the English Civil War. The first suggests that for Hobbes, insufficient coercive sovereign power is the main cause, so he prescribes a "coercive solution" by which the sovereign maintains peace through the threat of punishment (Finn 67). According to this view, because the state of nature is a natural state of war, it is in the people's interest to establish a sovereign who can "alter the payoffs" by making anti-social behaviours contrary to their self-interests; as a result, the "coercive solution" regards the codification and the enforcement of law as the most crucial factor in maintaining public order (Finn 68). This interpretation, however, is criticized by some scholars for failing to take into account Hobbes's attention to the impact of people's opinions on their actions, because some individuals are willing to die for transcendent principles.

¹ J.W. N. Watkins does mention it in his book *Hobbes's System of Ideas*, and a recent work by Stephen J. Finn also touches on a similar theme, but they do not give detailed analyses.

² Unless otherwise notified, quotes from Hobbes will be from his *Leviathan*.

The second interpretation thus contends that Hobbes provides an “ideological solution” to deal with the spread of seditious doctrines and opinions (Finn 68). Instead of focusing primarily on Hobbes’s philosophical work, especially his account of the state of nature, as the first interpretation does, this group of scholars draws more from Hobbes’s historical writings (Finn 69). For example, they point out that Hobbes’s diagnosis of the cause of the English Civil War in *Behemoth* is that “people were corrupted” by “seducers of divers sorts” (Finn 70). As Robert Kraynack explains, “In *Behemoth* corruption is the process by which people are indoctrinated by intellectual authorities (priests, scholars, and political demagogues) in the literal sense of being filled with doctrines and turned into zealous partisans” (qtd. in Finn 70). As a result, this interpretation holds that Hobbes’s prescription for the sovereign is “the neutralization of seditious and rebellious doctrines through political indoctrination” (Finn 71).

The third interpretation goes one step further by shifting the primary focus on doctrines to the broader historical conceptual world and locates the source of civil conflicts in what Hobbes calls the “abuse of language” (Ball, Whelan). As Frederick Whelan points out, for Hobbes, “disputes arise over differences of opinion, which in the last analysis may often be reduced to differences over the meaning of words,” and Hobbes actually “was the first modern political philosopher to become aware of the force of words and doctrines as political weapons” (60). Terence Ball even detects a “linguistic turn” in Hobbes’s political philosophy, as he thinks that Hobbes is “acutely aware that social and political reality is linguistically made” (739). As a result, this interpretation holds that Hobbes prescribes “a veritable conceptual purge, amounting to nothing less than the complete scientization of the political vocabulary” as the only solution to the

“conceptual-*cum*-political chaos” (Ball 754). The “conceptual purge,” according to this interpretation, is not limited to political and philosophical realms, but extends to poetry and literature as well (Ball 754).

These three interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and altogether they shed important light on Hobbes’s diagnosis of the English Civil War. However, my reading suggests that Hobbes also traces the source of the English Civil War to the Western philosophical tradition as fomented by ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and prescribes the radical “scientization” of the philosophical tradition as the cure. Even though this interpretation has significant amount of overlap with the above three interpretations, especially the third interpretation, its nuanced distinction makes it worth a separate elaboration. For Hobbes, the philosophical tradition itself is the “prime culprit” lurking behind the insufficient sovereign power, the spread of seditious doctrines, and the chaos of the conceptual world in early modern England. Ball and Whelan also discuss the role of the canonical philosophers for causing this conceptual chaos, but because they do not detect the precise source of the conceptual chaos, they too quickly generalize that Hobbes’s conceptual purge extends to poetry and literature as well. This sweeping perspective, however, ignores Hobbes’s nuanced treatment of different types of metaphors. As Andreas Musolff observes, Hobbes does not seek to purge all metaphors, but “excludes them from ‘reckoning, and seeking of truth’,” which belong to “the realm of science and counsel” (Musolff 12-3). In fact, among the four “forces which exercised a decisive influence on Hobbes before he turned to mathematics and natural science,” namely, “humanism, scholasticism, Puritanism and aristocracy” (Strauss 31), Hobbes condemns scholasticism and Puritanism but applauds the other two. It seems to be

precisely Hobbes's familiarity with these four forces, as well as the natural science emerging in Europe, that enables him to detect scholastic philosophy as the "prime culprit" that leads to the death of the English commonwealth.³ Therefore, this new perspective of Hobbes's diagnosis will complement and deepen previous interpretations: not enough soldiers (lack of coercive power) ← the sovereign's insufficient funds ← people corrupted by diverse ideological seducers (primarily religious groups and democratic parliamentarians) ← Universities that disseminate the teachings of ancient Greco-Roman philosophers ← the philosophical tradition itself (with the abuse of language as one primary consequence).⁴ This paper will elaborate how in Hobbes's view the Western philosophical tradition has both methodologically and substantially led to the English Civil War.⁵

The paper is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I will introduce Hobbes's understanding of philosophy, mind, speech, reason and explain his methodological critique of the Western philosophical tradition. Following this I will examine how in Hobbes's view the Western philosophical tradition, particularly Aristotle's philosophy, substantially contributes to the English Civil War by way of its dissemination in University curriculums and Church doctrines. Finally, I will review Hobbes's multi-level diagnosis of the English Civil War and his ultimate solution for all civil conflicts. I will also briefly mention the implications of this new interpretation.

³ For Hobbes, puritanism may well be the second "culprit" for the English Civil War (*Behemoth* 5; MacGillivray 189). However, a comparison between Hobbes's attitudes towards these two "culprits" is beyond the scope of the paper.

⁴ The sign "←" here is used to designate the direction of the causal links, and could be read as "primarily caused by."

⁵ By "Western philosophical tradition" I am referring to Hobbes's notion of the scholastic philosophy inherited from the ancient Greco-Romans such as Aristotle.

II. Hobbes's Critique of the Western Philosophical Tradition

Hobbes's Accounts of Philosophy, Speech, and Reason

According to Hobbes, philosophy is “the knowledge acquired by reasoning, from the manner of the generation of anything, to the properties; or from the properties, to some possible way of generation of the same; to the end to be able to produce, as far as matter and human force permit, such effects as human life requireth” (493). From this definition, we can see two essential characteristics of Hobbes's notion of philosophy. The first is the necessary involvement of reasoning, upon which I will elaborate later. The second is that philosophy is largely theoretical rather than practical, despite its final goal of serving human needs. Philosophy is therefore different from prudence, for philosophy produces “general, eternal, and immutable truth” while prudence is merely a “memory of successions of events in times past wherein the omission of every little circumstance altering the effect, frustrateth the expectation of the most prudent” (Hobbes 494). For Hobbes, prudence originates in experience rather than reasoning and is shared by animals (494).

Based on this understanding of philosophy, Hobbes criticizes the inherited ancient Greco-Roman philosophical tradition as absurd and meaningless. According to Hobbes, the natural philosophy of these philosophers is “rather a dream than science and set forth in senseless and insignificant language”; while “their moral philosophy is but a description of their own passions” (497). Hobbes especially rebukes Aristotle, not only for his natural philosophy shown in his *Metaphysics*, but also for his moral philosophy taught in his *Politics* and *Ethics* (497). The main reason for Hobbes' critique of these philosophers is that “there is not one of them that begins their ratiocination from the

definitions or explications of the names they are to use" (36). As a result, among all human beings, who have the "privilege of absurdity" due to use of speech, it is those philosophers who "most subject to it [absurdity]" (36).

For Hobbes, speech and reason are what distinguish human beings from animals. He defines speech as "consisting of names or appellations, and their connection, whereby men register their thoughts, recall them when they are past, and also declare them one to another for mutual utility and conversation, without which there had been amongst men neither commonwealth nor society nor contract nor peace not more than amongst lions, bears, and wolves" (Hobbes 25). The main use of speech, according to Hobbes, is to "transfer our mental discourse into verbal or the train of our thoughts into a train of words" for two purposes: either to serve for marks or notes of remembrance or to signify them as signs to each other (26). Hobbes points out that the invention of speech is "the most noble and profitable invention of all" (29). He argues, for instance, that "without words there is no possibility of reckoning of numbers, much less of magnitudes, of swiftness, of force, and other things, the reckonings of whereof are necessary to the being or well-being of mankind" (29).

Hobbes' account of reason is closely connected to speech, as reason is "nothing but *reckoning* (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the marking and signifying of our thoughts" (34).⁶ Because the ordering of names is a process of reasoning, Hobbes warns that it is extremely important to "remember what every name he uses stands for and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime twigs; the more he struggles, the more

⁶ In fact, as Hobbes notices, "The Greeks have but one word, *logos*, for both *speech* and *reason*; not that they thought there was no speech without reason, but no reasoning without speech" (30).

belimed” (29). The importance of defining names used could not be exaggerated, since “the errors of definitions multiply themselves, according as the reckoning proceeds, and lead men into absurdities, which at last they see, but cannot avoid, without reckoning anew from the beginning, in which lies the foundation of their errors” (29-30). Hobbes’ ideal example of science is geometry, which he famously praises as “the only science that it has pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind,” because “men begin at settling the significations of their words, which settling of significations they call *definitions*, and place them in the beginning of their reckoning” (29). For Hobbes, reason is acquired by learning rather than born with us like sense and memory, nor attained by experience like prudence (37). Hobbes further points out that “all men by nature reason alike, and well, when they have good principles. For who is so stupid as both to mistake in geometry and also to persist in it when another detect his errors to him?” (37)

To understand Hobbes’ contention that “reason itself is always right reason, as well as arithmetic is a certain and infallible art” (34), we need to understand his philosophy of experience and thought since Hobbes’ notion of universal reason is largely due to his rationalist account of speech modeled on his materialist account of mind.

According to Hobbes, every single thought or idea is “a representation or appearance of some quality or other accident of a body without us, which is commonly called an object,” and has sense perception at its root (13). As he says, “The original of them [thoughts] all is that which we call SENSE (for there is no conception in a man’s mind which hath not at first totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense). The rest are derived from that original” (13). Hobbes defines sense as “a phantasm, made by the reaction and endeavour outwards in the organs of sense, caused by an endeavour

inwards from the objects, remaining for some time more or less" (qtd. in Frost 503). The sense process starts, according to Hobbes, when the motions of external bodies press upon our sense organs, which do not terminate on contact with our body but transmit by means of neural impulses to the brain and heart, and cause "there a resistance or counter-pressure or endeavour of the heart to deliver itself" (13). For Hobbes, perceptions, memories, imaginations, and thoughts are all essentially the same thing: the motions in the bodily organs (Frost 508). Hobbes' account of thought thus closely parallels his account of experience, as he does not make clear distinction between the acts of perception and conception (Heinrichs 61) and sees thinking and experiencing involving nothing more than the compounding of phantasms (Heinrichs 61).⁷ For Hobbes, our knowledge thus all derives from our sensory experiences and appears in the form of phantasms.

As names are invented as instruments by people to mark and signify thoughts, and reasoning is the ordering of the names, Hobbes develops a rationalist account of speech modeled on the materialist operation of the mind. Heinrichs points out that what he calls the resolute-compositive method is the key to this connection between the two realms.⁸

In experience and thought, he [Hobbes] says, our minds compound individual phantasms into whole determinate images, while when we reason we compute the names of individual accidents (abstract names) to arrive at the particular names of

⁷ Heinrichs points out that Hobbes is not always consistent in his use of the word "phantasm." Sometimes he uses it as a synonym for "image," "idea," or "conception," and at other times to denote simple sense data such as color, figure, hardness, and other "representations" of qualities of accidents of objects (60). Here for the sake of usefulness, we may regard it as a set of neural activations ranging from a few to a large amount depending on the context in which the term is used.

⁸ By "resolute-compositive method," Heinrich seems to refer to the addition and subtraction of the reasoning process: "When a man reasoneth, he does nothing else but conceive a sum total from addition of parcels, or conceive a remainder, from subtraction of one sum from another; which (if it be done by words) is conceiving of the consequences of the names of all the parts to the name of the whole, or from the names of the whole and one part, to the name of the other part" (Hobbes 33).

bodies (concrete names).⁹ Moreover, just as any particular body appears as it does in sense or thought because of the peculiar composition of its accidents, so as well the determination of any particular name of a body is a result of the names of the accidents it comprehends. To be sure, this is the process of reasoning at its most elemental definitional level, but the process is the same as we move up the scale of generality to propositions, syllogisms, and demonstrations. Reason, therefore, as well as experience and thought is calculative. The only difference is in the nature of the materials calculated: reason computes names, the mind phantasms.

(63)

Since all human beings share the same sense organs and the same independently existing world, our reasoning is the same for all.

Based on such a universal account of reasoning, we can see why Hobbes contends that all philosophical controversies originate from wrong or no definitions. As Hobbes points out, “in the right definition of names lies the first use of speech, which is the acquisition of science, and in wrong or no definitions lies the first abuse, from which proceed all false and senseless tenets” (30). Because the inherited ancient Greco-Roman philosophical tradition lacks such definitions at the beginning of its reckonings, Hobbes points out that those who “take their instruction from the authority of books and not from their own meditation to be as much below the ignorant men as men endured with true science are above it,” since “between true science and erroneous doctrines, ignorance is

⁹ One fundamental principle of Hobbes’s metaphysics is that everything is either body or accident. Body, for Hobbes, refers to “anything subsisting of and by itself, independent of thought or imagination, and ‘coincident or coextended with some part of space’” (Heinrichs 57). In Hobbes’s view, bodies are real things and “they are ‘there’ whether or not we perceive or think they are” (Heinrichs 57). Accidents, on the other hand, are “the properties or qualities on the basis of which we distinguish one body from another,” hence not real things. They are the causes of all variations in our perception of bodies. Accidents thus are epistemological rather than ontological entities like the bodies (Heinrichs 58).

in the middle” (30). That is why Hobbes contends that it is necessary “for any man that aspires to true knowledge to examine the definitions of former authors and either to correct them, where they are negligently set down, or to make themselves” (29).

Hobbes on Abuse of Language

Hobbes then systematically categorizes four abuses of speech and seven causes of absurdities (27, 36-7). The first abuse of speech is “when men register their thoughts wrong by the inconstancy of the signification of their words by which they register for their conceptions that which they never conceived, and so deceive themselves” (27). This corresponds to the first use of speech as “*marks or notes* of remembrance” (26-7). The second abuse is “when they [the people] use words metaphorically, that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for and thereby deceive others” (27). It is worth noting that for Hobbes, if the use of metaphor does not mis-signify the word’s intended meaning, or mislead people’s understanding, it would not be an abuse. The last two abuses of speech are to mistake one’s will by words and harm others using words respectively (Hobbes 27). For the causes of absurdities, Hobbes includes the following seven types: a) not starting reasoning from definitions, which as we have seen earlier is regarded by Hobbes as the primary source of philosophical absurdities; b) confusing “names of *bodies* to *accidents*, or of *accidents* to *bodies*” shown in speeches such as “faith is infused”; c) giving “the names of the *accidents* of *bodies without us* to the *accidents* of our *own bodies*,” such as “the *color is in the body*”; d), giving “the names of *bodies* to *names*, or *speeches*,” such as “*there be things universal*”; e), giving “the names of accidents to names and speeches” such as “*the nature of a thing is its definition*”; f), “the use of metaphors, tropes, and

other rhetorical figures”; and g), the use of insignificant names, such as “hypostatical, transubstantiate, consubstantiate, eternal-now,” etc. (37).¹⁰

There are two things that are worth pointing out regarding Hobbes’ analysis of the causes of absurdities. First of all, although Hobbes includes “the use of metaphors, tropes, and other rhetorical figures” as a cause of absurdity, he does not deny the “legal” figurative status of them; instead he only excludes them from rigorous inquiries such as science and counsel (37). As mentioned at the beginning, this is a crucial distinction between my interpretation of Hobbes’s diagnosis of the English Civil War and that of Ball and Whelan. As Hobbes explains: “For though it be lawful to say, for example, in common speech, *the way goeth, or leadeth hither or thither; the proverb says this or that* (whereas ways cannot go, nor proverbs speak); yet in reckoning and seeking of truth such speeches are not to be admitted” (37). In fact, Hobbes is very aware of the different functions of techniques in different genres of writings. For example, in a good poetry, Hobbes thinks that both judgment and fancy are required but the latter should be more eminent; in a good history, judgment should be predominant; in orations, fancy is more important; and in persuasions, either judgment or fancy could be more relied upon depending on the context (55). “In demonstration, in council, and all rigorous search of truth,” Hobbes points out, “judgement does all, except sometimes the understanding have need to be opened by some apt similitude; and then there is so much use of fancy. But for Metaphors, they are in this case utterly excluded. For seeing they profess deceit, to admit them into council or reasoning were manifest folly” (55). Hobbes thus distinguishes “metaphors” and “apt similitude,” and allows the latter, which is close to present-day

¹⁰ Due to the scope and the purpose of the paper, I will not explain each of the causes. For more details, see Hobbes’s own explanations on page 37.

notion of simile, in scientific inquires (Musolff 14). Because of the nuanced distinction between “apt similitude” and “metaphors,” Musolff rightly argues that Hobbes in fact makes a defense of his own use of “metaphors,” as they would qualify as “apt similitude” in his terminology, which are intended to make his arguments more, not less, perspicuous (16). Conceivably, in Hobbes’ philosophy, fancy, which he equates as good wit (that is, celerity of imagining), is a kind of horizontal, heuristic connection in thought and imagination, closely connected to “the use of metaphors, tropes, and other rhetorical figures;” while judgment is a kind of vertical, logical connection in thought and imagination that relies largely on rigorous reasoning. Understanding this, we can then see why Hobbes points out that “there is so much use of fancy” to open one’s mind, just as his fancy of the machine-body metaphor vividly described in his Introduction of *Leviathan* intends. As such, Ball’s and Whelan’s sense that Hobbes seeks sweepingly to scientize language in philosophy, science, poetry and literature alike is an imprecise interpretation of Hobbes’s purpose.

The second thing we need to observe in Hobbes’ analysis of absurdities is his vehement critique of insignificant names and insignificant speeches. According to Hobbes, there are four general types of names and two sorts of insignificant names. The four types of names are: 1), the names of matter, in other words accidents of matter or bodies, such as “*living, sensible, rational, hot, cold, moved, quiet*, with all which names the word *matter* or *body* is understood”; 2), the names of some accidents or qualities such as “being moved,” “being hot” etc, which “are called names abstract, because severed, not from matter, but from the account of matter”; 3), the names of fancies derived from our bodies such as sight, color, and the idea, etc; 4), names of names themselves and

speeches, such as “general, universal, special, equivocal,” and “affirmation, interrogation, commandment, narration, syllogism, sermon, oration,” etc (31). As we can see from Hobbes’ seven causes of absurdities, the second to the fifth causes are results of wrong or confusing imposition of these different types of names. The seventh cause is the use of insignificant names, which are of two sorts. The first sort is the abundance of new words “coined by Schoolmen and puzzled philosophers,” which has not been explained by definition (32). The second sort is those combined of two names, “whose significations are contradictory and inconsistent,” such as “incorporated body” and “round quadrangle” (32). According to Hobbes, “When a man upon the hearing of any speech hath those thoughts, which the words of that speech and their connexion were ordained and constituted to signify, then he is said to understand it”; in other words, “understanding being nothing else but conception caused by speech” (32). Therefore, when people are saying insignificant names and speeches, Hobbes points out, they “have in them no signification at all, but are fallen upon by some through misunderstanding of the words they have received and repeat by rote, by others from intention to deceive by obscurity” (62). In fact, Hobbes rebukes these philosophers as mad, which is the symptom of excessive “passions that produce strange and unusual behaviour,” as he questions: “When men write whole volumes of such stuff,¹¹ are they not mad or intend to make others so?” (63)

¹¹ Hobbes is referring to the example of the sixth chapter title of Suarez’ book *Of the Concourse, Motion, and Help of God*: “The first cause does not necessarily inflow anything into the second, by force of the essential subordination of the second causes, by which it may help it to work” (63).

III. The Greco-Roman Philosophical Tradition as the Source of the English Civil War

Jumbled Opinions: Challenges from Natural and Moral Philosophies

As a result of inheriting the Western philosophical tradition shaped by the Greco-Roman ancients, which does not start inquiries from definitions, Hobbes claims that men are filled with opinions and beliefs rather than science and knowledge. Hobbes argues that one asserts mere opinion when “the first ground of such discourses be not definitions or if the definitions be not rightly joined together into syllogisms” (51); one asserts mere beliefs when one “takes up conclusions on the trust of authors and doth not fetch them from the first items in every reckoning” (35). Opinions and beliefs are certainly very different from Hobbes’ understanding of science, which relies on rigorous reasoning from names, assertions to syllogisms, and Hobbes’ notion of the second type of knowledge, which is the “knowledge of the consequence of one affirmation to another” (63).¹² In fact, Hobbes points out that people who lack science and knowledge are likely to blindly believe authorities. As he says, “Want of science, that is, ignorance of causes, disposeth or rather constraineth a man to rely on the advice and authority of others” (78). As we can see below, this “want of method” (Hobbes 36) in the philosophical tradition thus paves the way for the doctrines of the “authoritative” philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero.

What is the impact of this philosophical tradition on the English commonwealth? For Hobbes, not only do moral and civil philosophies of the ancients contribute to the disobedience of the subjects towards the sovereign, but so does their natural philosophy. He gives the example of the separation between essences and bodies derived from

¹² For Hobbes, the first kind of knowledge is fact, which is “nothing else but sense and memory and is absolute knowledge” (63).

Aristotle's metaphysics, which Aristotle calls "*abstract essence and substantial forms*" (499).¹³ As Hobbes vividly describes: "this doctrine of *separated essences*, built on the vain philosophy of Aristotle, would fright them from obeying the laws of their country, with empty names, as men fright birds from the corn with an empty doublet, a hat, and a crooked stick" (501). This is so because this tradition teaches that the human soul exists separately from the body, the bread can be transubstantiated into Christ's body, and "asunder" virtues could be "poured" or "blown" into a man (Hobbes 501). As Hobbes questions, "who will endeavour to obey the laws, if he expect [sic] obedience to be poured or blown into him? Or who will not obey a priest, that can make God, rather than his sovereign; nay, than God himself?" (501-2). From an outside and hindsight perspective, this doctrine of transcendent principle found in the Western philosophical tradition may have facilitated the emergence of Christianity and consequently the separation of church and state, which has caused many political conflicts in Western history.

If natural philosophy exerts its influence in "such subtlety in a work of this nature" (501), moral philosophy and civil philosophy then certainly are working in a more blatant way. For Hobbes, the moral philosophy from the ancient philosophers is nothing but a description of their own passions. For according to Hobbes, "The end of moral philosophy is, to teach men of all sorts their duty, both to the public and to one another"; but philosophers such as Aristotle "estimate virtue, partly by a mediocrity of the passions of men, and partly by that that they are praised" (*Behemoth* 56). Here I agree with Finn that Hobbes is referring to Aristotle's notion of virtue as a mean between two

¹³ This is referring to the transcendent principles of Aristotle's natural philosophy, which is contrary to Hobbes's materialism.

extremes, which are partly determined by subjective appraisals (Finn 92). As Finn further points out, Hobbes is concerned about the consequence of Aristotle's teaching for rendering the individual the private judge of virtues and vices (Finn 92). Hobbes acknowledges that the doctrine of private judgment of good and evil preached by "Aristotle and other heathen philosophers" has some validity in the state of nature, but it is false within a commonwealth since the law rather than private passions is the criterion for assessment (506). However, as long as this tradition is still embraced, Hobbes warns, men will "judge the goodness or wickedness of their own and of other men's actions, and of the actions of the commonwealth itself, by their own passions" (506), which would lead "to the subversion of commonwealth" (497). That is why Hobbes regards the ancient moral philosophy as "not only vain, but also pernicious to the public state" (506).

For Hobbes, it seems that the civil philosophy of the ancient Greco-Romans encourages the private judgment of good and evil in a manner that foment "the subversion of commonwealth." If we regard the function of the natural and moral philosophies of the ancients as a jumbling process for people's opinions and beliefs, and for giving authority to mere opinion, we could view the practice of their civil philosophy as a kind of dangerous channelling of people's minds. As Hobbes points out, single opinion or passion may not be very dangerous for the commonwealth, but "when many of them conspire together, the rage of the whole multitude is visible enough" (58). When individuals become the private judges of good and evil, by the nature of their great diversity in taste, "there is nothing generally agreed on, but every one doth, as far as he dares, whatsoever seemeth good in his own eyes" (497). However, when their opinions are oriented in the same direction, they could become politically powerful. That is why

Hobbes says that “though we perceive no great unquietness in one or two men, yet we may be assured that their singular passions are parts of the seditious roaring of a troubled nation” (58). To see how these “singular passions” may be oriented into a “seditious roaring,” we need to look into Hobbes’ analysis of the civil philosophy of the ancient Greco-Romans, especially of Aristotle.

Directed Minds: Challenge from Civil Philosophy

For Hobbes, the civil philosophy of Aristotle, which for Hobbes has deeply impacted Western political thought, is very pernicious for the commonwealth because it not only promotes hostility towards some legitimate sovereigns but also preaches a false notion of liberty. These doctrines have this impact because Hobbes sees them as deeply institutionalized in universities and churches in England of his day.

Hobbes argues that the dominant civil philosophy received from the ancients is hostile to some legitimate sovereigns. As Hobbes points out, “From Aristotle’s civil philosophy, they [the people] have learned to call all manner of commonwealths but the popular (such as was at that time the state of Athens) *tyranny*” (507). In fact, according to Hobbes, the word “tyrant” originally signified nothing but a monarch, but “when afterwards in most parts of Greece that kind of government was abolished, the name began to signify, not only the thing it did before, but with it the hatred which the popular states bore towards it” (507). This is in accord with Hobbes’ critique of Aristotle’s distinction between tyranny and monarchy, and between oligarchy and aristocracy: each pair is in essence the same but with different emotional connotations (139). This may remind us why Hobbes warns that “in reasoning a man must take heed of words, which, besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of

the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker” (33). Hobbes rebukes Aristotle for making the value-laden terminology available to the masses who are prone to private judgment and will use these terms for partisan interests. As Hobbes explains, those who are dissatisfied with monarchy call it tyranny, while those who “shall be displeased with those that have the administration of the democracy or aristocracy, they are not to seek for disgraceful names to express their anger in; but [they] call readily the one *anarchy* and the other *oligarchy* or the *tyranny of a few*” (507-8). In Hobbes’s view, this teaching of civil philosophy prevails because it appeals to the masses who do not want to be governed. As he explains, “which offendeth the people is no other thing but that they are governed, not as every one of them would himself, but as the public represent, be it one man or an assembly of men, thinks fit, that is, by an arbitrary government” (508). Understanding this, we can see why Hobbes believes that, under the influence of Aristotle, people readily regard all non-popular forms of commonwealth as illegitimate, “never knowing (till perhaps a little after a civil war) that without such arbitrary government, such war must be perpetual, and that it is men and arms, not words and promises, that make the force and power of the laws” (508).

Further undermining the authority of some legitimate sovereigns is a false notion of liberty inherited from the civil philosophical tradition. According to Hobbes, the liberty praised in the histories and philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as in various other writings, is not individual liberty but that of the commonwealth, “which is the same with that which every man then should have if there were no civil laws nor commonwealth at all” (161). Because for Hobbes, the individual in the state of nature enjoys “a full and absolute liberty” to do whatever one desires, “the same”

“absolute liberty” of the commonwealth thus means the sovereigns can do whatever it judges necessary and beneficial (161). This is so because for Hobbes nothing in the state of nature where there is a perpetual war of everyone against everyone is praiseworthy (161). “Liberty” of the sovereign as conceived by the ancients, according to Hobbes, would prevent war of all against all, since “peace may be secured only through absolute sovereignty” (Sommerville 247). Nevertheless, Hobbes points out, “it is an easy thing for men to be deceived by the specious name of liberty and (for want of judgement to distinguish) mistake that for their private inheritance and birthright which is the right of the public only” (161). This inclination is encouraged by authoritative philosophers such as “Aristotle, Cicero, and other men” who “derived those rights not from the principles of nature, but transcribed them into their books out of the practice of their own commonwealths, which were popular” (161-2). The natural tendency of people to mistake “liberty” and the authoritative writings of philosophers thus are mutually facilitating. As Hobbes points out, “because the Athenians were taught (to keep them from desire of changing their government) that they were freemen, and all that lived under monarchy were slaves,” Aristotle writes down in his book *Politics* that “*In democracy, LIBERTY is to be supposed; for it is commonly held that no man is FREE in any other government*” (162). When people’s inclinations are again “confirmed by the authority of men in reputation for their writings on this subject,” Hobbes points out, “it is no wonder if it produce sedition and change of government [in non-popular regimes]” (161).

Hobbes' critique of the teachings of philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero as the source of political conflicts in political communities that engage their philosophy is thus clear. As Hobbes argues:

by reading of these Greek and Latin authors men from their childhood have gotten a habit, under a false show of liberty, of favoring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their sovereigns, and again of controlling those controllers, with the effusion of so much blood as I think I may truly say there was never anything so dearly bought as these western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latin tongues. (162)

Hobbes discusses how the doctrines of these philosophers have been deeply indoctrinated in the people. He suggests that education is the principle means, as he says that "the instruction of the people dependeth wholly on the right teaching of youth in the universities" (256). Hobbes acknowledges that the university is not the author but the vehicle of these false doctrines, and that the universities have tended to be the site for the fermenting of rebellions against the sovereign. Because the university "knew not how to plant a tree," Hobbes contends, "it is no wonder, if they [the youth] yet retain a relish of the subtle liquor wherewith they were first seasoned against the civil authority" (256).

The Necessary Weakening or Dissolution of Commonwealth

Illustrating the consequences of the ancient Western philosophical tradition and the prevailing false doctrines, Hobbes spends the whole of Chapter 29 of his *Leviathan* analyzing the dissolution of a commonwealth. As we will see, all of the causes of dissolution that Hobbes lists are related to the ancient philosophical tradition which he painstakingly criticizes. This is so because the "want of method" of the ancient tradition

leaves people with chaotic opinions and ruined minds, from which grows the doctrines of some authoritative philosophers, including their hostility towards sovereigns, a false notion of liberty, and the value of private judgment of good and evil. The commonwealth is weakened and even destroyed mainly because of two tendencies that originate from the philosophical tradition: too much limitation on the sovereign power due to hostility towards it and too great a liberty in the subjects due to private judgment and interpretation. The authority of the sovereign and the liberty of the subjects are like a zero-sum game, a view that echoes Hobbes' central contention: "it is hard to pass between the two points of both [authority of the sovereign and liberty of the subject] unwounded. But yet, methinks, the endeavor to advance the civil power, should not be by the civil power condemned; nor private men, by reprehending it, declare they think that power too great" (3).

As we can see below, the first, the sixth, and the fourth causes Hobbes lists as weakening or destroying the commonwealth have to do with the limitations of sovereign power. The first cause for Hobbes is the lack of absolute power on the part of the sovereign. He seems to suggest that responsibility for the commonwealth's dissolution lays with the sovereigns because they are "sometimes content with less power than to the peace and defence of the commonwealth is necessarily required" (239). To maintain order and peace, the sovereign may need to take an action that has "the resemblance of an unjust act, which disposeth great numbers of men, when occasion is presented, to rebel" (239). Hobbes points out that sometimes kings transfer their power not from ignorance of the importance of the power, but "out of a hope to recover the same again at their pleasure" (239). "[T]hey [the kings] reason not well" in such instances, Hobbes says,

because their promise would be turned against them partly by nearby foreign powers who seek to weaken their neighbors (239).

Even though Hobbes does not say, it seems that the sovereign's want of absolute power has something to do with the philosophical tradition, especially the civil philosophy of Aristotle and others who, according to Hobbes, advocate a hostile attitude toward the sovereign. This may be best demonstrated by the numerous rebellions against monarchy in Western history, which, according to Hobbes, were most frequently caused by reading the books of those "democratic writers" such as Aristotle and Cicero (244). Hobbes claims that, "From the reading of such books, men have undertaken to kill their kings, because the Greek and Latin writers in their books and discourses of policy make it lawful and laudable for any man so to do, provided before he do it he call him tyrant" (244). He compares the venom of those "democratic" writers' books "to the biting of a mad dog, which is a disease that physicians call *hydrophobia* or *fear of water*" (244). Just as the person bitten by a mad dog "has a continual torment of thirst and yet abhorreth water; and is in such an estate as if the poison endeavoured to convert him into a dog"; Hobbes points out, "so when a monarchy is once bitten to the quick by those democratic writers that continually snarl at that estate, it wanteth nothing more than a strong monarchy, which nevertheless out of a certain *tyrannophobia* or fear of being strongly governed, when they have him, they abhor" (244). In Hobbes's view, it may be precisely this vicious circle that prevents the emergence of a relatively long period of absolute sovereignty in the Western history. For Hobbes, this could also help to explain why "the lesser cities of [ancient] Greece were continually disturbed with seditions of the

aristocratical and democratical factions, one part of almost every commonwealth desiring to imitate the Lacedaemonians, the other, the Athenians" (243).

From the hostility towards the sovereign also derives the sixth doctrine pernicious to the commonwealth: "the sovereign power may be divided" (Hobbes 242). According to Hobbes, the division of sovereign power is of two types, which may be well summarized by the Chinese idiom "Three Hearts and Two Minds" that is used to describe a distracted person. The first type is the separation of church and state. As Hobbes points out, because some doctors claim that there is more than one soul for a man, they also assert that there could be more sovereigns for a commonwealth, hence setting up "a *supremacy* against the *sovereignty*, *canons* against *laws*, and a *ghostly authority* against the *civil*" (244). Nevertheless, because the same subjects of the commonwealth could not be properly subject to two masters, Hobbes contends that such a commonwealth "divided in itself" could not stand (245). As a result, Hobbes points out, when "these two powers oppose one another, the commonwealth cannot but be in great danger of civil war and dissolution" (245). Hobbes traces the source of this false doctrine of divided sovereignty to the natural philosophy of Aristotle. As he points out, it is based on the separation of essences and substances of Aristotle's metaphysics that "when a man is dead and buried, they say his soul (that is his life) can walk separated from his body," and "they say that the figure and colour and taste of a piece of bread has a being there, where they say there is no bread" (501). "Being once fallen into this error of separated essences," Hobbes points out, "they are necessarily involved in many other absurdities," such as assigning places to these forms which seem to be real, and giving account how an incorporeal substance can experience pain and torment in the hell (502). Despite the fact that the

spiritual “stand[s] in the darkness of School distinctions and hard words,” which is contrary to the civil authority that is “visible, and standing in the clearer light of natural reason,” Hobbes contends that “because the fear of darkness and ghosts is greater than other fears, [the spiritual]¹⁴ cannot want a party sufficient to trouble and sometimes to destroy a commonwealth” (245). Hobbes attributes all this to Aristotle’s possibly malicious or misguided intentions, as he says that these are the results of the errors “brought into the Church from the entities and essences of Aristotle, which it may be he knew to be false philosophy, but wrote it as a thing consonant to, and corroborative of, their religion, and fearing the fate of Socrates” (502).

If the first type of the division of sovereign power fits into the “Two Minds” part of the Chinese idiom, the second type would be a good reflection of the “Three Hearts” of the idiom. This type refers to the “tri-partition” of the civil government. As Hobbes points out, sometimes a civil government is divided into three factions: one is the nutritive faculty with the power of levying money, which resides in a general assembly; the second is the motive faculty with the power of conduct and command, which depends on one man; and the third is the rational faculty with the power of making laws, which resides with a third body (246). These factions, according to Hobbes, endanger the commonwealth, “sometimes for want of consent to good laws, but most often for want of such nourishment as is necessary to life and motion” (246). One example for Hobbes would be how the need for parliamentary consent to taxation yielded Charles I inadequate funds with which to fight the Scot rebellions (Sommerville 252).

Besides the above means to limit the sovereign power, Hobbes also lists a third one: to subject the sovereign to civil laws (242). According to Hobbes, the sovereign

¹⁴ This is inserted by the translator.

must obey the laws of nature, which are divine, but is not subject to laws that the sovereign himself makes. Hobbes explains that “to be subject to laws is to be subject to the commonwealth, that is, to the sovereign representative, that is, to himself which is not subjection, but freedom from the laws” (242). In fact, as Hobbes points out, because this doctrine “setteth the laws above the sovereign, setteth also a judge above him, and a power to punish him; which is to make a new sovereign; and again for the same reason a third, to punish the second; and so continually without end, to the confusion and dissolution of the commonwealth” (242). For Hobbes, this doctrine of subjecting the sovereign power to civil laws certainly has something to do with Aristotle’s civil philosophy, which develops a tradition of hostility and suspicion towards the sovereign power.

If the above causes listed by Hobbes tend to weaken or dissolve the commonwealth because they limit the sovereign power, the second, the third and the fifth ones Hobbes includes in the chapter harm the commonwealth by giving the subjects too much liberty. For Hobbes, the second cause is the private judgment of good and evil, which he calls “the poison of seditious doctrines” (240). We have seen earlier that Hobbes vehemently criticizes this doctrine, but he never spares any effort to rebuke it again: “From this false doctrine, men are disposed to debate with themselves and dispute the commands of the commonwealth, and afterwards to obey or disobey them as in their private judgements they shall think fit, whereby the commonwealth is distracted and weakened” (241). Hobbes also analyzes how people later would subject private judgment to their consciences, which are nothing but their own opinions. For Hobbes, as Karen Feldman observes, conscience originates in consciousness, derived from Latin *conscire* –

to know (*scire*) + with (*con-*), which is by its “very definition public and shared among people” (24). From this origin, Hobbes’ notion of conscience inherits its inviolability and public character. However, as Feldman argues, when *conscience* is used metaphorically to include the private secret facts and thoughts of the individuals, it on one hand distorts the original “ordained” meaning of conscience, which is supposed to refer to publicly shared knowledge, but on the other hand retains the connotation of witnessing and the inviolability of the word (Feldman 25-27). In Feldman’s view, this is especially alarming to Hobbes because the people, who are always self-interested, would extend “the name conscience to private opinion in order to maintain it in the eyes of public witnesses,” and consequently “the commonwealth must needs be distracted, and no man dare to obey the sovereign power farther than it shall seem good in his own eyes” (241).

Also pertaining to “the fault of taking upon us to judge of good and evil” is the doctrine that “faith and sanctity are not to be attained by study and reason, but by supernatural inspiration or infusion” (241). This pretence of inspiration is the third means by which the commonwealth is weakened or destroyed. Because of this teaching, Hobbes wonders “why every Christian should not be also a prophet; why any man should take the law of his country rather than his own inspiration for the rule of his action” (241). Hobbes attributes this error chiefly to “tongues and pens of unlearned divines, who, joining the words of Holy Scripture together otherwise is agreeable to reason, do what they can to make them think that sanctity and natural reason cannot stand together” (242). For, according to Hobbes, faith and sanctity “are not supernatural,” but only “unobservable” to the many; nevertheless, they could be “brought to pass by education, discipline, correction, and other natural ways” (241). Hobbes hence criticizes various

Christian groups of the time, such as the “ministers of Christ,” who are “pretending to have a right from God to govern every one his pariah,” and the Papists, who hold the Pope to “be the vicar of Christ, and, in the right of Christ, to be the governor of all Christian people” (*Behemoth* 5). Recalling Hobbes’ critique of the division of the sovereign into two minds, we can infer that this third cause is also rooted in the natural philosophy Hobbes diligently rebukes.¹⁵

Besides these two causes that are leading the subjects towards too much liberty, Hobbes also includes the fifth cause which is individuals’ belief in exclusive right over their private property not only in relation to each other but also in relation to the sovereign. According to Hobbes, a subject may enjoy private right of property that excludes other subjects but not the sovereign, since otherwise the sovereign “cannot perform the office they have put him into, which is to defend them both from foreign enemies and from the injuries of one another, and consequently there is no longer a commonwealth” (242). This error is closely related to the false notion of liberty discussed earlier, since the people “mistake that [the specious name of liberty] for their private inheritance and birthright which is the right of the public only” (161). For Hobbes, these six causes are “of the greatest and most present danger” of a commonwealth, but he also includes some minor ones, such as the want of money for necessary uses by the sovereign, monopolies of one or a few private men, the high popularity of demagogues, and the excessive greatness of a town (247-8). Due to the scope of the paper, however, I will not address them here.

¹⁵ While the ancient philosophers such as Aristotle clearly favour reason and study over faith, for Hobbes, there would probably have no Christianity at all if there were no transcendent principles of the ancient philosophers. Therefore, the Christian doctrine is still indirectly related to the Western philosophical tradition, as reflected in the Church’s investment in Aristotle.

IV. Hobbes's Multi-level Diagnosis and Ultimate Solution

As we have seen, Hobbes traces the deepest source of the English Civil War to the Western philosophical tradition inherited from the ancient Greeks and Romans. This interpretation, however, does not contradict the previous interpretations. In fact, Hobbes provides a multi-level diagnosis of the pathologies driving the English Civil War, and issues one ultimate solution.

On the most immediate cause of the commonwealth breakdown, Hobbes thinks that the King lacks enough soldiers and enough financial means to maintain them (*Behemoth* 4). As Hobbes says, "If those soldiers [a total of 60,000 men] had been, as they and all other of his subjects ought to have been, at his Majesty's command, the peace and happiness of the three kingdoms had continued as it was left by King James" (*Behemoth* 4). The lack of coercive power, however, has to do with a lack of money, as few people cared about the causes of either side of the conflict, "but would have taken any side for pay or plunder" (Hobbes, *Behemoth* 4). This is a crucial factor in the King's defeat because "the King's treasury was very low, and his enemies, that pretended the people's ease from taxes, and other specious things, had the command of the purses of the city of London, and of most cities and corporate towns in England, and of many particular persons besides" (*Behemoth* 4). This analysis fits well into the insight of the "coercive solution" interpretation; however, one may trace the cause to a deeper level and consider why the people are so corrupted and who the seducers are. Hobbes thus analyzes the seductive role of various religious groups, such as the Presbyterians, the Papists, the advocates of liberty of religions, and the democratic parliamentarians. Because of the seditious doctrines promulgated by these diverse seducers, Hobbes points out that "the

King is already ousted of his government” even before they take arms for it (*Behemoth* 7). This reflects the insight of the second interpretation about the causal link between the seditious doctrines and opinions and the weakening of the English commonwealth.

However, Hobbes’s diagnosis does not stop there, because he observes a striking commonality behind most of the seducers: their education in the Universities. Hobbes thus starts to investigate the role of the Universities for the English Civil War and concludes that “The Universities have been to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans” (*Behemoth* 51). This is so, because for Hobbes to teach duty is to teach “the science of just and unjust ... from true principles and evident demonstration”; however, “the light of that doctrine has been hitherto covered and kept under here by a cloud of adversaries, which no private man’s reputation can break through, without the authority of the Universities. But out of the Universities, came all those preachers that taught the contrary” (*Behemoth* 50-1). As a result, it is through the universities that the clergy and the laity become seditious. Hobbes therefore investigates the curriculum of the universities and discovers the writings of the ancient Greco-Roman philosophers, especially that of Aristotle, as pernicious. For Hobbes, this philosophical tradition gives birth to two major kinds of controversies: one is “the hopeless incomprehensibility and contentiousness of Roman Catholic doctrine” driven in part by “its assimilation of Aristotelian teachings”; the other is the “subversive political doctrines” acquired by reading of those ancient philosophers (Whelan 64). Hobbes thus traces the deepest source of the English Civil War to the philosophical tradition inherited from the ancient Greco-Roman philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero, as elaborated in this paper. This interpretation overlaps to some extent with Ball and Whelan’s locating of the source of

the English Civil War in the public communication breakdown, as the conceptual chaos is a major problem of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. However, because Ball and Whelan focus primarily on the abuse of language and do not detect the precise source of the abuse – the methodological and substantive dimensions of the inherited philosophical tradition --, they overextend Hobbes's conceptual purge to other realms such as poetry and literature. Their interpretation thus fails to allow for Hobbes's delicate treatment of metaphors. For Hobbes, because metaphors and tropes of speech "profess their inconstancy," they are less dangerous and are not the primary source of conceptual chaos; the "prime culprit" instead is the ancient Western philosophical tradition which lacks precise definitions for the terms they use yet does not confess their inconstancy.

Based on this multi-level diagnosis of the English Civil War, Hobbes undertakes to reform the philosophical tradition within the tradition: by not casting away philosophy altogether, but making it more scientific and establishing a genuine science of politics. His ultimate solution for civil conflicts in Western politics is thus to have the sovereign "consider it [*Leviathan*] himself without the help of any interested or envious interpreter; and by the exercise of entire sovereignty, in protecting the public teaching of it, convert this truth of speculation into the utility of practice" (275). This means that the absolute sovereign will not only possess the necessary coercive power to maintain public obedience and tranquility, but also act as what Sheldon Wolin calls the "Great Definer, a sovereign dispenser of common meanings, a 'publique reason'" (232). Accordingly, Hobbes recommends a purge of the universities, which does not have to be a blood purge, but the sovereign "needs to be backed by an army or at least by the financial means to raise one" (MacGillivray 193).

V. Conclusion and Implications

To sum up, we have seen that Hobbes traces the deepest source of the English Civil War to the ancient Greco-Roman Western philosophical tradition, especially to Aristotle. The first problem with the tradition is its lack of methodology required by the nature of philosophy. As we have seen, this methodological critique is consistent with Hobbes's philosophy of mind and speech. Because the Western philosophical tradition that takes shape after Plato and Aristotle is primarily a logo-centered tradition, it attaches unproportional importance to speech and reason. For Hobbes, because all people reason alike due to a rationalist account of speech modeled on the materialist account of mind, absurdities have been largely derived from abuse of language, especially a lack of definitions for the terms used in the ratiocination. Definition of the terms used in the philosophical process hence acquires an unprecedented important position; nevertheless, few Western philosophers have emphasized the importance of definition, nor have they started their ratiocination with terms clearly defined. The result, in Hobbes's eyes, has been a conceptual chaos. This chaos permeated the whole ideational world – primarily through Aristotle's natural, moral and political philosophies institutionalized in universities – and consequently led to the civil conflicts. Hobbes's critique of Aristotle's natural philosophy is mainly for its role in supporting Church authority and the religious conflicts, while his critique of Aristotle's moral philosophy is largely due to the resulting privatization of judgment for good and evils. Regarding Aristotle's political philosophy, Hobbes mainly criticizes its democratic implications. Hobbes's critique of Aristotle's philosophy may not be very convincing but as Finn points out, by doing so "Hobbes sheds light on the mystery of how the classical philosophers promote democratic ideas"

(92). Indeed, future scholars may applaud Hobbes for the perhaps most ambitious and creative endeavor to exorcise the demon of the Western philosophical tradition.

This new perspective on Hobbes's diagnosis of the English Civil War has several important implications. First of all, it could help to bring a unity to different branches of Hobbes's philosophy. The "problem of unity" has puzzled many scholars as they debate whether it is primarily Hobbes' natural philosophy that influences his political philosophy or the other way round (Finn 5). From the perspective of this paper, the natural and political philosophies of Hobbes mutually influence each other and there is no need to discern which exerts a greater influence. Secondly, this perspective on Hobbes' diagnosis of the cause of civil war may force some Western scholars to rethink the philosophical tradition they inherit from the past. In fact, Hobbes's critique of Aristotle's natural philosophy, especially his transcendent principle, might have more profound implications than he has realized. For example, comparative philosophers David Hall and Roger Ames point out that "any recourse to transcendent principles inevitably leads to a substance view of the self," which is "contrasted with articulations of more diffuse senses of 'self' in the Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian schools of classical Chinese philosophy" (15-6). Hobbes' critique of the Western philosophical tradition also finds supports from the well-established discoveries of cognitive science as shown in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* and Antonio Damasio's *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*.¹⁶ Thirdly, this new perspective on Hobbes's diagnosis could shed light on

¹⁶ One major commonality between them is the materialistic account of mind, which radically challenges the core tenets of Western philosophical tradition that relies on a "ghost in the machine" notion of mind and disembodied reasoning. In fact, my research suggests that because there are so much in common between Hobbes's philosophy and cognitive science, he might well be regarded as the forerunner of the latter.

the methodology for interpreting Hobbes's works and other historical texts in general. Because Hobbes explicitly calls the legitimacy of the Western philosophical tradition into question, yet the tradition largely shapes the "prejudice" (Gadamer 272) or what Kuhn calls the "priority of paradigms" (Skinner 6-7) of Western interpreters as they approach historical works, one may ask how the interpreter could feel certain to have done justice to Hobbes's works or other works in general.¹⁷ Thus, "a hermeneutically trained consciousness" advocated by the hermeneutists, becomes especially important, as it requires the interpreter "to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer 271-2). One could doubt, however, whether it is possible for the interpreter to examine the definitions of all terms of past philosophers as Hobbes advocates, or examine the whole false reference world that is "constitutive of the social matrix in which the individuals find themselves and act" (Taylor 48). Nevertheless, this interpretation of Hobbes's critique of the Western philosophical tradition as the deepest source of the English Civil War may broaden our perspectives on the above questions and alert us to rethink many of our preconceptions.

¹⁷ This in fact could help to explain why the traditional textualist approach of interpreting history of ideas has been accused of reaching conclusions that are "foolishly and needlessly naïve," as well as historically absurd (Skinner 7, 50).

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