**The Sacred Stays Central: Agency and Transcendent Credibility in Early Modern Political Theories of Authority**

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ABSTRACT

The Nation came to replace God as the ultimate source of political authority in Europe by a somewhat complex path. This complexity can be clarified by examining the role that agency played in early modern political theories. One strand of seventeenth-century political theory, exemplified by Thomas Hobbes, sought to transform the active God of the sixteenth century into a passive and distant observer. Somewhat simultaneously, the People were made active agents in the derivation of political authority by John Locke and the theorists of another strand of political theory. The eighteenth-century saw authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Herder weave together the changes made in each of these seventeenth-centuries strands into a theory of political authority that depended on the Nation. An examination of the process by which the theoretical source of political authority passed from God to the Nation in the early modern period of Europe reveals that society continued to require and rely upon a “sacred center,” a transcendent source of political credibility.

Recent scholarship has begun to reemphasize the role of theology in the advent of the modern nation-state. This literature, in part, characterizes the nation-state’s rise as being enmeshed in the process by which the sanctity of the king was replaced by the sanctity of the People.[[1]](#footnote-1) While critics of this literature have described the transition as “disenchantment,” “rationalization,” and “secularization,” all of these terms are misleading. To the extent that early modern European writers sought to take God out of the political equation, the modern state system required the creation of a new metaphysical, transcendent, and sacred entity: the Nation. The “god” may have changed, but the theological foundations persisted.

Unfortunately, efforts to demonstrate that such a transition took place have resulted in an insufficient accounting of *how* this change occurred. Replacing God with the People as the ultimate source of political authority was neither a simple nor an inevitable operation. This article will argue that the complex process by which the People replaced God can be clarified by examining the role that agency played in early modern political theories. Understanding this process is not a mere historical curiosity. In particular, a closer interrogation can provide insights into how a similar change in the foundational assumptions of political authority may be occurring now or may take place in the future.

A deeper investigation of the process will also demonstrate that theological elements remain within modern politics and that assertions of the secularization of politics are grossly over-exaggerated. Max Weber famously argued that, thanks to modern processes of rationalization, societal bonds no longer needed a consensus over religious values. More recently, Charles Taylor suggested that secularization “puts an end to the naïve acknowledgement of the transcendent, or of goals or claims which go beyond human flourishing.”[[2]](#footnote-2) However, an examination of the process by which the theoretical source of political authority passed from God to the Nation in the early modern period of Europe reveals that society still required and relied upon a “sacred center,” a transcendent source of political credibility. Critics may refuse to call this “religion” (i.e. *civil* religion), but that is merely a question of semantics.

Political authority in societies relies upon a *source of transcendent credibility*. Individuals are suspicious of rulers and governments, who demand taxes, military service, sacrifice, and obedience in exchange for promises of benefits in the future. The credibility of the government to follow through on these promises is weak, making it unlikely that individuals will comply short of costly coercion. To rectify this problem, rulers and governments must find a means of enhancing their own credibility by attaching it to some transcendent entity or source that the people already find inherently credible. That rulers use sacred and transcendent beliefs to legitimate their power is not a new argument.[[3]](#footnote-3) What is novel here is the idea that the political appropriation of the sacred and transcendent is linked to issues of establishing the credibility of the ruler.

To the extent that the ruler can appropriate this already-accepted transcendent credibility to his or her own credibility, he or she will be able to generate compliance from the people relatively cheaply with their consent. This will provide sufficient starter resources, which the ruler can then turn around and invest in developing further means of coercion and credibility appropriation.[[4]](#footnote-4) Generating compliance using consent is far cheaper than doing so using coercion, so the ruler will be especially sensitive to his or her ability to generate compliance through the appropriation of a source of transcendent credibility.[[5]](#footnote-5)

One of the key attributes of credibility is agency. To be credible, an entity must at a minimum be able to promise some outcome, which then also means it must have the agency to make decisions and take actions. Theories of political authority must be able to trace the source of political authority and credibility back to some ultimate actor who possesses agency. To emerge as this source of transcendent credibility in the modern era, the People were transformed into the Nation and were made an active participant in the derivation of political authority. This article describes the theoretical basis for the shifting of the source of transcendent credibility in European polities from God to the Nation in the early modern era.

The role of the People, as a collective, in modern political theory is twofold. First, the People now have agency. They are no longer merely instruments of the ruler or the nobility, but possess the ongoing ability to judge, to influence, and to act. Second, the People are now considered the ultimate source of political authority and credibility. In modern politics, this task is no longer left to a deity or deities. The People embody a transcendent entity we call the “Nation” that makes their collective claim to legitimate authority appear to be unquestionable. Not only have the People become an active player in modern theories of political authority, but God has been made a passive one and His role in legitimizing authority has been transferred to the People.

There are three primary actors in early modern theories of political authority and credibility: God, the People, and the Ruler. These actors may be characterized as active, meaning they have agency in the theory, or passive, meaning they have a role, but no agency. The ruler, as the ultimate recipient of the political authority and credibility generated, is considered active in all of the theories since he or she has the task of governing. Thus, the various theories may be distinguished by the active-passive characterization of the other two actors. Does God play an active role in generating political authority? Do the People play an active role?

Through the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the dominant theories of political authority in Europe evolved from a model in which God was active and the People were passive, to the modern theories in which God was passive and the People were active. This article argues that this transformation was not cohesive, but required two separate, simultaneous steps: making God passive and making the People active. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the dominant model of political authority contained an active God and a passive People. This model proved unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons, but this became especially apparent in England during the heart of the seventeenth century. In response, two separate strands of political theory developed as alternatives. In the first, exemplified by Hobbes, the People remained a passive actor, but God was also made passive. In the second strand, exemplified by Locke, both God and the People were made active players in the determination of political authority. For different reasons, both of these alternatives proved insufficient. Finally, in the eighteenth century, authors like Rousseau and Johann Herder accepted the changes the two strands had made to the earlier dominant model and wove them together to construct the modern nationalist theory of political authority in which God is passive and the People are active.

God People Theoretical Model

*Raison d’Etat* (16th cent) Active Passive God 🡪 Ruler

First strand (e.g. Hobbes) Passive Passive God - - - > Ruler

Second strand (e.g. Locke) Active Active God 🡪 People 🡪 Ruler

Nationalists (18th cent) Passive Active God - - - > People 🡪 Ruler

**The First Strand: God Wanes**

The authors of the first strand of political theory sought to make God a passive actor in the derivation of political authority. The wars of religion and various outbreaks of civil unrest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries convinced many that the primary cause of war was government entanglement with particular religious doctrines.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, since political authority in this era was seen to derive from an active God endorsing the ruler, many believed that taking God out of the political equation could cause the entire edifice of social order to collapse, or at least make the current government less credible in the eyes of the people. Thus, if God was to be made passive, it must happen in a manner that protected order and stability.

The development of a minimalist religion provided the first step in removing God from the political equation. For example, Hugo Grotius argued that only a few shared, fundamental religious doctrines are *required* for human beings, while all of the other doctrines should be held loosely, if at all. The government had a right and duty to enforce these fundamental doctrines, while it should entirely stay out of other religious debates.[[7]](#footnote-7) The belief was that, if governments stuck to the fundamental doctrines and ignored the others, religious disputes would cease to become political battles and the conflicts that occurred within and between political units would finally abate.

In *Of the Law of War and Peace* (1625), Grotius applied his minimalist religion to show how this made God a more removed source of political authority. God remained important: after all, a minimalist religion was still religion. But, Grotius revolutionized Natural Law theory by suggesting that the Laws of Nature did not depend on the constant and active enforcement by God.[[8]](#footnote-8) These Laws applied to all people at all times because to act against them was to act against one’s self-interest and against Reason. Individuals followed the Laws of Nature without, as Richard Tuck phrases it, “any mediating promises about God’s will.”[[9]](#footnote-9) In effect, Natural Law enforced itself. Individuals formed societies and political communities in the sandbox God had created, but the authority of each polity was independent of the active involvement of God. This was, as Michel Foucault phrased it, a “de-governmentalization of the cosmos” and it influenced many other thinkers of the seventeenth century, including Thomas Hobbes.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Like Grotius, Hobbes envisioned a state of nature, but in his *Leviathan* he asserted that this pre-government condition had no laws, natural or otherwise: “Where there is no common power, there is no law.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Human beings in this condition possessed only Reason and fear which, fortunately enough, were sufficient for humans to figure out how to form governments. Hobbes agreed that God had formed the sandbox, but it was a sandbox with almost no rules. When it came to political authority in such a system, God was superfluous and could recede into a passive role.

Both Grotius and Hobbes sought to demonstrate “how people without theistic beliefs can have a moral life” and, by extension, how a government can maintain its legitimacy and credibility without an active appeal to God.[[12]](#footnote-12) Their answer was an appeal to Reason. The Laws of Nature, and by extension all other laws, were consistent with and could be discovered through Reason. Thus, they asserted that Reason was the ultimate source of governmental credibility and authority. Grotius, for example, believed that the government’s authority derived from its role in forcing irrational persons to act according to Nature and Reason, rather than from the direct imprimatur of God.

Hobbes similarly agreed that Reason provided all of the credibility and authority the government required. Hobbes postulated that individuals only emerged from the “nasty, brutish, and short” state of nature by creating a sovereign he called the Leviathan, or the “mortal god.”[[13]](#footnote-13) This mortal god, the result of individuals’ use of Reason, took on all of the transcendent qualities traditionally assigned to God. The authority of the Leviathan came from two places: the *fear* of reverting to the anarchic state of nature and the *Reason* that gave birth to the government.[[14]](#footnote-14) The suggestion here is not that Hobbes was an atheist. Hobbes retained God as a backstop: “This is the generation of that great Leviathan (or rather, to speak more reverently, of that *mortal god*) to which we owe, under the *immortal God*, our peace and defense.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Adding an active God to this equation would be redundant and, hence, unnecessary. God existed, but He was passive.

However, a political theory that based the government’s authority and credibility solely on Reason proved insufficient. Of course there were critics from conservative and ecclesial circles who rejected the idea that God should be removed from the political equation or relegated to distant, passive observer of human affairs. In addition, rulers and political practitioners tended to dislike this first-strand theory because it implied a much broader idea of individual rights against the government, so long as one followed Natural Laws and Reason.[[16]](#footnote-16) But, even those who were sympathetic to the project tended to see it as impractical: although some elites in Europe embraced this essentially deistic vision of the world and political authority, the vast majority of people were unwilling to accept it. Reason could only serve as an effective source of political credibility if it held the same or greater credibility as God.

The strand of political theory represented in this section did manage to move God further from the active center of many theories of political authority, but it was ultimately unsuccessful in shifting the source of governmental credibility and authority to Reason. Reason lacked sufficient means of motivating the population to comply with the ruler’s commands. In short, Reason was still perceived by most people as passive and thus unable to function as an effective source of transcendent credibility. Reason was a method of finding truth, but it was not seen as truth itself. What was needed was an inherently legitimate entity that all persons in society would believe to be credible in the absence of God. This was provided in the concept of the active political community, the subject of the next strand of political theory.

**The Second Strand: The People Rise**

The innovations of the second strand were to create greater distance between the political community and the ruler and empower the People to take a more active role in political authority. The concept of the “political community” had slowly developed in European history.[[17]](#footnote-17) While the idea that authority flowed from God to ruler through the consent of the community did exist among a few medieval authors, the predominant theoretical position was that God, via *His* Church, directly bestowed His credibility and authority on the ruler. Medieval coronation rituals were indicative of this stance. God commanded the ruler to serve the “common good” and protect his or her people, but evaluating the royal job performance was a matter exclusively between God and the ruler. The people were not asked for feedback.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, several authors made the concept and role of the political community more explicit. These *raison d’Etat* theorists argued that God’s credibility and authority passed to the ruler *through* the political community, rather than directly. Emphasizing the intermediary role of the political community gave new legitimacy to the community itself: God’s use of it made it sacred, a thing that was considered blessed or even chosen.[[18]](#footnote-18) The community’s members, in turn, came to see it as an entity that they must protect because it was Holy. In the middle ages, this sacredness fell predominantly on the ruler, but now it was increasingly seen to rest on the People as well. While the *raison d’Etat* theorists gave new significance to the political community, they continued to affirm the ruler to be the embodiment of the political community, synonymous with it.

The theorists in the second strand of political theory innovated upon the *raison d’Etat* concept of the political community by first, separating the People from the ruler, and second, making the People an *active* participant in political credibility and authority. For the medieval and *raison d’Etat* theorists, the ruler’s performance was a matter for God and the ruler. For the second-strand writers, the ruler’s performance was judged by God and the People. The ruler was no longer considered synonymous with the political community. If anything, the ruler was “hired” by the People to govern. As such, he or she could be “fired” as well.

While not the first, John Locke is the best known of the Calvinist authors in the second strand because he presented the most “coherent,” and thus most useful, version of its precepts.[[19]](#footnote-19) For Locke, the formation of government out of the state of nature was a two-step process. In the first step, individuals consent to put themselves under obligation to each other, an act that transformed a disparate group into a united community, or a “People.” In the second step or “contract,” this community creates institutions of government and selects persons to fill these roles.[[20]](#footnote-20) This meant that the People preceded the existence of the ruler. If the government was not fulfilling its responsibilities, it effectively declared a state of war on the People.[[21]](#footnote-21) In short, People don’t rebel, governments do.

Unlike the authors in the first strand, the writers of the second strand retained an active God within their political authority equation. There are several reasons for this, the most obvious of which is that many of these Calvinist authors could not have conceived of a political theory in which God was not the vital center. Such a theory would have been rejected out of hand. In addition, if the People or its’ representatives were to evaluate the government, they needed a moral yardstick with which to make this judgment. Thus, the authors argued, those who speak on behalf of the People in judging the ruler must be the most in tune with the active God who governs the world.

Some scholars who examine Locke’s well-known positions on religious toleration often suggest he intended to radically secularize political theory.[[22]](#footnote-22) While Locke did intend to remove the government from confessional and doctrinal disputes about God, God still remained a necessary and active part of his political theory.[[23]](#footnote-23) For example, Locke argued that a state should not tolerate atheism because, when the atheist denied God, he undermined the bases for government.[[24]](#footnote-24) Locke’s conception of the “separation of church and state” was institutional only: organized religion should be distanced from government, but God should be brought closer. Since the People were to judge the ruler, God was more necessary than ever in order to provide moral content for society.[[25]](#footnote-25) This meant government should stay out of religious disputes, but it should be intimately involved in the morality of its citizens. Political authority that rested on Reason alone was insufficient for Locke because “human reason unassisted failed men in its great and proper business of morality.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Today, “we read Locke as though his Christianity is but a religious layer… We are wrong. His political thought is Christian to the core.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

In the end, however, this strand of political theory was as insufficient as the first. It was successful in establishing the existence of an entity known as the People as distinct from the ruler and government and in making it an essential part of the political vocabulary of the era. But the concept of the “People” remained too vague to be useful on its own. The People depended for its authority and credibility on that derived from God. This, then, left open the question of who could speak on behalf of both the People and God. The traditional answer of organized religion was no longer considered satisfactory. If the first strand suffered from a lack of sources of political authority and credibility, the second strand posited too many, which inevitably led to conflicts over who had what authority when. The eighteenth-century fix was to make the People its own source of political credibility and authority by converting it into a Nation.

**Weaving the Strands Together: The Nation Solidifies**

Over the course of the eighteenth century, various theorists merged these two separate strands of political thought into a single theory of political credibility and authority. The resulting political theory of nationalism blended the passive God of the first strand with the active People of the second. This theory’s success was not inevitable and it continued to co-exist and compete with other potential theories of political credibility and authority. For example, there remained many advocates of retaining God as the active and ultimate source of political credibility and authority.[[28]](#footnote-28) Eighteenth-century England, for its part, experienced a resurgence of religious expression among the mass of the population, perhaps most evident with the Methodist movement of John Wesley.

In France, many of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers, or *philosophes*, supported the elevation of Reason and the elimination of “superstition.” Because they focused on *human* nature and the improvement thereof, they tended to downplay national distinctions. All humankind, they asserted, not this or that People group, would eventually be free through their use of Reason. Thus, they claimed membership in humanity first and foremost. However, Jean-Jacques Rousseau modified the *philosophes’* theory of a perfected vision of humanity and it was his version upon which the participants of the French Revolution relied.[[29]](#footnote-29)

For Rousseau, the source of political credibility and authority was the “general will.” Each citizen must decide between what was in his own interest and what was in the interest of the community. To know what the latter was, the citizen must consult the general will. What Rousseau meant by “general will” has been the subject of perennial scholarly debates, but there is ample evidence to suggest that, with it, he promoted a nascent version of nationalism. First, he argued that a particular general will was affixed to a finite set of individuals, not all of humanity.[[30]](#footnote-30) Second, the general will was a metaphysical entity: it was engraved on the hearts of the citizens. Third, he presented it as an active source of transcendent credibility. Patrick Riley argues that Rousseau intended the “general will” to replace the traditional political concept of the “will of God.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Thus, Rousseau’s general will is essentially similar to the modern, metaphysical concept of the “nation.” He did not attempt to explain *why* there were different nations (or several general wills) in the world. He merely asserted that such wills exist and that individuals were to consult their respective general will.

As a necessary supplement to the general will, Rousseau advocated a “civil religion.” He suggested replacing “superstitious” traditional religion with a civil religion, not unlike Hume’s natural religion.[[32]](#footnote-32) Rousseau agreed with the *philosophes’* critique of traditional religion, but not to the extent that this critique might undermine the social cohesion that religious institutions provided.[[33]](#footnote-33) As Simon Critchley argues, Rousseau recognized “the motivational inadequacy of a purely philosophical account of politics and offer[ed] a picture of a political religion.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Rousseau knew that Reason must be supplemented with passion, at least in the political sphere. Vague commitments to “humanity” would not inspire sufficient passion: self-love could only be counteracted with another love.[[35]](#footnote-35) Rousseau argued this new love was generated when individuals felt “themselves to be members of the patrie” and they would “love [the patrie] with that delicate feeling that any isolated man feels only for himself.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Civil religion provided the *passion* that prompted citizens to obey *Reason*, meaning in this case the general will.

French Revolutionary intellectuals and later nationalist writers recognized that for nationalism to motivate action, the particular Nation must be infused with meaning and purpose. Rousseau’s position in the *Discourse on Inequality* was that national distinctions (like other human institutions) were artificial, rather than natural. This raised a new complication: if the Nation were perceived as a humanly-constructed thing, this could undermine its ability to efficiently mobilize compliance from the population. Rulers and political practitioners found an answer to this in the works of several Counter-Enlightenment authors, including Johann Herder, who asserted that the Nation was natural and essential for human freedom.

Herder argued the Nation, as opposed to the individual, was “the basic unit of humanity.”[[37]](#footnote-37) An individual was nothing outside his or her Nation. Individual thought was shaped by language, language reflected the culture, and each culture was unique.[[38]](#footnote-38) Thus, human nature itself was not universal, but “a pliant clay which assumes a different shape under different needs and circumstances.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Since individual identity was derived in large part from the Nation to which a person belonged, the Nation *was* the unique set of stories, myths, traditions, rituals, customs, language, and religion. For Herder, the Nation now assumed the role and responsibilities of a transcendent source of political credibility and authority that had traditionally belonged to God.

Herder asserted that the inherent credibility and authority of the Nation came from several sources. There was, he claimed, a deep psychological need in every person to *belong* that the Nation fulfilled.[[40]](#footnote-40) Existing in a particular place at a particular time meant the individual was part of a particular culture and Nation, which was formative of that person’s identity. But, for Herder the credibility and authority of the Nation came from more than just an accident of birth. Each Nation was a *natural* part of Humanity.[[41]](#footnote-41) Every Nation, from the most advanced to most primitive, revealed some important aspect of Humanity (*humanitat*).[[42]](#footnote-42) Thus, an individual knows that his or her Nation was natural, not man-made, and that it embodied a transcendent (or possibly Divine) purpose within the history of Humanity.

Despite the fact that Herder was a Lutheran minister, God’s role in his theory was almost wholly mediated through the Nation. Religion was a part of culture and, as such, under the list of things that defined and distinguished a particular Nation. A government would often appeal to the credibility of its deity or deities, use religious language and symbols, and even maintain an official relationship with the priesthood or church, but this should be interpreted as an appeal to *culture* and the Nation that embodies that culture. The *Nation*, then, was the ultimate source of transcendent credibility and authority.

**Conclusion**

The Nation came to replace God as the ultimate source of political authority in Europe by a somewhat complex path. The active God of the sixteenth century was theorized as passive and distant through the work of Hobbes and other writers in the first strand of seventeenth-century political theory. Separately, the People were simultaneously made active participants in the derivation of political authority by Locke and the theorists of the second strand. However, as was demonstrated above, there were problems when God and the People were considered either both passive or both active. The eighteenth-century saw authors like Rousseau and Herder weave together the changes made in each of the seventeenth-century’s strands into a theory of political authority that depended on the Nation. The success of this new model demonstrates that modern society still required and relied upon a “sacred center,” a transcendent source of political credibility.

The process described above was not so much one of “secularization” as it was a transition from one source of *transcendent* credibility to another. Rather than disenchanting politics, the People were made sacred. The People were the physical embodiment of the Nation, the transcendent source of credibility and political authority. The implication of the term “secularization” is that this process was a movement toward infusing greater rationality into politics, government, and authority. This was emphatically not the case. The “rational-bureaucratic” state that emerged in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries continued to be founded and sustained on what many would consider an “irrationality.” Arguably, this continues to be the case today.

The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment attempted to separate two human faculties: reason and passion.[[43]](#footnote-43) Herder and other Counter-Enlightenment writers, however, argued that reason and passion could not be separated.[[44]](#footnote-44) The *passionate* response of nationalism, love of *la patrie*, was presented as a *reasonable* reaction to a Nation that fundamentally constituted an individual’s identity. It was exactly this passion, so similar to that exhibited toward religion in previous eras, which rulers desired to tap into in order to solidify their authority. It proved to be incredibly efficient at generating compliance and soon political practitioners all over Europe began to convert their particular Nation into the source of political credibility and authority.

None of this should be construed as a linear progression of history toward a more “rational” theory of government. We tend to read our current dominant ideas into the writings of political theorists of the past. Thus, modern scholars can exegetically find arguments for democracy in the texts of Hobbes and pro-secularization tenets in the oeuvre of Locke. While the ideas of these early modern theorists would later be synthesized into the seeds of current liberal democratic theory, such an amalgam was not inevitable. The authors themselves certainly never intended it.

The process described above also provides an example of how foundational theories of political authority and credibility can change over time. When the dominant theory is no longer efficient or effective at generating compliance given changing circumstances, rival theories emerge. The success of these rivals is dependent on their ability to generate compliance, which means they must effectively tap into, or if necessary create, a source of transcendent credibility that persons believe is inherently credible. The dominant theory can only be abandoned after rival theories materialize and their effectiveness has been adequately demonstrated.

There may be lessons for our world today in the early modern transition. It seems the Nation as source of transcendent credibility is under stress and has been so since the twentieth century. In many ways, we find ourselves in the same situation as the seventeenth-century writers discussed above. The lack of satisfaction with the Nation as the source of transcendent credibility (and its accompanying states-system) has prompted contemporary theorists to offer alternative schemes. Like Locke and Hobbes, we cannot know if any of these alternatives, or some combination thereof, will replace the Nation as the primary source of transcendent credibility. We cannot even really know if we are in a transition to something new. What we can say is that the Nation will not be jettisoned before a practical alternative is in place that can fulfill the role of a source of transcendent credibility. As of now, the nation-state is secure; but this security may be short-lived.

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1. See, for example, Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Ludwig Mikael Gelot, “Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and the Theological Origins of Secular International Politics,” *Political Theology* 12, no. 4 (2011): 553-76; Eric L. Santer, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); William T Cavanaugh, “‘Killing for the Telephone Company’: Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004): 243-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Daniel Engster, *Divine Sovereignty: The Origins of Modern State Power* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: Routledge, 1980); Eric R. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Victor V. Magagna, *Communities of Grain: Rural Rebellion in Comparative Perspective* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 25-47; Mark Harrison, “Coercion, Compliance, and the Collapse of the Soviet Command Economy,” *The Economic History Review* 55, no. 3 (2002): 397-433. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 69-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Grotius directly addressed theological issues in two works, *Defensio fidei Catholicae de Satisfactione Christi* and *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, both written in 1617 in the midst of the Arminian controversy, though only the former was published at that time, Richard Tuck, “Grotius and Selden,” in *Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1750*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 511-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2005 [1625]). The famous line of Grotius’s “Prolegomena” is known as the *etiamsi daremus* sentence, which translated means “even if we should concede…”, here meaning *even if we should concede that God did not exist*. It should be noted that Grotius was not the first author to present such an inherently heretical argument: the Spanish Scholastics and the neo-Stoical movement had also considered such a question, both of which influenced Grotius, J. G. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978*, Graham Burchell, trans. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberal Arts Press, 1958 [1651]), ch. XIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Knud Haakonssen, “Divine/Natural Law Theories in Ethics,” in *Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy, vol. II*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1330. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ch. XVII. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ch. XIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ch. XVII. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It is for this same reason that the Natural Law theories of Grotius and Hobbes succeeded at the international level, at least among European political units: each European political unit possessed individual rights against the others in an anarchic world, but political units outside of Europe did not possess the same rights as European political units because they were not rational, Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Pat Moloney, “Hobbes, Savagery, and International Anarchy,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (2011): 189-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, David William Bates, *States of War: Enlightenment Origins of the Political* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See, for example, Helmut Lehmann, “The Germans as a Chosen People: Old Testament Themes in German Nationalism,” *German Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (1991): 261-73; Dale Van Kley, “Protestantism, Catholicism, and the Religious Origin of the French and American Revolutions,” *Fides et Historia* 23, no. 1 (1991): 53-68; Bo Andersson, “Sweden, the Elect Nation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1999): 305-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Lois G. Schwoerer, “Locke, Lockean Ideas, and the Glorious Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 4 (1990): 531-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. What made the contract language of Locke and other English Whigs so important was that it gave the *People* the right to decide when a contract was violated. Thus, the events of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 could be considered the choice of the People, James Farr and Clayton Roberts, “John Locke on the Glorious Revolution: A Rediscovered Document,” *Historical Journal* 28, no. 2 (1985): 385-98. Locke’s “radical” position was contrasted with the position of moderates and conservatives who argued that there was no “revolution” at all: either William legally conquered England (William’s choice) or James II deserted his throne (James’s choice), Tim Harris, “The People, the Law, and the Constitution in Scotland and England: A Comparative Approach to the Glorious Revolution,” *Journal of British Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 28-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986 [1680]), sects. 222, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See, for example, George Kateb, “Locke and the Political Origins of Secularism,” *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1001-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. John Perry, *The Pretenses of Loyalty: Locke, Liberal Theory, and American Political Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jakob De Roover and SN Balagangadhara, “John Locke, Christian Liberty and the Predicament of Liberal Toleration,” *Political Theory* 36, no. 4 (2008): 523-49; Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952 [1685]). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. David McCabe, “John Locke and the Argument Against Strict Separation,” *Review of Politics* 59, no. 2 (1997): 233-58; “*God* in Heaven is *Judge*: He alone, ‘tis true, is Judge of the Right. But *every* Man is *Judge* for himself, as in all other Cases, so in this, whether another hath put himself into a State of War with him,” Locke, *Second Treatise*, sect. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1695]), sect. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. De Roover and Balagangadhara, “John Locke, Christian Liberty,” 540. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The actual number of deists in Europe in the eighteenth century was relatively small, S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. One of the key ways in which Rousseau differed from the other *philosophes* was his argument for a political theory that relied on a minimal version of nationalism rather than the broader concept of humanity, Daniel E Cullen, *Freedom in Rousseau’s Political Philosophy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1993), 130-55. It was no coincidence that French Revolutionaries made Rousseau, rather than Condillac or Helvetius, the intellectual father of their movement: he supplied a much more manageable and practical source of political credibility and authority. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Rousseau often stated his preference for smaller communities on the scale of the Athenian city-state or his native Geneva. There has been some debate about whether he would have supported the idea of the general will on the scale of modern-day nation-states, but it is more than possible to see that “the seed of nationalism” existed in Rousseau’s thought, Arthur Melzer, “Rousseau, Nationalism, and the Politics of Sympathetic Identification,” in *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield*, ed. Mark Blitz and William Kristol (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Patrick Riley, *The General Will before Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Arthur M Melzer, “The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 344-60; Edwin A Judge, “The Beginning of Religious History,” *Journal of Religious History* 15, no. 4 (1989): 394-412. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Graeme Garrard, “Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment,” *History of Political Thought* 15, no. 1 (1994): 97-120. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless* (London: Verso, 2012), 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Jason Neidleman argues that Rousseau “did not believe that cosmopolitanism could match patriotism’s capacity to inspire. In theory, of course, a cosmopolitan love of humanity could supply the motivation for virtue, but a more *particuliere* love of *la patrie* is far more likely to inspire self-sacrifice in practice,” Jason Neidleman, “Rousseau’s Rediscovered *Communion des Coeurs*: Cosmopolitanism in the Reveries of the Solitary Walker,” *Political Studies* 60, no. 1 (2012): 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Political Economy,” in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1755]), 1-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Richard White, “Herder: On the Ethics of Nationalism,” *Humanitas* 18, nos. 1-2 (2005): 167. In contrast, earlier social contract theories and, to a large extent, natural law theories, suggested that individual was the basic unit, which would mean the individual preceded the political community, Annabel Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 37-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Michael N Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 55-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Frederick M Barnard, ed., *J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Isaiah Berlin, Herder’s most famous modern-day commentator, labeled this “belief in the value of belonging to a group or culture” as *populism*. It should be noted that Berlin was not a big fan, believing this to be a negative characteristic that, in most cases, produced inter-group violence and suppression of the individual, Isaiah Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997 [1976]), 367-68, 370-80; a far stronger rejection of Herder’s theory and its descendents may be found in Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. David Maisel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The tendency to see nations as *natural* rather than *man-made* dominated political practice and scholarship until World War I, Elias Jose Palti, “The Nation as a Problem: Historians and the ‘National Question,’” *History & Theory* 40, no. 3 (2001): 324-46. This raises the possibility that the post-modern questioning of the naturalness of the Nation has played a significant role in the nation-state’s perceived decline today. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Herder asserted that each nation contributed to Humanity as a whole primarily through its particular arts. He put this into practice by attempting to collect and publish all of the German folk poetry he could find, William A Wilson, “Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 6, no. 4 (1973): 819-35. This idea was more fully developed several decades in Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* and had a significant impact on the development of German arts and, not coincidentally, German nationalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. White, “Herder,” 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ilit Ferber, “Herder: On Pain and the Origin of Language,” *Germanic Review* 85, no. 3 (2010): 205-23; Brian J. Whitton, “Herder’s Critique of the Enlightenment: Cultural Community versus Cosmopolitan Rationalism,” *History & Theory* 27, no. 2 (1988): 146-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)