On the Indivisibility of Sovereignty

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THE INDIVISIBILITY OF SOVEREIGNTY

INDIVISIBILITY HAS LONG BEEN AMONG THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF SOVEREIGNTY. As Hans J. Morgenthau once stated this point, "sovereignty over the same territory cannot reside simultaneously in two different authorities, that is, sovereignty is indivisible."[1] Sovereignty cannot be divided without ceasing to be sovereignty proper, and precisely this quality of being indivisible distinguishes sovereign authority from other forms of political power. Dividing sovereignty between two or more authorities within a given state would therefore be to dissolve that state into parts. The indivisibility of sovereignty is thus a necessary condition of the unity of the state.

But although indivisibility has long been regarded a necessary attribute of sovereignty, scholars have equally long argued that this requirement does not correspond to empirical facts and, therefore, ought to be abandoned in favor of conceptions that are more closely aligned to political reality. In modern times, sovereignty has almost invariably been internally divided between different authorities, and externally it has been constantly compromised through contractual and other means.[2] From this contention it has been a short step to argue that the very notion of indivisibility is a main obstacle to redefinitions of sovereignty that hopefully could make better sense of those numerous instances in which sovereignty has been de facto divided within or between polities.[3] Still other critics of sovereignty have pointed to its undesirable normative im-

[1] Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Problem of Sovereignty Reconsidered," *Columbia Law Review* 48, no. 3 (1948): 350.

[2] See Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[3] See, e.g., Neil Walker, "Late Sovereignty in the European Union," in *Sovereignty in Transition,* ed. Neil Walker (Oxford: Hart, 2003), 3–32; Jens Bartelson, "Sovereignty Before and After the Linguistic Turn," in *Sovereignty Games:*

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plications. Indivisible sovereignty not only turns the state into a bounded and exclusive moral community but also renders its legal authority exceptional in the sense that it necessarily will lack a foundation outside itself. As Derrida has argued, "the state's use of power is originally excessive and abusive. . . . it is thus no doubt necessary to erode not only its principle of indivisibility but its right to the exception, its right to suspend rights and law."[4]

But getting rid of the notion of indivisible sovereignty has not been easy. Despite the fact that many of those who have questioned the concept of sovereignty have made indivisibility their prime target, this has done little to the change the ways in which the concept of the sovereign state has been defined and used within modern political science and international relations.[5] Thus, sovereignty cannot simply be wished away, since it has been foundational to the differentiation of modern political life into a domestic and an international sphere. Without the concept of sovereignty, the way in which modern politics is conducted would become hard to comprehend, let alone justify.[6]

This difficulty indicates something important about the concept of sovereignty and its relationship to political practice. Indivisibility is often taken to be necessary to sovereignty in the same way that it is to the definition of a point in geometry. As Le Bret expressed this analogy in 1632, "sovereignty is no more divisible than a point in geometry."[7] But from a modern point of view, even if all pointlike objects in the world were to be destroyed, this would do little to invalidate the theorems of Euclidian geometry. Neither would the truth of those theorems warrant a denial of the fact that all pointlike objects in the world, in fact, are infinitely decomposable. This is so because, to modern geometers, the objects of geometry are nothing but constructs of the human mind. As Hume stated in his *Treatise on Human Nature,* "the objects of geometry . . . are mere ideas in the mind, and not only never did, but never can exist in nature. They never did exist; for no one will pretend to draw a line or make a surface entirely conformable to the definition: They never can exist; for we may produce demonstrations from these very ideas to prove, that they are impossible."[8]

From this point of view, sovereignty looks like nothing less and nothing more than a *symbolic form* by means of which we have come to perceive the political world, but as such it does not stand in any determinate relationship to the world thus perceived.[9] Yet nevertheless, and as with the point in geometry, once such a definition has taken hold, it becomes hard to shake off. I therefore suspect that there is another and more intriguing reason why the concept of sovereignty has proven so recalcitrant to redefinition, and why the assumption of its indivisibility has proved so sticky for so many centuries: the concept of indivisibility has made it possible to relocate and divide authority between different actors simply by telling us *what* to relocate and di-

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Instrumentalizing State Sovereignty in Europe and Beyond, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33–45.

[4] Jacques Derrida, "The 'World' of the Enlightenment to Come (Exception, Calculation, Sovereignty)," *Research in Phenomenology* 33 (2003): 47, 48.

[5] I have made his point at length in Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[6] Or so I argued in Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[7] Cardin Le Bret, *Traité de la souveraineté du roy* (Paris, 1632), 1.

[8] Quoted in H. Mark Pressman, "Hume on Geometry and Infinite Divisibility in the *Treatise,*" *Hume Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997): 228.

[9] See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), 1:73–114.

vide. The theoretical indivisibility of sovereignty therefore turns out to be a condition of its divisibility in practice.

This leaves us with an intriguing question: how did this symbolic form take hold of our political imagination? I believe that an answer to this question necessitates a closer look at the concept of indivisibility itself. Although so much seems to hinge on this concept, little is known about its history and how it entered the foundations of modern political thought through the back door. Therefore, in this article, I shall start by describing how the concept of indivisibility was used in early-modern theories of the state to account for the nature of political authority and its relationship to the political community. I shall then propose a brief sketch of how this concept might have found its way into those theories, and why it came to perform such a vital function when articulating modern conceptions of the state.

HOW SOVEREIGNTY BECAME INDIVISIBLE

Let me start by describing the role played by the notion of indivisibility in the early-modern accounts of sovereignty by Bodin, Grotius, and Hobbes respectively. This is not an altogether easy task, since the role of this concept has to be inferred from how they used other concepts, rather than from any explicit definitions or consistent references to the term "indivisibility" itself. As I will suggest, the concept of indivisibility helped early-modern authors to solve two problems that had eluded medieval political theology and that had been further aggravated by the confessional crisis in early-modern Europe. While the first concerned how to account for the *unity* of the state in terms independent of traditional conceptions of authority and community, the second concerned the *continuity* of such a unity in time and space and its relative ability to withstand the corrosive effects of historical and political change.[10] These problems were often formulated in terms of each other and spurred a series of attempts to justify political authority without reference to divine law or to the community of mortals. As Skinner has argued, the eventual outcome of these attempts was a concept of the state sufficiently abstract to render it independent of rulers as well as ruled.[11] As I shall argue in this section, the concept of indivisible sovereignty provided a valuable resource in this regard, since it made it possible to transfer elements of transcendent authority to the temporal realm without appealing to a divine will or to a cosmic order within which human communities were embedded.

The credit for first having defined sovereignty in terms of indivisibility routinely goes to Jean Bodin and his *Six livres de la République* (1576). Although it is not my aim to dispute his innovativeness in this regard, it is worth recalling that the concept of indivisibility had a long history and a rich symbolic significance upon which he and his successors were able to draw. As Bodin states in his *Six livres*, "sovereignty is the absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth."[12] According to him, "he is absolutely sovereign who recognizes nothing, after God, that is greater than himself" (4). As for the requirement that sovereign power ought to be perpetual, "we must understand the word 'perpetual' to mean 'for the life of him who has the power'" (6).

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[10] See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 314–450.

[11] Quentin Skinner, "The State," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change,* ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell T. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90–131; Quentin Skinner, "From the State of Princes to the Person of the State," in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2:368–413.

[12] Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters from "The Six Books of the Commonwealth,"* trans. Julian H. Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1. Hereafter, page numbers to this source will be given in the text.

Moreover, being absolute here means that "persons who are sovereign must not be subject in any way to the commands of someone else and must be able to give law to subjects" (11). The capacity to make laws is thus the most important mark of sovereignty since "it is only sovereign princes who can make law for all subjects without exception, both collectively and individually" (52). From this "we may thus conclude that the first prerogative of a sovereign prince is to give law to all in general and each in particular . . . without the consent of any greater, equal, or below him" (56). From legal sovereignty other prerogatives follow, such as the rights to declare war and negotiate peace, the rights to collect taxes and punish evildoers, the rights of coinage and measurement, as well as the right to compel subjects to change their language. Summarizing the import of those prerogatives, Bodin asserts that "the entire force of civil law and custom lies in the power of the sovereign prince" (58).

To Bodin, sovereignty is either located in a single person, in the people, or in a fraction of the people. To combine the principles of monarchy, democracy, and aristocracy is "impossible and contradictory, and cannot even be imagined. For if sovereignty is indivisible . . . how could it be shared by a prince, the nobles, and the people at the same time?" (92). Bodin answers this question by arguing that any attempt to divide sovereignty ultimately must issue either in popular sovereignty or in monarchy rather than in any blend of constitutional principles. States that actually try to combine these principles are inherently unstable and dependent on outside forces for their survival, so "it must always come to arms until such a time as sovereignty resides in the prince, in the lesser part of the people, or in all the people" (104). From this simple logic he then devised an explanation of state failure, exemplified by the struggle between kings and nobles in Denmark and Sweden. The fact that the question of absolute authority still was unsettled in those countries was seen as the chief cause of their internal weakness and external vulnerability. In conclusion, since sovereign power is the only remaining and reliable source of right among human beings, political anarchy and the breakdown of the social order will inevitably follow in its absence.[13]

Although Bodin expressed a clear preference for monarchy over other constitutional forms, the internal ambiguities and contradictions of the *Six livres* were used to support a wide range of ideological positions during the centuries to come.[14] But at this point it is worth recalling that what mattered to Bodin is not exactly *where* sovereignty happens to be located in a commonwealth but rather that this locus has to be *singular* for sovereignty to perform its unifying function within the social body. Thus conceived, indivisible sovereignty is necessary to the unity and continuity of the commonwealth, and hence also to its relative ability to withstand internal and external threats to its existence. So by insisting that the prince is bound neither by any universal law nor by any authority other than that of God, Bodin takes an important step toward replacing medieval conceptions of hierarchy with a modern notion of spatiotemporally demarcated authority.[15]

By telling us what makes a state a state, the concept of indivisibility performs a similar integrative function in the writings of Grotius. To him, indivisibility is equally an essential characteristic of sovereignty, constitutive both of the state and of an international society of states. In *De Iure Belli ac Pacis Libri Tres* (1625), he insists that political authority must be supreme, since "in

[13] Daniel Engster, "Jean Bodin, Scepticism and Absolute Sovereignty," *History of Political Thought* 17, no. 4 (1996): 469–99.

[14] J. H. M. Salmon, "The Legacy of Jean Bodin: Absolutism, Populism or Constitutionalism?" *History of Political Thought* 17, no. 4 (1996): 500–522.

[15] See Constantin Fasolt, *The Limits of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 200–203.

Civil Government, because there must be some last Resort, it must be fixed either in one Person, or in an Assembly; whose Faults, because they have no superior Judge, God declares."[16] The fact that such supreme authority has been conferred on the king by the people does not imply that this authority can be reclaimed by them, since although it originates in the latter, its transfer is irrevocable. Yet in many cases, supreme authority is divided in practice, "either amongst several Persons, who possess it jointly; or into several Parts, whereof one is in the Hands of one Person, and another in the Hands of another."[17] To handle such cases in legal practice, Grotius holds that we must judge "by the Will of him, that conferred that right."[18] Grotius thus implies that even in those cases where indivisible and supreme authority is difficult to locate with any precision in a commonwealth, we are nevertheless obliged to assume that such sovereignty exists in principle. Again, the existence of indivisible sovereignty seems to be a prerequisite for the unity and continuity of the state, as well as for the existence of an international society of such states.

Finally, to Hobbes, the concept of indivisibility becomes important when defining sovereignty and its relationship to the commonwealth. As he states in chapter 18 of *Leviathan* (1651), "A Common-wealth is said to be Instituted, when a Multitude of men do Agree . . . that to whatever Man, or Assembly of Men, shall be given by the major part, the Right to Present the Person of them all . . . every one . . . shall Authorise all the Actions and Judgements, of that Man or Assembly of men, in the same manner, as if they were his own, to the end, to live peaceably amongst themselves, and be protected against other men."[19] The rights "which make the Essence of Soveraignty . . . are incommunicable and inseparable." Any division of these rights will produce nothing but discord, since "unlesse this division precede, division into opposite Armies can never happen" (127). Later, in chapter 24, Hobbes lists the division of sovereignty as one of the major causes of weakness in a commonwealth: "for what is it to divide the Power of a Common-wealth, but to Dissolve it? For Powers divided mutually destroy each other" (225). Hence, mixed forms of government are unsustainable, since "the truth is, that it is not one independent Common-wealth, but three independent Factions, nor one Representative Person, but three" (228). In Hobbes, the commonwealth exists independently of rulers as well as ruled, but it takes on such a legal personality only by virtue of being represented by an authority that is indivisible. To him, "it is the Unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the Person One" (114). Thus, sovereignty and the state are co-constituted, the indivisibility of the former being an expression of the unity of the latter, as well as conversely.[20]

Thus, to these writers, the indivisibility of sovereignty is crucial to the conceptual identity of the state, and hence also to its empirical unity and continuity. The notion of indivisibility helped these authors shift focus away from the medieval question of how a political community should best be governed to the question of what *form* authority ought to assume for a political community to stand internally united and best be protected from external enemies. In the absence of a determinate locus of sovereign authority, the state itself will lose its unity and dissolve

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[16] Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 274 (I:III).

[17] Ibid., 306 (I:III).

[18] Ibid., 307 (I:III).

[19] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 121. Hereafter page numbers to this source will be given in the text.

[20] For excellent accounts, see Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes on Representation," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2005): 155–84; Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State," in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3:177–208.

into factions, divided along the lines of status or faith. The notion of indivisibility thereby also provided a simple way to account for the spatiotemporal continuity of political authority, given the undeniable mortality of the physical person of the king and the historical mutability of territories and populations. In sum, the relatively swift incorporation of the concept of indivisibility into the very core of early-modern political thought was arguably crucial to the depersonalization of sovereignty and thus to the emergence of an abstract concept of the state.

TOWARD A HISTORY OF INDIVISIBILITY

But how did indivisibility become a defining characteristic of political authority? Although it is beyond the scope of the present article to provide a detailed account of how indivisibility came to perform this crucial function in early-modern theories of the state, a brief inquiry into the prehistory of the idea of indivisibility might help us understand how this swift transition became possible and why the idea of indivisibility became so hard to resist even for those who later objected to many of its political and moral implications.

What seems clear is that the concept of indivisibility was imported from contemporary theories of geometry. Bodin, Grotius, and Hobbes all drew on geometry in their efforts to provide their justifications of political authority with a more secure footing in an age beset by doubt. Although Bodin made few such references to geometry in his *Six Livres*, they abound in his other writings. For example, in his *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime* (1588), he writes that "whoever agrees with a teacher of geometrical theories and does not understand geometry has faith, not knowledge. But if he understands geometry, he obtains knowledge, but at the same time loses faith."[21] Grotius and Hobbes were more explicit on this score. As Grotius states, "just as mathematicians treat geometrical figures as abstracted from material objects, so I have conceived of law in the absence of all particular circumstances."[22] Most famously, for Hobbes, geometry was "the only science that it hath hitherto pleased God to bestow on mankind" (28). But although such recourse to geometry was seen as a way to combat moral skepticism and religious doubt, the theories of geometry actually available to these writers were hard to disentangle from the theological frameworks within which they had been articulated since antiquity onward. This implies that early-modern theories of the state were erected on foundations partially alien to their overt rationalistic and secularist aspirations.

The concept of indivisibility is a case in point, since it is an indispensable part of geometry. But while modern geometers tend to think of indivisibility as an innocent requisite of a self-evident axiom, their ancient and medieval predecessors regarded indivisibility as a principle of order in the cosmos. For example, when discussing Euclid's definition of the point as "what has no parts," Proclus held that points "have power in the cosmos and . . . have premier rank in the All by virtue of carrying the likeness of the first and most sovereign causes."[23] Whereas the philosopher "should examine everything that is in any way divisible as well as the natures of the indivisibles that are sovereign over them," the scientist "has the responsibility of examining and expounding only that indivisible nature which is appropriate to his first principles."[24] But whereas early-modern political

[21] Jean Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime,* trans. Marion Leathers Kuntz (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), bk. 4, 169.

[22] Grotius, *Prolegomena* to *Rights of War and Peace,* bk. 3, 1762.

[23] Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's "Elements,"* trans. Glenn A Morrow (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 75.

[24] Ibid., 76.

writers defined sovereignty in terms of its indivisibility, Proclus defined indivisibility in terms of *its* sovereignty over things divisible, the latter embodying indivisibility by virtue of their participation in the former. A connection between sovereign authority and indivisibility had thus been established well before it was reversed in early-modern theories of the state, but this earlier connection was embedded within a cosmological framework altogether different from that which we retrospectively have come to associate with the scientific age.

Integral to that framework was an assumption distilled from Plato's *Parmenides,* namely, that the One is ontologically prior to the Many. To Neoplatonist writers, such transcendent unity was the ultimate source of all being insofar as it constitutes all particular objects in a progressive sequence taking us from the most complex to the most simple. From this assumption a series of other beliefs followed about the nature of being and the conditions of knowledge, beliefs that emphasized that indivisibility is not only the most basic principle of being but also the ultimate condition of its intelligibility.[25] To Proclus and his followers, geometrical objects are universals, ontologically prior to their particular instantiations in sensible objects. Since geometrical objects are universal forms with causal powers of their own, sensible objects are not mere instantiations of these forms but are actually *produced* by these forms in an infinite series, each object partaking in the form from which it derives. The task of the ancient and medieval geometer was to decipher this occult order of things.[26]

But from Descartes and Locke onward, geometrical objects were no longer thought of as emanations of an eternal cosmic order. The objects of modern geometry are brought into being by the mind of the mathematician, and the validity of modern geometry's axioms derives either from their seemingly self-evident character or from their rough correspondence to the shape of sensible objects. After this transition to analytical geometry, the whiff of incense that had surrounded the concept of indivisibility gradually dissipated, leaving us with what came to appear as a secular and self-evident presupposition of both geometry and politics.[27]

There are reasons to suspect that early-modern theories of the state were influenced by a Neoplatonist understanding of geometrical objects rather than by a modern analytical one. Bodin was simply not around to enjoy the major restatement of the philosophical foundations of geometry: that of Descartes's *La géométrie* (1637). Instead, Bodin's *Six livres* was heavily indebted to the Renaissance version of Neoplatonism, and his *Colloquium* was replete with references to Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus.[28] For similar reasons of chronology, although Grotius struggled to put his legal theory on a geometric foundation, the references to geometrical principles made in the *Prolegomena* and elsewhere did not reflect any recognizably modern understanding of geometry.[29]

Most interestingly, however, Hobbes vehemently defended the theory of geometry he had set forth in *De corpore* against Descartes by drawing and expanding on Proclus.[30] When doing so,

[25] See A. E. Taylor, "The Philosophy of Proclus," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 18 (1918): 600–635.

[26] See Orna Harari, "*Methexis* and Geometrical Reasoning in Proclus' *Commentary* on Euclid's *Elements*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 29 (2005): 361–90.

[27] David Lachtermann, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[28] See Julian H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

[29] See Hendrik van Eikema Hommes, "Grotius' Mathematical Method," *Netherlands International Law Review* 31 (1984): 98–106.

[30] See Alexander Bird, "Squaring the Circle: Hobbes on Philosophy and Geometry," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, no. 2 (1996): 217–31; Douglas M. Jesseph, *Squaring the Circle: The War between Hobbes and Wallis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 79.

he added an assumption that greatly facilitated the transference of the concept of indivisibility from the realm of mathematics to that of politics. True to the materialistic spirit of his system, he argued that a point in geometry has a *corporeal* existence and thus that points do have extension in time and space. While this assumption was at odds with main tenets of classical geometry, it made it possible to argue that some corporeal entities are indivisible and that such indivisibility is a condition of their continuous existence in time and space.[31] This interpretation of indivisibility helps us to explain how it was possible for Hobbes to account for the unity and continuity of the state in such terms and thus to conceive of the state in modern and wholly abstract terms, as an entity conceptually distinct from rulers as well as ruled. While Hobbes insists that the state is a fictitious person by virtue of being an association of men under a single sovereign, his state enjoys spatiotemporal extension as a consequence of being thus represented. To Hobbes, then, the state is a geometric object made concrete in and through its instantiations in the corporeal realm, a unity-in-multitude whose intelligibility derives from a universal and transcendental form. As he states in chapter 4 of *Leviathan,* "By this imposition of Names . . . we turn the reckoning of the consequences of things imagined in the mind, into a reckoning of the consequences of Appellations . . . and thus the consequences found in one particular, comes to be registred and remembred, as an Universal rule" (26–27).

Thus, from having defined the conditions of existence and intelligibility of geometrical objects within an eternal cosmic order, the concept of indivisibility was now used to justify the modern sovereign state but without explicit references to anything over and above the temporal realm. While the ontological status of the unity thus constructed was to be intensely contested during the centuries to come, the fact that the indivisibility of sovereignty ultimately emanated from a conception of transcendental unity has been forgotten by its modern critics. Remnants of ancient and medieval universalism thereby became encapsulated in the foundations of modern political order, the indivisibility of sovereignty becoming as self-evident to the modern mind as that of the point, quite irrespective of the fact that its correspondence to actual political arrangements remained forever rough.

The rest of this story is well known. While theories of popular sovereignty later shifted the locus of sovereignty from kings to people, they did so without questioning the indivisibility of sovereignty. As Rousseau was quick to point out, "whenever Sovereignty seems to be divided, there is an illusion: the rights of which are taken as being part of Sovereignty are really all subordinate, and always imply supreme wills of which they only sanction the execution."[32] The fact that the unity of the state came to depend on the unity of the represented rather than on the unity of the representer thus did little to change this underlying presupposition but instead left Rousseau and other advocates of popular sovereignty with the difficult task of accounting for the unity of the people and the indivisibility of *its* sovereignty.

For a long time after the French Revolution, the paradigmatic solution to this problem was provided by the concept of the *nation*. Whether conceived in terms of the sameness of its members or in terms of their allegiance to common political institutions, the nation could be conceptualized as an independent source of sovereignty only by virtue of being understood as an

[31] Jesseph, *Squaring the Circle,* 80–81.

[32] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* in *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London: Dent, 1990), 202 (II:II).

indivisible unity whose identity was unaffected by historical change.[33] When this view eventually was challenged by those arguing that humanity as a whole should constitute the ultimate source of sovereignty, the transmigration of the concept of indivisibility seems to have brought us full circle, back to a universalistic framework not very different from that which early-modern theorists of the state struggled so hard to escape.[34]

CONCLUSION

But what difference does this make? The fact that our way of perceiving the political world has been conditioned by a peculiar reading of Plato's *Parmenides* that made the One prior to the Many does not make that world any easier to change, but it might help explain why this has been so difficult. If the above analysis is correct, the relocations of sovereignty from God to kings, from kings to particular peoples, and then from these peoples to humanity as a whole have been made possible by the underlying assumption that the nature of political authority remains essentially the same irrespective of its source and locus, and this precisely by virtue of its inherent indivisibility. Thus, the notion of indivisibility tells us that the basic makeup of the political world is immutable and that beyond the apparent plurality of political forms is an underlying unity that has made this pattern of variation possible. Theories of sovereignty are theories of political form, and as such they subsume all manifestations of plurality and multitude under the one and indivisible.

The above account also helps us to understand how the mismatch between conceptions of sovereignty and actual constellations of political authority came into being and became so difficult to handle for modern political theorists. While theories of sovereignty presuppose that political authority ought to be indivisible, the findings of modern political science have almost invariably testified to its actual divisibility. Yet subsequent attempts to banish the concept of indivisible sovereignty from political science have more often led to a loss of coherence rather than to a gain in explanatory power. Partly this is because the norm of indivisible sovereignty has been institutionalized to the point of becoming taken for granted, but I also think that there is another and more profound reason why the notion of indivisible sovereignty has displayed such remarkable endurance within political thought. This has less to do with the nature of political authority and more to do with the modern constructivist understanding of geometrical objects and its inability to account for the relationship between geometrical forms and sensible objects other than in terms of the conditions of possible knowledge. After Kant, we have been tempted to regard geometrical objects as little more than symbolic forms that help us make sense of what otherwise would be a chaotic manifold of objects given to experience. But as indicated at the outset of this article, to say that indivisible sovereignty is nothing but a symbolic form by means of which we make sense of political reality merely begs the question of how this symbolic form relates to the objects it represents or subsumes. Granted that sovereignty is what we make of it, what remains to be investigated is how this form has been involved in the actual constitution of the modern political world to the point of becoming a condition of its intelligibility. Yet fortunately, no recourse to the occult is needed to accomplish this task, only a careful analysis of the historical on-

[33] See, e.g., Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 447–528; Bernard Yack, "Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism," *Political Theory* 29, no. 4 (2001): 517–36.

[34] See, e.g., James Bohman, *Democracy across Borders: From Dêmos to Dêmoi* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

tology of the symbolic form of sovereignty and its subsequent dissemination in political theory and practice. Undertaking this task would perhaps sensitize us to the possibility that the Many is prior to the One and that the only thing that has led us to believe otherwise is the violent imposition of that form upon the world. A