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Mother Lords: Original Maternal Dominion and the Practice of Preservation in Hobbes

Meghan Robison 

Philosophy Department, Montclair State University Schmitt Hall, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ 07083
Corresponding author. email robisonm@montclair.edu

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Abstract

Hobbes's justification for original maternal dominion is often evaluated in connection to the ambiguous status of women in his political thought. Many feminist interpreters explain this ambiguity as a contradiction: following Carole Pateman, they see maternal dominion as one term of the "paradox of parental power." The first aim of this article is to elaborate a second, alternative approach within some critical responses to Pateman's reading. Rather than as one part of a contradiction, in these interpretations maternal dominion emerges as a self-standing form of authority that is very different from patriarchal domination. By offering a new synthesis of some of these interpretations, I aim to show this second view as more comprehensive and compelling than that offered by Pateman. Then, building upon this view, I give a new reading of the concept of preservation that establishes the mother's dominion as an intersubjective practice that reflects an awareness about the interdependent conditions for human well-being and, hence, challenges the standard approach to Hobbesian individualism and sovereign power. Finally, drawing from my interpretation of preservation, I offer a new way to understand Hobbes's argument that "parental authority is derived from the child's consent."

In each of his major political treatises, Thomas Hobbes explains how parental dominion is established when there are no laws or contracts dictating which parent should have that authority. In *Leviathan*, for example, he concludes, "If there be no Contract, the Dominion is in the mother" (Hobbes 1985, 254). Hobbes's argument that the mother "is original lord over children" has been a touchstone for contemporary feminist discussions about Hobbes, inspiring examinations of issues that had been previously ignored, such as the status of women and their children in the State of Nature, the family, and the Commonwealth.¹ Hobbes's justification for original maternal dominion has often been evaluated in connection to the larger question of the status of women in his thought. Scholars agree that this status is ambiguous: in the State of Nature, men and women start off on equal ground in that neither sex has the right to deprive the other of any benefit on the basis of nature, and women have original dominion over children. However, fathers are seen as ruling the household, and as having a privileged status in the Commonwealth.

Many feminist interpreters explain this ambiguity as a contradiction, presenting maternal dominion as one term of the “paradox of parental power,” to borrow Wendy Gunther-Canada’s phrasing (Gunther-Canada 2006, 150). This view is most fully developed by Carole Pateman (Pateman 1989). According to Pateman, original maternal dominion functions as the *peripeteia* of Hobbes’s political thought: what a woman gains in acquiring child-subjects in the State of Nature, she loses in the Civil State when she is subjected to a man in the family. Although Pateman’s reading has elicited several critical responses, the paradox framework continues to dominate feminist discussions of Hobbes. Editors of a recent special issue of *Hobbes Studies* note that the first main direction taken by contemporary feminist readers has been to explain the “paradoxical” status of women: “[feminists] have sought to explain why women in his theory move from a position of natural equality—and, indeed, in sharp contrast to patriarchal accounts, a position in which they possess right over their children—to one of subordination to men” (Chadwick and Odzuck 2020, 1).

Although this way of framing original maternal dominion has been at the forefront of feminist debates, in this article, I point to a second, alternative approach that I see as emerging out of some critical responses to Pateman. Those who take this second approach do not deny the subjection of Hobbesian women in the family, but when they investigate Hobbes’s account for original maternal dominion, they do not presuppose the eventual subjection of women and children under the rule of a patriarch. Indeed, they question or even reject the paradoxical interpretive framework itself. Rather than as one part of a contradiction, maternal dominion emerges as a self-standing authority, and an alternative to patriarchal domination.

The first aim of this article is to elaborate this second, alternative approach to original maternal dominion within some feminist commentators’ critical responses to Pateman’s reading. By offering a new synthesis of some of these interpretations, I aim to show that there is another comprehensive and more compelling alternative feminist reading of maternal dominion available than that offered by Pateman. In order to show this emerging alternative view, part 1 of this article surveys feminist literature on Hobbes in three sections. In the first, I carefully reconstruct the development of the paradox framework, from its beginnings in the work of Gordon Schochet, to its elaboration in the collaboration of Theresa Brennan and Pateman, to its culmination in Pateman’s independent work. I then track an emerging interpretive shift by outlining some contributions that question this view (Nancy J. Hirschmann and S. A. Lloyd) and then others who take a different approach to the question altogether (Jane S. Jaquette and Joanne H. Wright).²

Next, in part 2, I return to Hobbes’s arguments. I begin by analyzing his arguments against naturalist justifications of dominion, and in a second section, I comb through his positive arguments for maternal dominion by preservation. Bringing together points made by Hirschmann, Lloyd, Jaquette, and Wright, the aim of this section is to synthesize and refine the emergent second approach, and to show it as more consistent with Hobbes’s text.

Then, standing on the shoulders of the feminist interpreters who take the second approach, in part 3, I develop a reading of original maternal dominion that elaborates upon and extends this alternative view of preservation in a new way—that is, as an intersubjective practice. Agreeing with the second-view interpreters that the authority of Hobbes’s Mother Lord is not justified upon her superior strength or sustained by the threat of violence, I show it as established by nourishing the child, and as justified by his strengthening and well-being. Moreover, I argue, dominion is not “in” the

mother or “in” the child. Rather, I propose that we see it is a kind of *pas de deux* that unfolds between mother and child. In the final sections, I go on to argue that this way of interpreting maternal dominion is better able to accommodate Hobbes’s perplexing statement that “parental dominion is derived from the child’s consent” because it enables the child to appear as participating in the establishment of that dominion, even in the first moments after birth.

1. Framing and Reframing Original Maternal Dominion in Hobbes

Maternal Dominion within the Paradox of Paternal Power

The first contemporary critic to call attention to the “paradox of parental authority” in Hobbes was Gordon Schochet in his groundbreaking analysis of the Hobbesian family (Schochet 1967). Against the traditional interpretation that posited atomistic individuals as the original pact-makers, he argued that the family, with a father as its sovereign head, is the basic social unit of Hobbes’s political thought. Schochet argues that two unorthodox features allowed Hobbes’s patriarchalism to go undetected: Hobbes rejected the traditional patriarchalism argument that fathers play a superior role in reproduction, arguing instead that both parents were equally involved; second, he attributed authority to whomever preserved the child, whereby to preserve is to *not* destroy: “The power of parents was a virtual reward for preserving the lives of their children when they had the ability and right to destroy them” (Schochet 1967, 432).³ In this reading, parental dominion is a compensation for not killing the child, and maternal dominion is original because the mother has the first opportunity not to do so. Continuing—and this is the basis of what later becomes formulated as the “paradox of paternal authority”—Schochet notes that whereas mothers have dominion in the State of Nature, fathers rule the family.

As Schochet presents it, Hobbes does not signal, let alone justify this change; immediately after arguing for the original dominion of the mother in *Leviathan*, he excludes women from his definition of family. Schochet notices this lacuna but unlike feminist commentators who come after him, he does not attempt to fill it. Instead, he shifts his focus to the father’s rule, which, like the mother’s original dominion, he ties to the use of coercive force (432). He accommodates Hobbes’s puzzling claim that parental authority is “derived from the child’s consent” by explaining consent as an acknowledgment of the parent’s power to kill. For him, there is no contradiction between force and consent since “acquiescence” to force is a form of consent. Schochet applies this interpretation to explain Hobbes’s distinction between “sovereignty by acquisition”—established when a father forces his children to submit—and “sovereignty by institution”—established by mutual covenant. Schochet concludes that sovereignty by institution depends upon and develops out of sovereignty by acquisition, and that men establish themselves as heads of households before making the social contracts and submitting to a sovereign.⁴

Schochet sets the stage for contemporary feminist readings of Hobbes by exposing the ambivalent status of parental authority. In their co-authored article, “Mere Auxiliaries to the Commonwealth,” Pateman and Brennan refocus the issue on women. They ask “the embarrassing question” underlying liberal theory, namely: “If individuals are naturally free and equal, and subjection is conventional and based on consent, then what justifies women’s subjection to men in the family?” (Brennan and Pateman 1979, 187). Noticing that most “discussions of patriarchy unfailingly concentrate on the relationship between a father and male children,” they shed light on the

“shadowy figure” of the mother (185). They argue that it is by making all human relationships conventional, and based on consent, that Hobbes gives patriarchy a new twist. However, like Schochet, they claim that Hobbes identifies “consent” with submission to another’s force, or the “voluntary acceptance of protection in return for life” and see the same notion of consent at work “whether the submission is given by the subject in the face of the conqueror’s sword, by a victim to a robber with a gun, or by a child to a parent who has the power to expose or abandon it” (188). They use this reading of parental “domination,” to use their term, to explain the disappearance of Hobbesian women as the moment when the mother who rules children in the State of Nature is overtaken by the “father or master” who rules the family (188).⁵

In *The Sexual Contract* and “God Hath Ordained to Man a Helper” (Pateman 1988; 1989) Pateman develops her reading of the paradoxical status of Hobbesian women. Pateman views original maternal dominion as the first part of Hobbes’s contradictory account of parental authority. In *The Sexual Contract*, she explains the subjection of Hobbesian women by claiming that the social contract is supported by a more original sexual contract in which men acquire the authority to rule women through marriage. She positions contract theory as a new solution to the problem of subordination in light of new ideas about natural equality, which shows consent as the only justification for subordination: “a naturally free and equal individual must, necessarily, agree to be ruled by another” (Pateman 1988, 40). The subordination of infants to mothers is based on the same logic: “An infant, necessarily, has two parents (‘as to the generation, God hath ordained to man a helper’), but both parents cannot have dominion because no one can obey two masters. In the State of Nature, the mother, not the father, has political right over the child; ‘every woman that bears children, becomes both a *mother* and a *lord*’” (40–41).

For Pateman, the power to decide if the child lives or dies is the source of the mother’s dominion: “At birth,” she writes, “the infant is in the mother’s power. She makes the decision whether to expose or to nourish the child,” which, in turn, forces the infant to “contract to obey her” (41). She describes the “postulated agreement of the infant” as “one example of Hobbes’s identification of enforced submission with voluntary agreement” (41). She glosses the distinction between birth and capture: “Submission to overwhelming power in return for protection, whether the power is that of the conqueror’s sword or the mother’s power over her newly born infant, is always a valid sign of agreement for Hobbes . . .” (41).⁶ Pateman goes on to argue that maternity allows women to be conquered by men: “When a woman becomes a mother and decides to raise her child, her position changes; she is put at a slight disadvantage against men, since now she has her infant to defend too. A man is then able to defeat the woman he had initially to treat as an equal (so he obtains a ‘family’)” (49). For Pateman, this shift is not just a historical fact; it is a consequence of the self-undermining logic of original maternal dominion: “Mothers are lords, but, paradoxically, for a woman to become a mother and a lord is her downfall. She then has been given an opening for a male enemy to outwit and vanquish her in the ceaseless natural conflict” (Pateman 1989, 458).

Pateman uses what she sees as the logical contradiction between maternal dominion and patriarchal power to explain the shift from “the original political dominion of maternal lordship” to the rise of the family (445). Motherhood shifts the natural relation between men and women from one of equality to one of superiority and, then, to inferiority, thereby opening the door to a new, exclusively male political realm: Father Masters, after the defeat of the Mother Lords, make the Commonwealth.⁷ Hobbes, she

writes, “transforms natural maternal power and women’s natural freedom into patriarchal right” (451). This implies that maternal dominion is an inversion of traditional patriarchal power: “In direct contradiction of Sir Robert Filmer and the patriarchal doctrine that political right originates in the father’s generative power, Hobbes proclaims that, ‘every woman that bears children, becomes both a mother and a lord’” (453). Although she agrees with Filmer that the idea of a contracting infant is “anthropological nonsense,” she interprets this idea of consent as consistent with coercion: “for Hobbes, it makes no difference whether a contract is entered into after due deliberation or with the conqueror’s sword at one’s breast. Submission to overwhelming power in return for protection, whether the power is that of the conqueror’s sword or the mother’s power over her newly born infant, is always a valid sign of agreement for Hobbes” (454).

Re-Answering the Question, Then Questioning the Paradox

Nancy Hirschmann makes important contributions to shifting the paradox framework. In *Rethinking Obligation*, she affirms the paradox framework but inverts the explanatory role of maternal authority, criticizing Pateman’s portrait of “the defeated Hobbesian woman.” She approaches Hobbes’s theory of maternal authority in relation to what she describes as an effort to reconcile two extremes: radical individualism and absolute sovereignty. The latter, in her view, is the solution to the former.⁸ Hirschmann, like Pateman, emphasizes that motherhood allows a woman “a confederacy with others,” which is necessarily denied to men (Hirschmann 1992, 38). Like Pateman, she connects motherhood to patriarchy, but takes an inverse path, explaining women’s subjection as motivated by men’s desire to restrain women’s reproductive powers (42).

In *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory*, Hirschmann argues against Pateman and Schochet that the subjection of women to men in the family predates the social contract. She begins by repeating her argument that original dominion enables women to surpass men in natural powers and, in turn, motivates men to strip them of this power by forcefully making themselves the heads of families. Yet she notes that the relation between Mother Lords and their respective child subjects is unstable: “children can always turn on their caregiver, as wrong as this might be in Hobbes’s view” (Hirschmann 2008, 52). She then proposes that Hobbes gives a new meaning to parental dominion by giving mothers original authority:

the chapter in which women’s potential dominion over children is discussed is titled “Of Dominion Paternal and Despotical” . . . and indeed throughout the chapter Hobbes includes mother-right under specifically “paternal dominion,” either introducing a radically different meaning of the term, or apparently oblivious to the contradiction he poses. (56)

In her contribution to *Feminist Interpretations of Hobbes*, Hirschmann takes a different approach in that she reposes the status of Hobbesian women as a question (Hirschmann 2012, 125–45). She attempts to re-explain women’s subjugation to men by drawing upon the account of gratitude formulated in Hobbes’s Fourth Law of Nature, but eventually rejects this reasoning on account of the tenuous status of laws in the natural state (291). Additionally, she argues that, if we use Hobbes’s understanding of gratitude to explain original maternal dominion, then we would end up with a justification of matriarchy, not patriarchy, since an infant is obliged to obey the mother before the father. Her article closes inconclusively: “[t]he puzzle concerning Hobbes on women and

the family thus—perhaps fortuitously—remains open to debate” (Hirschmann 2008, 143).

Most recently, in her essay “Hobbes on the Family,” Hirschmann offers another reading of the source of maternal dominion, suggesting that it “follows from the work that a parent (or other person) does in caring for the child” (Hirschmann 2013, 244). While emphasizing the importance of care, however, she sustains her previous argument when she claims that “pregnancy and parturition give . . . dominion [to the mother] from the moment of birth” (245). Nourishing the infant, she argues, “reinforces” the mother’s dominion, since her claim is already stronger on the basis of her natural, physical attachment to the child, and the child’s natural, physical dependence on her.⁹

In her contribution to *Feminist Interpretations of Hobbes*, “Power and Sexual Subordination in Hobbes’s Political Theory,” S. A. Lloyd takes a similar approach to Hirschmann in that she acknowledges that “the claims of women count, and count equally, to the claims of men,” and that “this also applies to authority over children” (Lloyd 2012, 47). However, she disagrees with Hirschmann’s argument that maternal authority is merited on the basis of natural reproductive powers. Moreover, she continues, “[the mother] has dominion over it for as long as she continues to preserve it” (51). Lloyd affirms that Hobbes acknowledges biological maternity, but, in her view, biology does not legitimate authority. Rather, dominion begins when the mother feeds the newborn. Lloyd goes on to consider relative differences between men’s and women’s “instrumental,” rather than natural, powers, as the possible cause of women’s subjection (56).

More recently, in her article “By Force or Wiles: Women in the Hobbesian Hunt for Allies and Authority,” Lloyd suggests that Hobbes’s concept of alliance could help to explain the historical subjection of women from a Hobbesian point of view. Against the standard individualist view, she depicts the State of Nature as a dynamic social reality—a “spectrum” or “continuum”—that contains alliances of various types; one form is an “ordered alliance” in which one person dominates another (Lloyd 2020, 9). These alliances can be acquired “by force,” that is, “motiv[at]ing others to act as one wishes by activating their fear of bad consequences if they do not” or “by wiles,” that is, “by activating their positive feeling of solidarity with oneself or one’s cause” (10). She distinguishes the mother–child alliance because it is based on preservation, which is different from “force” on the one hand or “wiles” on the other. Referencing Hobbes’s Fourth Law of Nature, she argues that the child obeys the mother because he “owes a debt of gratitude to the person to whom it owes its life,” on account of having been preserved by her (11). Then, returning to the question of the subjection of women in Hobbes’s thought, as an alternative to Hirschmann’s suggestion, she proposes that the relative power women acquire in commanding children might offer a better explanation for their subjection to men than their natural reproductive powers (28). Yet, importantly, at the end of her article, she concludes that women’s subjection is not built into Hobbes’s political philosophy, leaving Pateman’s paradox unsolved, if not unsolvable (28).

Original Maternal Dominion Viewed from Outside the Paradox of Paternal Power

In her attempt to defend the importance of Hobbes and social contract theory for feminist critique against Pateman’s attack, Jane S. Jaquette offers a reading of original maternal dominion that suggests an alternative relationship between coercion, consent, and authority. Unlike Hirschmann, who affirms Pateman’s interpretation of Hobbesian

consent as consistent with coercion, in “Contract and Coercion: Power and Gender in *Leviathan*,” Jaquette aims to discredit Pateman’s case by showing that the Hobbesian contract does not categorically exclude women and that “conquest does not create authority.” She begins by asking not “how were women subjected to men” in Hobbes, but “why do women disappear?” (Jaquette 1998, 207). She turns to Jean Hampton’s interpretation of the exit from the Hobbesian State of Nature in order to build an alternative story about the rise of the womanless family. Following Hampton, she explains sovereignty as born out of a bargain between “more and less successful inhabitants,” whereby success is defined as “more entrepreneurial” (207). Eventually, she argues, the “less successful” tacitly accept to do the “more successful’s” bidding on the threat that they will be harmed if they do not. Although there is “a real physical threat” in this “early stage” of the relation, the relation becomes less coercive and more consensual over time; she argues that this has the effect of reversing the power dynamic such that the sovereign’s authority is placed in the subjects (207). Drawing from this argument, Jaquette suggests that maternal dominion is analogous to sovereign power: “Just as the mother must anticipate that the child will grow up and contend with her for power unless she makes an ally of him, so the ruler begins with a high degree of dominance over his subjects, yet, over time, their power relation shifts” (207). Contra Pateman, she contends that Hobbes upholds the value of “equality, choice and negotiation” (218). She closes by explaining Hobbes’s contract theory as an invocation for the active creation of communities and calls upon us, as readers, “to examine the emotional commitments that make it possible to maintain them and develop trust” (218).

Joanne H. Wright offers yet another critique of Pateman’s reading of Hobbes and draws out new ways to understand original maternal dominion outside the paradox paradigm. She first presents her reading in her article, “Going against the Grain: Hobbes’s Case for Original Maternal Dominion.”¹⁰ Although Wright acknowledges that Hobbes leaves women behind, she aims to make room for his critique of patriarchy together with the radical (albeit brief) way in which he reconceived gender relations in his own time. Central to her reading is what she is the first to call “Hobbes’s theory of original maternal dominion” (132). When she argues that the Hobbesian State of Nature “did not bear the marks of a defeated woman,” she aligns herself with Hirschmann, Lloyd, and Jaquette against Pateman (124). However, she goes further and rejects the paradox framework itself when she argues that Hobbes was able “to make his case about equality and consent—using examples of powerful women without contradiction” (132). Moreover, though Wright agrees that the mother’s knowledge of her maternity and her physical relation to the child grant her an “original right to claim parental authority,” the authority, and the bond it generates, is not natural, but conventional: they go “to whomever cared for it” (132).

Wright completes the interpretive shift out of the paradox paradigm in three ways: first, she fulfills the move away from force and toward care, as seen in Hirschmann and Lloyd, and made explicit by Jaquette, when she argues that maternal dominion is not a form of domination. Second, she explains the natural conditions that give rise to maternal authority as necessary but insufficient since authority is established only by care. Third, by locating the mother’s title to dominion in the activity of caring, she opens a new way to understand the child’s consent. Although Wright does not emphasize this point herself, if the mother’s authority is established through a conventional act of caring, then it is potentially to this care that the child consents. (I will return to reflect further on this point in the concluding sections.)

Contra Schochet, who sees the conventionality of Hobbesian motherhood as a “conceptual embarrassment,” Wright describes it as “strategic and convincing,” in that whereas birth may be a *natural* event, she argues, “motherhood is a *social* relationship” (145).¹¹ What is strategic, more precisely, is that it provides Hobbes with a new artificial and rational foundation for politics: “Conventionalizing the mother–child bond is the first step to rationalizing every human relationship, making [it] . . . the product of artifice rather than nature,” and “If even the most ‘natural’ relation between mother and child was conventional,” she adds, “then, by extension, the relationship between subjects and their sovereign was conventional” (132). Wright closes her discussion by denying that there is a contradiction between Hobbesian Mother Lords and subjected wives, thus dissolving the paradox framework.¹² Furthermore, although she echoes Pateman when she describes maternal dominion as “the first political right,” she clarifies that the purpose of Hobbes’s theory of maternal authority was to “disrupt patriarchal authority in the family and hence in the political realm as well” (135).

Two Ways of Viewing Original Maternal Dominion in Hobbes

Looking over these interpretations, we can distinguish two ways of approaching original maternal dominion in Hobbes. The first, which is most fully developed by Pateman, locates it as one term of a paradox: women’s original dominion over children in the State of Nature is viewed through their eventual subjection to men in the family. In this view, moreover, maternal dominion is an absolute power that is granted on the basis of superior strength, and it is to the mother’s force that the child “consents”—that is, passively submits. The second approach is born out of a critique of the first and, for that reason, is much less defined. Those who take this approach reject Pateman’s claim that dominion is established by the threat of violence. Each offers a different alternative: the physical connection between a mother and child; her biological reproductive powers; her power to decide to preserve; and preserving the infant by caring for him.

How we approach the mother’s role in the establishment of maternal dominion bears upon how we can make sense of Hobbes’s enigmatic statement that parental dominion is “derived . . . from the Childs consent” (Hobbes 1985, 253). If we were to follow Pateman, then the child’s consent is limited to passive submission. If, on the other hand, we were to follow Lloyd and Wright, and see her authority as established by an activity of care, then the child potentially gains some measure of participation. Furthermore, the two approaches have different understandings of the function of maternal dominion within Hobbes’s larger political philosophy. Pateman identifies maternal authority as the first political right precisely because it is based on submission to force (like all forms of Hobbesian authority, in her view) and established at birth; Jaquette rejects this argument and proposes, instead, that there is a spectrum between coercion and consent, and that the child’s position changes as he develops and acquires strength. Wright, for her part, shows maternal authority as establishing the conventional ground of Hobbesian authority in general.

Gaining clarity on Hobbes’s position on this question is crucial for understanding original maternal dominion, but also for how we understand his account of the institution of a commonwealth. If maternal dominion is the first form authority takes in Hobbes, and if it is justified upon force, as Pateman suggests, then the free, egalitarian foundation of politics would vanish, revealing Hobbes’s political philosophy as a theory of domination in disguise.¹³

Turning to examine Hobbes's discussions of parental authority in each of his three major political treatises, I will reconstruct the arguments against the traditional patriarchal justifications and then unpack the positive justifications for original maternal dominion, paying close attention to the meaning of the term *preservation*.

2. Hobbes's Arguments for Original Maternal Dominion

"Dominion by Generation is Not so Derived from Generation": The Negative Arguments

a. The Elements of Law (1640)

It is important to note at the outset that when Hobbes takes up the issue of parental authority, he does not ask "should children be subjected to parents"? He takes the authority of parents over children as in need of a new explanation; traditional patriarchal justifications based on natural generation are incoherent, in his view. Hobbes takes up the question for the first time in a discussion of the three ways a human being becomes subject to another: "voluntary offer, captivity and birth" (Hobbes 1994, 130). His aim, as he presents it here, is to explain the subjection of a child at, and not before, birth.¹⁴

Taking up subjection to a parent as a "third way of subjection," he positions himself against the traditional patriarchalists who argue that children are born under the father's rule. He suggests that from a true naturalistic point of view—that is, he clarifies, one in which all (conventional) human obligations have been dissolved—the only "right" a human being has is to his own body. Therefore, he argues, since a child is attached to the mother until it is separated at birth, the child should be seen by those who justify authority on the basis of nature as belonging to her: "the child ought rather to be the propriety of the mother (of whose body it is part, till the time of separation) than of the father" (130).

It is easy to overlook that Hobbes invokes the idea of bodily propriety in this passage in order to argue that, *if* natural generation were to be taken as the source of parental authority, then it would favor the mother, and not the father. This is a conditional claim, not a statement of his own position. In the next passage, he explains that his own account will follow and it will answer two questions: "first, what title the mother or any other originally hath to a child new born; secondly, how the father, or any other man pretendeth the mother" (130). Yet, before turning to give his own positive account, he reflects a step further on the idea that generation justifies dominion, arguing that the respective parts that males and females play in the generation of offspring is not sufficient to determine which parent should rule because the parents are equally involved (130). Generation thus divides sovereignty, which, he argues, makes obedience impossible: "no one can obey two masters" (130). He concludes by claiming that it is mistaken to give the father authority on the assumption that he plays a more active role in reproduction, or on any other supposed natural superiority.

b. De Cive (Latin original 1642; English translation 1651)

In *De Cive*, Hobbes puts forth many of the same conclusions as in *The Elements* but takes a different path to arrive there (Hobbes 1991, 212). He begins by contrasting two syllogisms, "Socrates is a Man, and therefore a living creature," with "Sophroniscus is Socrates's Father and, therefore his Lord" (212). Although the latter claim may "be a true inference," he argues, unlike the former, it is "not evident" because "the word Lord is not in the definition of Father" (unlike the concept "living creature,"

which is logically entailed in the concept “man”) and, therefore, he explains, “it is necessary to make it more evident that the connection of Father and Lord be somewhat unfounded” (212). So far, he explains, parental authority has been justified by the claim that generation entails authority, “as if it were itself evident that what is begotten by me is mine” (212). This is incoherent, he argues, because dominion is an “indivisible,” “supreme power,” and if we were to consider children in this way, there would be two involved: “two persons, male and female, [who] must concur in the act of generation” (212). Authority, in sum, cannot be explained by the power of generation alone: hence, he concludes, “it is impossible that dominion should be acquired by generation only” (212).

c. *Leviathan* (1651)

Leviathan's attack on justifications for parental dominion by natural generation largely maps onto the previous texts. It begins by citing the singularity of sovereignty principle: “For as to the generation, God hath ordained to man a helper, and there be always two that are equally parents. . . the dominion should belong equally to both, and he be equally subject to both, which is impossible; for no man can obey two masters” (Hobbes 1985, 253). Hobbes repeats his point that this dominion cannot be determined by natural differences between men and women since “there is not always that difference of strength or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be claimed without War” (253).

Before turning to give his own positive argument, Hobbes takes a moment to contextualize the issue. This marks a change from *De Cive* in which, as we will see in the next section, he reinvokes the idea of captivity as he begins to justify original maternal dominion. Unlike in *De Cive*, in *Leviathan* he reminds us that when we ask about which parent has the original authority over children, we are doing so having assumed that there are no laws that determine why parents should rule: “The question lieth now in the state of mere nature where there are supposed no laws of matrimony, no laws for the education of children, but the law of nature and the natural inclination of the sexes, one to another, and to their children.”¹⁵ The “law of nature” to which Hobbes is here referring is “a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same, and not to omit that by which he thinketh it may be best preserved” (Hobbes 1985, 189). If we were to follow a standard approach, we would assume that noninstrumental concern for others is inconsistent with Hobbesian human nature. What he says here complicates this idea: although the State of Nature is governed by the *lex naturalis*, it also includes the mutual desire of reproductive couples, and that of parents for their offspring. There is much to say about this. What is important at present is that, according to Hobbes, neither the *lex naturalis*, nor the natural inclination to care for one’s offspring can explain what legitimates the subjection of a child to a parent.

So, the question remains, which parent has original dominion and why?

“The Title to Dominion over a Child Proceedeth . . . from the Preservation of It”: The Positive Arguments

a. *The Elements of Law*

After attacking traditional arguments for dominion by generation, Hobbes provides his own justification. The argument of *The Elements of Law* seems straightforward: “The

title to dominion over a child proceedeth . . . from the preservation of it” (Hobbes 1994, 130). Yet, as seen above, commentators explain what is entailed in “preservation” differently. Although Hobbes does not give a straightforward answer, he gives many clues. The first appears when he explains that “in the State of Nature, the mother in whose power it is to save or destroy it, hath right thereto by that power” (130–31). Without a doubt, according to Hobbes, the mother has the first right to rule because she is the first to have the opportunity to “save or destroy” the child. (This is clearly on account of having carried and given birth to him, but Hobbes does not make this explicit.) Pateman is not wrong to emphasize the power of not killing. Yet Hobbes also makes clear that having the power to save or destroy the child is not sufficient to grant dominion: “The title to dominion over a child, proceedeth . . . from *the preservation of it* and therefore in the State of Nature, the mother in whose power it is to save or destroy it, hath *right* thereto by that power, according to that which hath been said in Part I. chapter 14, sect. 13 [“In manifest inequality might is right”]” (130–31, my emphasis). To repeat Hobbes’s argument: given this inequality, she has a natural *right* to rule him. However, Hobbes clarifies that to have the *right* is not yet to have the *title*, as Wright pointed out: “And if the mother shall think fit to abandon, or expose her child to death, whatsoever man or woman shall find the child so exposed, shall have the same right which the mother had before; and for the same reason, namely, for the power not of generating, but preserving” (131).

In *The Elements*, preserving entails providing the infant with sustenance in order to strengthen him. Hobbes emphasizes this when he considers that once a child has acquired the strength to kill whoever preserved him, he might see her authority as illegitimate; but this would be a mistake “both because his strength was the gift of him, against whom he pretendeth; and also, because it is to be presumed, that he which giveth sustenance to another, whereby to strengthen him, hath received a promise of obedience in consideration thereof” (131). As noted in part 1, Hirschmann, Lloyd, Jaquette, and Wright each acknowledges the centrality of nourishing for maternal dominion. However, they disagree about the specific role it plays: Hirschmann explains nourishing as reinforcing an authority that was granted by natural maternal powers and connections. Lloyd challenges this claim when she argues that nursing the child establishes the “ordered alliance” between mother and child. The difference is subtle but significant. Here, Lloyd’s interpretation seems closest to the text: nourishing does not reinforce the mother’s natural authority, but establishes it from the ground up.

b. De Cive

In *De Cive*, Hobbes repeats his point that preservation justifies the subjection of children, but here he describes the nativity scene as a kind of capture. He begins: “We must therefore return to the State of Nature, in which, by reason of the equality of nature all men of riper yeares are to be accounted equall; There by right of nature the Conqueror is Lord of the conquered” (Hobbes 1991, 212). At first glance, this seems to give support to Pateman’s reading against critics who locate it in the activity of giving nourishment. In Hobbes’s natural state, the conqueror rules by the right he acquires via the power to choose if another lives or dies, and it is by the same “Right of nature” that “dominion over the Infant first belongs to him who first hath him in his power” (212). This quick shift from “captivity” to “birth” might understandably lead us to think that Hobbes is claiming that whoever has the child “in” her power thereby has dominion over him. However, Hobbes goes on to clarify that this is not his point: “it is manifest that he who is newly born is in the mother’s power before

any others, *insomuch* as she may rightly, and at her own will, either breed him up, or adventure him to fortune” (212).

In this passage, Hobbes compares—and then distinguishes—the power of the mother over the infant from the power of the captor over the captive. In the State of Nature, the mother could end the infant’s life with impunity. But he does not mention killing here, focusing instead on the power to choose between “breeding him up” or “adventuring him to fortune.” Hobbes, in this way, separates the *power to do* from the actual *doing*. Although the power to kill, to “venture to fortune” or to “breed up,” and to choose among these options, provides the conditions for dominion, the dominion is established only by “breeding up.”¹⁶

Although Hobbes describes parental authority as “absolute,” this does not mean it is fully unconditioned, as Jaquette points out. The limits are inscribed within the activity of nourishing as strengthening the child. Since no one would strengthen another so that he might one day kill her, it would be illogical to suppose that the mother would do so, he argues: “it cannot be understood that any man hath on such terms afforded life to another, that he might both get strength by his years, and at once become an enemy; but each man is an enemy to that other whom he neither obeys nor commands” (213). Here, preservation is explained as “affording another with life,” which clearly entails much more than not killing an infant, and it cannot be accomplished by death threats alone. This must be kept in mind when we read that “every woman that bears children becomes both a mother and a lord.”¹⁷

Hobbes concludes his discussion by repeating his basic argument: in the natural condition, every woman has the right to rule the child to whom she gives birth because she can either nourish him or kill him. If she nourishes him, then her dominion and his obligation are established. Yet if she runs away, or gives the child away, she invalidates her authority and gives the opportunity to establish authority to another: “Wherefore the obligation also arose from the benefit of life, is by this exposition made voyd” (213). The mother acquires her authority over the child, Hobbes repeats, by having given him “the benefit of life”—and the child’s obligation, “arose from the benefit of life” (213). And it is on account of this that he is preserved and, thus, obliged to obey her: “For now the preserved, oweth all to the preserver, whether in regard of his education as to a *Mother*, or of his service, as to a *Lord*” (213).

c. *Leviathan*

In his final word on the matter, Hobbes repeats some arguments made in earlier texts while also making an important addition. As in *De Cive*, he distinguishes two scenes of human subjection—“generation” and “conquest”—and connects parental authority to the former alone: “The right of dominion by generation is that which the parent hath over his children, and is called paternal” (Hobbes 1985, 253). Hobbes employs the term *generation* here but, as in earlier texts, he makes clear that he is not arguing that authority is given on the basis of a genetic relation. However, what he says next should strike us as surprising: “[Dominion] it is not so derived from Generation, as if therefore the Parent had Dominion over the Child because he begat him; but from the child’s consent, either express or by other sufficient arguments declared” (253). This claim might, understandably, seem like an abrupt change: Previously, Hobbes argued that dominion is established by nourishing. Is he now suggesting that the nourished child empowers the nourishing Mother Lord? Does nourishing no longer matter? We will return to this question below, after we follow Hobbes’ argument further.

In the next passage, Hobbes gives his final version of his case for original maternal dominion. He begins by distinguishing two ways it can be established in the State of Nature: parents can contractually agree between themselves, and then “the right passeth according to the Contract” or, “if there be no Contract,” then “Dominion is in the Mother” (254). Once again, the mother’s dominion is original: “For, seeing the infant is first in the power of the mother, so as she may either nourish or expose it; if she nourish it, it oweth its life to the mother, and is therefore obliged to obey her rather than any other; and by consequence the dominion over it is hers” (254).

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes sustains the argument developed since *The Elements*: parental dominion is established by preserving the child, which he explains as “breeding him up,” “affording him with life,” “strengthening,” and “nourishing.” As he closes this discussion, Hobbes returns to explain the role of the child. Here he does not speak about parental authority in general, but original maternal authority, in particular, that a child is obliged to obey his mother because “it owes its life to her” (254). Why does he “owe his life” to her? Because she gave him the sustenance necessary to strengthen him. “Dominion,” he writes for the last time, “is in him that nourisheth it” (254).¹⁸

3. Original Maternal Dominion Viewed Again on Its Own Terms

Relocating the Second View

Having looked closely at each of the texts, we are now in a position to decide which of the two feminist approaches outlined in part 1 gives a better interpretation of Hobbes’s argument for original maternal dominion: as one term of a paradox of parental power or, instead, as a self-standing concept of authority that is an alternative to a patriarchal domination. To do this, we need to definitively answer the question: Is a mother’s authority justified by her superior strength and established by force? To repeat: If the answer is positive, then we side with the paradox view and see her dominion as analogous to patriarchal power. If it is negative, then we are in the domain of the second view, and we must decide on one of the three foundations proposed by the second-view interpreters: a natural maternal power or physical connection between mother and child, the mother’s power to choose, or a caring activity. If we choose one of the first two, then we locate the authority “in” the mother. Yet if we see dominion as established by an activity, then we have the possibility of seeing the child as potentially involved (the degree and extent of which will need to be examined).

Keeping in mind our examination of Hobbes’s texts, we can conclude that preservation is an actual, performed activity, not a power or capacity; it is something one *does*, not something one *has*.¹⁹ Our task now is to locate ourselves more precisely within the second framework by refining our understanding of the activity of preservation. Once we have accomplished this, we can try to resolve the puzzle of the consenting infant. These are the issues I will now address as I draw my conclusions.

The Original Scene of Parental Dominion / Child Subjection

In Hobbes, subjection cannot be justified by natural relations or powers. Rather, it is a social relationship that is “artificially” (as Hobbes might say) established by human beings. Hobbes identifies birth as the original scene of human subjection. When the curtain goes up on this scene, there are two: a woman who has given birth to a child, and the child to whom she has given birth. Hobbes explains birth as the moment in which the two are physically separated. He also explains the mother and child as having an unequal relation in that the mother can kill the infant; the infant cannot kill the

mother since he lacks the strength to do so. In addition to having this advantage, the mother can also nourish the infant, something that he needs to acquire strength necessary to live and to live well, and that he cannot do for himself.²⁰ It is this relational condition of natural inequality that stages, yet does not determine, the first encounter between mother and infant.

The Mother's Choice. Although Hobbes recognizes a natural inclination to care for offspring, inclinations do not play an active role in his account of original maternal dominion. There is no maternal instinct in Hobbes as nothing compels the Hobbesian mother to nourish the infant. Rather, a mother “chooses” to nourish. What kind of choice is this? Hobbes does not provide an account of what is entailed in the mother's choice in his discussion of parental dominion. In order to make sense of this, it is helpful to review his account of volition.

First, it is important to recall that Hobbes denies the existence of “the free will,” that is, a mental faculty that directs our actions from a place outside bodily life.²¹ In Hobbes, volition is not a purely mental power or faculty; it is fully bound up with sensuous-appetitive life. In *Leviathan*, he describes the will as an “appetite,” namely, “the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof. . .” in the activity of deliberating (Hobbes 1985, 127). Deliberation, in turn, Hobbes defines as: “the whole sum of desires, aversions, hopes and fears, continued till the thing be either done or thought impossible” (127). Deliberation, in other words, is a process by which a human being decides what to do by reflecting on the consequences of following one appetite rather than another. Further, volition is not a power that is possessed by a body; it is a kind of bodily movement, what he calls a “voluntary motion.” As examples of voluntary motions, Hobbes lists: “to go, to speak, to move any of our limbs, in such a manner as is first fancied in our minds” (118). He goes on to explain that voluntary motions are those that have been made in a particular “manner,” and it is the diversely mannered nature of these motions that enables us to see them as having originated from the imagination: “And because going, speaking, and the like Voluntary Motions, depend always upon a precedent thought of whither, which way, and what; it is evident that the Imagination is the first internal beginning of all Voluntary Motion” (118).

Moreover, unlike “vital motions” that “begin in generation” and effortlessly unfold until death (such as the circulation of blood), voluntary motions have distinct “beginnings.” Hobbes identifies the imagination as “the first internal beginning of all Voluntary Motion.” Imagination, like all forms of mental activity in Hobbes, is rooted in sensation (78). Hobbes is a materialist, to be sure—he thinks that everything in the world can be explained in terms of matter and motion. Yet, when he roots voluntary motion in sensuous-appetitive life, we should not understand Hobbes to be putting forward a causal account of volition, as if what made a motion “voluntary” is that it was the final effect of a causal succession of motions. This is clear, first, because although Hobbes identifies the imagination as the beginning of all voluntary motion, more than imagination is required for voluntary motion, in his view. In addition, a “beginning” can be the initial part of a motion without acting as its cause. Second, a voluntary motion entails a process of deliberation, so an initial thought or feeling is not sufficient to determine which action will be performed. Third, voluntary motions have a condition of visibility; they are those motions that appear to unfold in a particular manner (rather than another) and, hence, in order to appear, they must be seen by someone who recognizes them as such. Finally, this account of voluntary motion is retrospective:

in that a human being appears to move in a particular “manner” (rather than another), her motion shows itself as having entailed some deliberation and, more basically, as having originated in her sensuous imagination. In Hobbes, in short, there is a continuity—not a causal gap—between the corporeal and the volitional registers of life.

To return to the original scene of human subjection with this account of volition in mind: as Hobbes explains it, the mother’s choice is occasioned by an actual encounter with the newborn; it is lack of strength and need for nourishment, on the one hand, and her relative strength and her ability to nourish or, alternatively, expose him, on the other, that makes deliberately nourishing possible. Indeed, in his account of original maternal dominion, Hobbes shows the volitional register of deliberation as opening up in virtue of having different possibilities for how to respond to the infant—possibilities that are tied to having certain physical or mental capacities, but that are not reducible to them since they require an actual encounter with him.

We can now take a position on the interpretive issue raised at the opening of this section: while acknowledging that the mother has various physical and mental capacities that the newborn has not yet developed, we can reject the idea that the source of her authority is her power to choose if he lives or dies since Hobbes denies that human beings have this capacity and, instead, roots volition in the appetitive and motive possibilities of the human body. Moreover, and more important for the point I am trying to make here, seeing the mother’s power to determine the fate of the infant as what legitimates her authority would prevent us from recognizing the relational condition of her choice—that it arises out of a physical encounter with the child and, therefore, depends upon him. To put it in a way that reconciles some interpretive differences in the second feminist view, we could say that there are many natural powers that the mother possesses, and that contribute to setting the stage for the activity of preservation—her capacity to carry, to give birth, to kill, and to nourish—none of which, however, justifies her dominion on its own but that, together, occasion the possibility of deliberately nourishing.

The Child’s Consent. To return to a question posed above, this way of interpreting the mother’s choice to nourish or expose the child, as well as the emphasis on the activity of nourishing itself, provides new resources to unlock his puzzling claim that dominion is “derived from the child’s consent.” An older child can explicitly accept (or reject) another’s authority, but a nonverbal infant indubitably poses a problem. When we rejected Pateman’s interpretation of force as what legitimates maternal authority, we also rejected her claim that the child’s consent is identical to his submission to that force, thereby reopening the question: how can a child consent?²²

Understandably, many readers note a tension in Hobbes’s argument that parental authority is derived from the child’s consent since they assume that consent necessarily entails having the capacity to speak and reason. To repeat: three ways of explaining consent have therefore been proposed: 1) as submission to her superior strength; 2) as merely tacit; or 3) as projected back in time after the child has acquired the capacity to speak and reason.²³ Each either explicitly states or implies that an infant cannot play an active role in the establishment of dominion. Agreeing that an infant can neither speak nor reason, and building upon suggestions made by Lloyd, Jaquette, and Wright, I propose a different way to understand consent that is consistent with Hobbes’s arguments.

When Hobbes argues in *Leviathan* that “parental authority is derived from the child’s consent,” he qualifies it as “either expresse, or by other sufficient arguments

declared” (Hobbes 1985, 253). Elsewhere in *Leviathan*, he argues that children cannot reason because they cannot speak but also clarifies that they are “reasonable creatures for the possibility apparent of having the use of Reason in time to come” (116). So, the question is, can Hobbesian infants, who cannot speak or reason, but who appear to have the ability to do so in the future, somehow “express” consent?

In order to answer this question, the first issue that needs to be clarified is, to what exactly does the child consent? Because they see that dominion is rooted in a superior power or strength, most interpreters assume that the infant’s consent is a purely passive form of submission. Although an older child can respond to force or threats, the idea that an infant can consent in this way would undoubtedly be “anthropological nonsense,” as Pateman aptly described it, since the infant would have to be aware of his relative weakness, and he would have to understand that being brought to his mother’s breast is no different from having a sword pushed into his throat. Since Hobbes does not claim that infants can have this kind of understanding (they lack the requisite experience, for one thing), this does not seem to be a plausible way to interpret his argument. To be sure, one could argue that submission to force does not entail this kind of judgment, and that an infant can submit without being aware that he is doing so. But this is not what Hobbes says. Instead, he distinguishes the power to preserve from the activity of preservation, and he states that parental dominion is derived from the child’s consent, which implies that he thinks a child can consent. Our task as interpreters is to try to understand what he could have meant by this without importing ideas about consent that Hobbes does not share.

To claim that the Hobbesian infant consents to the mother’s rule on the basis of her superior strength is to skip over an important step of Hobbes’s argument: the child’s acceptance of nourishment. In *The Elements*, Hobbes elaborates the activity of preservation as the giving of sustenance to strengthen the child. He reinforces the importance of the child’s acceptance of nourishment in *De Cive*. In *Leviathan* he makes this point central when he argues that the obligation of the child to obey the mother begins when he accepts the nourishment she gives. Taking in mind that nourishing, as Hobbes explains it, necessarily involves two human beings, one way to make sense of the puzzle is to see the child’s consent as his acceptance—his actual consumption—of the nourishment. This notion of consent does not require reason or speech since it is satisfied by the act of receiving. Further, this kind of consent is not merely tacit; it is, to use Hobbes’s term, “expressed” and it can be “expressed” at the very first feeding. Finally, it is a crucial aspect of preserving as nourishing since nourishing has two interconnected parts—a giving and a receiving.

The Pas de deux of Preservation. Drawing from these reflections, as a concluding image, I propose we see this notion of preservation at work in Hobbes’s theory of original maternal dominion as a kind of *pas de deux*—an intersubjective practice in which the mother gives, and the child receives, nourishment. Dancing, like nourishing, is an embodied practice that is produced out of the moving human form: the human being is both “matter” and “artificer,” to employ Hobbes’s terms. In the classical *pas de deux*, each dancer moves in a designated sequence, but the dance is more than the sequence performed by either one individually: it is a series of interconnected steps woven together for a shared purpose. In this context, it is the practice through which one human being strengthens another who has just been born—by giving him nourishment—and it is only in being nourished that a legitimate power relation is established between the two.²⁴

Rather than finding her in the shadow of patriarchal rule, from this point of view the Mother Lord appears as an alternative to the classical *pater familias*. Her dominion is not established by forcing the child to bend to her will, but is strengthened through nourishing *him*. In turn, by accepting the nourishment she gives, the child plays an active role in his nourishment: indeed, since her authority is established by nourishing, in accepting that nourishment he is fulfilling the conditions for her authority. Hobbes rejects the patriarchal claim that authority can be justified by natural connections or powers. He is giving an alternative theory of authority that shows the conditions for legitimate authority as artificial, practical, and intersubjective. In other words, although it emerges from and responds to natural conditions and individual powers, the practice that justifies maternal authority goes beyond the mother's power to strengthen or the child's desire to be strengthened.

Shown from this perspective, the concept of preservation at work in the theory of original maternal dominion looks very different from the one that we have come to associate with Hobbes. Rather than a selfish, individualist natural desire to survive, it is an active, "partnered" activity that is organized by strengthening the subject. Extending the dance metaphor, we could say that the dance of preservation Hobbes is trying to bring into view expresses an awareness about the interdependent conditions for human life and well-being and that can only be satisfied by an intersubjective "nourishing" practice. Although it must be postponed for a future study, this idea of preservation invites us to reconsider how we understand the idea of preservation involved in the institution of the Hobbesian Commonwealth.

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Notes

1 Feminist interpretations have had an increasing impact on the study of Hobbes, as evidenced in recent years by the essays collected in Hirschmann and Wright 2012 and Chadwick and Odzuck 2020, as well as the inclusion of feminist readings in various companions and handbooks, for example, the inclusion of an entry on parental authority that foregrounds original maternal dominion (Sreedhar 2012). For a comprehensive study of the impact of feminist interpretation on Hobbes studies, see Odzuck 2019.

2 The interpretations surveyed here each contribute in an essential way to the development and shift away from the first "paradox view" to the second alternative feminist view. One recent rich and original interpretation that sustains the first view and its interpretation of parental authority as a form of domination, but challenges it in other interesting ways, which is not included here is Paganini 2020. There, Paganini offers a new solution to the paradox by arguing that the distinction between the "vainglorious" and "moderate" is gendered in Hobbes. I don't engage this essay here because original maternal dominion does not play a substantial role in his explanation for the subordination of women to men. However, although I disagree with his solution to the issue of women's subordination to men in the family, I agree with his description of Hobbes as the "philosopher who reveals the mechanisms of dominion instead of concealing them behind a curtain of justifications that would be consistent with his theory" (Paganini 2020, 4), as well as his emphasis on the thick web of social and affective interrelations in the State of Nature. On the second view, for a striking critique of Pateman's attack on the notion of "male sex right" and the heteronormative, male-centered theory of desire that Pateman claims is harbored within Hobbes's and Locke's respective social contract theories, see Boucher 2003. Boucher's article is not engaged here because, like Paganini, she does not focus on original maternal dominion, but on gender in and the subordination of women in the family.

3 This principle holds for anyone who confronts a child in the State of Nature, in his view: “Functionally, authority over the child in the State of Nature belonged to anyone who had the power to kill it.” Schochet explains that in the Hobbesian State of Nature every human being is “entitled to subdue” another on account of the natural right to all things, and the equal vulnerability to violent death and, therefore, a person who “preserved someone whom he might have destroyed, is entitled to obedience from the person he saved.” One of the main questions pursued here is whether infants are the same as vanquished or do they have only some similar aspects (Schochet 1967, 432–33).

4 Schochet distinguishes three kinds of arguments used in patriarchal doctrine: anthropological, moral, and ideological. He argues that Hobbes uses anthropological arguments to justify the rule of fathers but he does not distinguish his logical justification for political authority from his anthropological account of the evolution of the state and that, although Hobbes conflates paternal and political authority, he was original in arguing that both were grounded in consent (see Schochet 1967).

5 Rejecting the hypothesis that the mother was transformed into a servant or child, they suggest that “there is no solution to the problem of the ‘disappearing parent’” because Hobbes was attempting to conceal his patriarchalism. These inconsistencies remained concealed because, rather than carry through his anti-patriarchal arguments, Hobbes “falls back on patriarchal assumptions about the ‘natural’ fitness of males to govern” so that “the inconsistency of [Hobbes’s] capitulation to the patriarchalists is not to be brought to the surface” (Brennan and Pateman 1979, 190).

6 The quote continues, “preservation of life being the end, for which one man becomes subject to another, every man [or infant] is supposed to promise obedience, to him [or her], in whose power it is to save, or destroy him” (Pateman 1988, 41).

7 As Hirschmann points out, this leads to the disturbing suggestion that if women had killed, rather than nourished their offspring, then they would have remained equal, free, and powerful (Hirschmann 2008, 54).

8 “Hobbes’s most radical assertion of the separateness and individualism of humans results in one of the most repressive solutions to the problem of reconciling political authority with individual freedom” (Hirschmann 1992, 39).

9 To cite the full passages: “Once children are born, mothers’ dominion is reinforced if they ‘nourish’ the child rather than ‘expose it’ just as men’s dominion would be based on such action; but because the infant was originally part of the woman’s body, Hobbes seems to suggest that women have a stronger title to dominion” and “Children once they are born, then owe obedience to the mother for taking care of them and keeping them alive, literally with her body, and so her claim to dominion gains further strength” (Hirschmann 2013, 245).

10 Wright expands upon this reading in her monograph, *Origin Stories in Political Theory*, but her interpretation of Hobbes’s theory of maternal dominion is basically unchanged (Wright 2004).

11 Here Wright cites Schochet 1990, 64.

12 According to Wright, Hobbes instrumentalized gender for the purpose of conventionalizing all authority, and so, in her view, there is no contradiction between a Mother Lord in the State of Nature and a subjected wife in the household. This situation, however, is limited to the prepolitical condition, in her view; “by the time the social contract is instituted, women were absent from discussions of civil society and from descriptions of the family, Hobbes fell back on customary arguments about men being more suited to rule than women. The rest of the argument proceeds as though Hobbes had never made his enigmatic assertions” (Wright 2002, 141).

13 If this were correct, then we would not need to wait for fathers to rule in the family: the subjection of children to dominating mothers would already threaten to undermine the equality of the State of Nature.

14 Although distinguishing “subjection at birth” from “voluntary offer” or “captivity” is not sufficient on its own to prove that subjection at birth is logically different from these other forms of subjection, it is important to note that Hobbes separates them here.

15 In *De Cive*, Hobbes made the same move, invoking the logic of the captor–captive relation in order to pivot to his positive account of parental authority. Whereas in *De Cive* he applied the captor–captive logic to explain that the right of nature as that of the strong over the weak, here he invokes the State of Nature in order to argue against the legitimacy of natural sexual hierarchies, and to show that maternal dominion is original whenever parents have not settled the issue by contracting among themselves, or there is no civil law dictating which parent should rule, as Hirschmann argues. What might we make of this difference?

16 Hobbes repeats that it is only “affording him with life” that is sufficient to satisfy the full conditions for dominion. In order to become a mother, to have authority, she need not only give birth, but also nourish the child. Maternal authority does not coincide with biological maternity.

17 Although the term *bears* can signify giving birth (as she “bore three daughters”), it can also signify “to support” or “take responsibility for.” Given that Hobbes acknowledges that a woman can give birth and not acquire dominion over the child, it seems evident that he used the term in a way that comprehended all three meanings. If a woman feeds her child, and acquires dominion in so doing, she does not lose her biological relation to the child, she only gains legitimate authority over him. Biology is included within Hobbes’s account of maternal authority, but, again, authority is not established on the basis of maternal biology alone.

18 It is interesting to note that Hobbes uses a masculine pronoun when he makes this claim, just after giving a justificatory explanation of the originality of maternal dominion.

19 A force-based threat is not a “doing” in the same sense since its aim is projected into the future, as what will be done if the conditions demanded are not met. Hence, a threat requires a form of comprehension that entails interpretation and experience.

20 Given that Hobbes stages the first act of nourishing just after birth, and given the options available in the seventeenth century, it is likely that he has nursing in mind as the first form of nourishing. However, on the interpretation advanced here, it is not necessary for Hobbes’s argument that the mother feed the child with milk from her own body. Hobbes acknowledges that anyone could take the child after he is born and feed him or, instead, give him to another to feed. That said, nursing is a unique form of nourishing in that the nourishment exchanged is provided by the mother’s body, by her natural reproductive powers, and therefore shows the way in which the natural can become conventional through the purposive exchange. And, as the first form that nourishing can take, the exchange of nourishment that occurs in nursing—an exchange that, for Hobbes, cannot be the effect of a natural instinct since it involves a deliberate activity. In nursing, in particular, the continuity between conventional establishment of authority and the vital-appetitive register of life is startlingly illuminated since the legitimate power relation between mother and child is generated out of resources provided by their respective bodies: her capacity to produce milk, his ability to draw it from her body. Invoking Jaquette’s spectrum, from a Hobbesian point of view, nursing would appear as neither purely vital nor as purely voluntary but somewhere in between. To avoid misunderstanding: this is not to say that the motive and volitional possibilities for mother and infant are the same. The infant’s sucking is undoubtedly a response to an appetite for food that Hobbes sees as inborn. The mother can choose to nourish or expose, which entails being able to deliberately move herself in one way or another. My point, however, is that in his account of original maternal dominion, Hobbes is not focusing on the relative physical or cognitive capacities of the child or the mother considered as individuals, but as partners in nourishing—an activity in which they both participate, albeit in different ways.

21 See, for example, Hobbes 1985, 127. Hobbes also rejects the idea of the free will in his discussion with John Bramhall (Hobbes, Bramhall, and Chappell 1999).

22 The contract mentioned in this context is the potential one between mother and father, as Hirschmann points out (Hirschmann 2008, 48). Indeed, Hobbes never claims that there is a contract between mother and child.

23 Hirschmann suggests that infants cannot consent because they cannot speak, suggesting that consent was possible only after speech had been acquired and then was projected back in time. Lloyd follows Hirschmann, attributing the child’s obligation to the relation between preservation and obedience formulated in the Fourth Law of Nature, and she also distinguishes preservation from mutual consent and force. Jaquette defines consent as the acceptance of care, and proposes that there is a spectral relation between coercion and consent. Wright argues that maternal dominion entails “at least tacit consent,” adding that “Hobbes understood the difficulty in achieving consent from an infant” (Wright 2002, 132). My elaboration of consent as the act of acceptance of nourishment is closest to Jaquette’s.

24 Within the classical dance narrative, the *pas de deux* often has a symbolic function, showing the interdependency of the two lovers. Extending the metaphor further, this might be compared to a partnered lift, in which one partner acts as the support for the other, enabling the supported partner to acquire height that he or she would not be able to acquire alone. Either dancer can potentially take this role—depending on the relative strength of a given couple, of course—which is different from mother and infant, whose respective roles as nourisher and nourished do not change as the practice of preservation unfolds over time.

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Meghan Robison is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Montclair State University. Her current research examines the relationship between power, authority, and embodiment in early modern political thought. Her publications include “The Appearance of Power in Hobbes's *Leviathan*” (*Scienza & Politica*, 2019);

“From Expansionist Power to the Erosion of *Bios* in Arendt’s Reading of Hobbes” (*Arendt Studies* (6), 2022: 169–195), “Dominion without Domination: Modernizing Parental Authority in Hobbes and Locke,” in *The Edinburgh Critical History of Early Modern and Enlightenment Philosophy* (forthcoming, 2023). She is completing a monograph that advances an original interpretation of the connection between life and agency in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*.

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