

Article

Sectarian Trifles and Political Necessity: Swift on Lilliputian Religion in *Gulliver's Travels*

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Abstract

This article offers a novel reading of *Gulliver's Travels* that argues Jonathan Swift's analysis of religion and politics is more daring and philosophically profound than is generally recognized. Focusing on Lilliput in Part I, I show that Swift treats sectarian disputes as trivial, while at the same time he demonstrates the enduring political necessity of religion for social and civic order. Through Gulliver's encounters, Swift presents a range of alternative political arrangements structured by their relation to religious belief, thereby advancing a sustained inquiry into the problem of organizing political life in light of religion. By interpreting the Lilliputian controversies and their underlying theological implications, the article contributes to ongoing debates about Swift's religious outlook and situates *Gulliver's Travels* as a work of political philosophy concerned with the limits of toleration, the persistence of sectarian conflict, and the conditions of a stable political community.

Keywords: Jonathan Swift; *Gulliver's Travels*; Lilliput; religion and politics; sectarianism; political theology; religious toleration; enlightenment thought; satire; early modern political philosophy

Religion is one of the principal themes of Jonathan Swift's most famous novel, *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift 2002). Through his account of his protagonist's travels, Swift presents the reader with an analysis of no less than four alternative ways to organize political life, where the principle of distinction centers on the best way to organize politics with a view, above all, to religion. In one of the lands Gulliver visits, the people practice a revealed religion; in another, the people are pagans; in the third, scientists rule as a sort of secular priesthood; and, finally, Gulliver discovers a land of philosophic, rational animals who evince no spiritual beliefs whatsoever.

This article aims first to demonstrate the fundamental importance of religion for understanding the deeper political teaching of *Gulliver's Travels* by focusing on a treatment of the topic in Part One of the Book, and second, in so doing, to point the way to a deeper exploration of the topic in the remainder of the book. For, through Gulliver's various experiences and encounters, Swift offers a comprehensive account of religion that includes a shrewd critique of existing practices and an adumbration of the requirements for the best kind of political and religious community. Swift uses the satire of Lilliput to advance a paradoxical teaching: while religious quarrels and sectarian disputes are matters of indifference from a higher perspective, religion remains politically indispensable; so, any philosophical critique of religion must be veiled rather than openly declared.

From the very start of the text, there are subtle but clear indications that Swift has religion in mind above all else. In the first chapter of the first part, Gulliver, our putative "author," gives an account of himself. After a one-sentence report of his father and birth,



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Gulliver turns immediately to an account of his own education, revealing the things Swift presumably wants the reader to infer Gulliver knows and was interested in learning. Gulliver studied at Emanuel College at Cambridge University, and as is well-known, the different colleges at Cambridge focus on different subjects of study. Emanuel happens to be the college that trained protestant ministers, and it had quite a reputation as a seedbed for Puritanism and dissent.¹ Gulliver also studied at Leiden, another university strongly associated with Puritanism. This was a deliberate choice by Swift for the rich set of associations it conjures, from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to the Anabaptist rebellion at Munster. Thus, Gulliver's primary course of study would have been religious in character. Gulliver spent three years at Emanuel College, and, by his own account, applied himself closely to his studies there.² Further, he indicates that he would have preferred to have continued his studies at Emanuel but for a lack of financial resources. So, in a novel that critiques the very notion of self-directed travel as a form of edifying education, Gulliver may have undertaken his first travels in an attempt to continue his religious education by other means.

This suggestion is indeed confirmed in another bit of evidence from the opening pages: the spiritual character of Gulliver's initial destination. Gulliver's first one or two travels, he tells the reader, were to the Levant, the birthplace of the three great monotheistic religions, with a captain named Abraham, no less. Gulliver reports, but does not discuss, an additional voyage, between his second and third voyage, to the Levant.³ Thus, Gulliver's first and central voyages are to the Holy Land. Swift, known for his rhetorical playfulness, appears thus to have Gulliver indicate the primacy and centrality of religion to the book.⁴

Although Swift does not quote or even directly allude to the Bible in the *Travels*, Christianity is central to the text.⁵ None of the lands Gulliver visits is inhabited by Christians.⁶ And no major character seems to be particularly Christian; the Dutch merchants mentioned in Part III are even willing to trample on the crucifix.⁷ Accordingly, many scholars argue that *Gulliver's Travels* is not a religious satire at all, and certainly not one on Christianity. See Eddy (1963), pp. 45 and 155, as well as (Case [1945] 1958), pp. 107–9. Case, for example, argues that Swift avoids satirizing religion in *Gulliver's Travels* because of the accusations of blasphemy that arose from *A Tale of a Tub*.⁸

But while it is entirely possible that Swift avoided criticizing religion altogether, it is also possible, even likely, that Swift used greater caution in writing about ecclesiastical affairs in response to the criticism *A Tale of a Tub* received to avoid detection and even punishment. For as Gulliver says, in a letter to his cousin Sympson prefaced to the 1753 edition: "People in Power were very watchful over the Press; and apt not only to interpret, but to punish every thing which looked like an *Inuendo* (as I think you called it)."⁹ These remarks show that Gulliver, and, by extension, Swift, understood the political consequences of writing works of literature, and thus that Swift may have presented his criticism of existing religious and political order *politically*. *Gulliver's Travels* is a work of political philosophy and must be read accordingly.¹⁰

Although Swift is certainly cautious in his treatment of religion, references to it abound: there are priests and prophets, invented scriptures, allusions to sacraments, and apparently miraculous incidents.¹¹ In one visit, Gulliver successfully evades being compelled to disrespect the crucifix.¹² In another land, Gulliver encounters polytheistic pagans, inviting the reader to reflect on the differences between Christianity and paganism.¹³ In another place, he encounters a race of immortal beings.¹⁴ Even the complete absence of religion in the final stop of Gulliver's several voyages, the land Gulliver loved and venerated most, is itself noteworthy.¹⁵ The persistence of religious references in this book calls out for interpretation.

We will limit ourselves to the initial part of the book. Lilliput, the nation Gulliver visits first, seems to offer the worst model for how to organize religious life politically; it is a land wracked by sectarian disputes. It also happens to be the land whose religion reflects most closely the religion of Europe during Swift's life. Gulliver is initially lodged in an ancient temple during his stay in Lilliput, one that has been abandoned due to a past undisclosed pollution (I, i, 22). The people of Lilliput are more deeply religious than the people of any other land Gulliver visits (I, i, 22), though we discover the learned do not necessarily share the zeal or even the credulity of the vulgar (I, vi, 48), and religion is of such paramount civic importance in Lilliput that atheists are formally barred from holding public office (I, vi, 49). There are priests in Lilliput, as in other lands he visits, but only here in Lilliput do we hear mention of resurrection, a revealed text, a multiplicity of sects, and religious disputes. Of all the places Gulliver visits, Lilliput seems the most familiar, and, apart from the obvious difference in size, the least bizarre. Lilliput, more than any other land Gulliver visits, resembles contemporary Europe.¹⁶ Thus, this voyage speaks most directly to the religious views of Swift's day.¹⁷

The religious problem of Part I is outlined clearly in the fourth chapter, in a conversation Gulliver had about a fortnight after he obtained his liberty in Lilliput. The principal secretary of private affairs, Reldresal, visits Gulliver at his home, wishing to speak in private. After some introductory compliments, the secretary tells Gulliver, who reports to the reader, that the Lilliputians labor under two mighty evils. The first is a violent faction at home, and the second is a danger of an invasion from a most potent enemy from abroad.

The domestic dispute is between two political factions, one who wear high heel shoes and the other who wear low heels. Scholars concur that Swift is using this device to satirize a contemporary English political dispute: the dispute between the low-heeled and high-heeled factions represents the dispute in England between the Tories and the Whigs. The Emperor hobbles when he walks because he wears one high-heeled and one low-heeled shoe—a signal that the current King of England has a foot in each camp. However, while the debate between the Whigs and the Tories was principally political, it was also religious: the Whigs supported the low church and the Tories the high.¹⁸

Reldresal devotes more attention, by far, to the second mighty evil, the evil from abroad. The Lilliputians are threatened with an invasion from the Island of Blefuscu, the only other people in the world known to the Lilliputians. The hostility between the two empires has its roots in a religious dispute regarding the seemingly trivial question of which end of an egg is the appropriate end to cut. The reason the question takes on significance has to do with the proper interpretation of scripture, as there is a prophecy from the Lilliputians' chief prophet, Lustrog, on the question, but it also has to do with the power of custom and the human inclination to resist forsaking tradition. The three-year war that persists between Lilliput and its chief enemy, Blefuscu, began in the following way: As is unanimously agreed upon, all broke their eggs on their big end originally, but then, the current emperor's grandfather, when he was a boy, cut his finger while attempting to cut an egg. Accordingly, his father, who was then Emperor, issued an Edict, under great penalty, that everyone must now break eggs according to their smaller ends. The people resented the law and raised six rebellions in response to the edict and one emperor lost his life and another his crown. It is estimated that eleven thousand persons have been put to death rather than submit to breaking their eggs at the smaller end. Many of those who heretically cut their eggs on the larger end became exiles in Blefuscu, which, for its part, fomented civil faction in Lilliput.

This satire works on multiple levels. Above all, the satire concerns the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, but the dispute also gestures toward internecine Protestant conflicts.¹⁹ First, the dispute between the Lilliputians and the Blefuscans represents a

rivalry between England and Catholicism, the Anglicans versus Roman Catholics. Second, the dispute could represent an intra-English squabble between Protestants and Catholics. Lastly, scholars posit the rivalry represents the rivalry between England and France. In all these cases, the debate over how properly to cut an egg would likely be an argument over transubstantiation.²⁰ All of these possibilities are likely, and I see no reason that the fight cannot operate on all the levels suggested in the literature. But these accounts of the dispute leave many curiosities inadequately explained, and these curiosities suggest Swift's satire may be more biting than it appears to be at first, and may be working on another, still deeper level.

In particular, four curiosities call out for interpretation. The first has to do with time. The war, whose duration Reldresal stresses, is curiously short in human terms—a mere three years. Related to this, we are led to reflect on Lilliputian life expectancy—there seems to be good evidence that the lives of Lilliputians are considerably shorter in duration than human lives. Is there any significance to this reduction? Next, Lustrog's prophecy is bizarre—why would a prophet busy himself with the seemingly trivial question of which side of an egg is the appropriate one to cut? Is it literally about eggs? Might it be a parable? One wonders whether there is a source for this strange prophecy in any existing scriptures, especially given that Swift is writing in a Christian country for a Christian audience, and was himself a dean in the Anglican Church, whether there is a source in the New Testament. Perhaps Swift is taking aim at a particular passage of scripture, but a source for this satirical prophecy has not been identified. Next, why did Swift choose an egg as the source of the religious dispute? The argument that the debate represents the question of transubstantiation does not settle the question, because it could have been any edible item, and thus the question remains: Why eggs?²¹ Lastly, in Chapter IV Gulliver contradicts his earlier and later accounts of how long he stayed in Lilliput. Dwelling on these curiosities will reveal that Swift had a deeper, more radical teaching regarding revealed religion than is generally recognized.

According to Reldresal, the duration of the war between Lilliput and Blefuscu has lasted three years, or, as he states in rather archaic terms that seem only to exaggerate the duration of time, the two sides have been engaged in obstinate war for “six and thirty moons past.” The length of the war, three years, would thus not be very long, judging by human standards; surely we humans have had wars of much greater duration. The war began when the current emperor of Lilliput's great-grandfather was emperor, but this would mean a war that lasted but three years has spanned four generations of rulers. The only way to make sense of this is if the Lilliputians have considerably shorter life spans than their human counterparts.²²

Moreover, the length of the war is also considerable by Lilliputian standards if one judges it relative to the span of their recorded history. The Lilliputians only had recorded history for about 6000 months, or 500 years. Now, three years out of 500 is a rather significant length of time.²³ A proportional period of recorded human history would accordingly be quite extensive. Recorded history, according to Christianity, is around 5000 years, so an equivalent length of time for Christendom would be roughly thirty years, drawing a much more obvious parallel to the Thirty Years' War.²⁴ If this suggestion is correct, Swift would be satirizing the seriousness of the major dispute within Christianity, and we could probably learn something about his position on the proper place for religious and political authority, and perhaps, as we turn to the prophecy Reldresal quotes, even the problem of revelation.

The prophecy occurs in the fifty-fourth chapter of the *Brundrecal*, the Lilliputians' Quran (or as Gulliver calls it, in the language of his day, the *Alcoran*). In that chapter, the Prophet *Lustrog* prophesies, “that all true believers break their eggs at the convenient

end.”²⁵ In searching for the source of the prophecy in the Bible, one is first led to identify the fifty-fourth book of the King James Bible in hopes of guidance, but we find that the fifty-fourth book, First Timothy, sheds little light on the passage. If instead we search the Bible for content that resembles the Lustrogian prophecy, and, in particular, if we search for references to eggs, we find eggs mentioned four times in the Bible: there are three occurrences in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, and one particularly apt reference in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of an egg in the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 11, in fact, which contains the same number of verses, fifty-four, as the chapter in which Lustrog’s prophecy occurs. Swift almost surely intends to point us to this chapter from Luke.

Luke 11 consists of a version of the Lord’s Prayer,²⁶ followed by Jesus’ parabolic explanation of God’s response to human prayer. That is, Jesus teaches his followers how to pray and what to expect from prayer. In the first place, Jesus’ prayer is quite simple, and other than pleas for daily sustenance, forgiveness, and deliverance from error, is rather short on demands. After relating the prayer that Christians should recite, Jesus expounds upon the expectations of the one who prays:

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:9–13).

Taken in the immediate context, these verses can be read as extraordinarily universalist. God, by Jesus’ account, answers the prayers of anyone who asks. Anyone who seeks finds. Swift’s invented prophecy is similarly universalist in character. All true believers break their eggs at the convenient end, and believers ought to pray in whatever way they deem convenient. Any son who asks will receive; all sectarian disputes are matters of indifference from a superhuman or divine point of view. That is not to say that *humans* treat sectarian disputes as matters of indifference; to the contrary, humans, much like their Lilliputian counterparts, regularly take such matters seriously, gravely so. But some humans, or, in this case, Lilliputians, read scriptures so universally, and, by satirizing sectarian disputes and minimizing their importance, Swift gently guides his readers toward a more universalistic, less dogmatic insistence on orthodoxy. At a minimum, Swift seems to encourage Protestants and Catholics to take their sectarian differences less gravely serious; a deeper reading might lead to even greater religious toleration. The secretary Reldresal, for example, advances a universalist interpretation of the passage, stating: “which is the convenient End, seems, in my humble Opinion, to be left to every Man’s Conscience” (I, iv, 41).

From the Gulliverian point of view, from the point of view of a superhuman being, sectarian conflicts between the Big Endians and the Small Endians are simply insignificant. After all, how well could Gulliver, or someone his size, be able to discern the small or large side of a Lilliputian-sized egg—keeping in mind that Gulliver wears glasses on account of the weakness of his eyes? (I, ii, 31). If Gulliver is 6 feet tall, Lilliputians 6 inches tall, and eggs are about 2–3 inches tall, then Lilliputian eggs would correspond to slightly less than a quarter of an inch in height. If eggs look insignificant in the eyes of a visually impaired giant, how much less significant must a dispute about eggs look from a truly divine point of view? At no point does Gulliver evince any interest whatsoever in the content of the religious debate between the big and little enders. He is utterly indifferent, and states his indifference regarding similar disputes candidly much later in the book, while visiting the land of the Houyhnhnms: “Difference in opinion hath cost many Millions of Lives: For

instance, whether *Flesh* be *Bread*, or *Bread* be *Flesh*; whether the Juice of a certain *Berry* be *Blood* or *Wine*. . . Neither are any Wars so Furious and bloody, or of so long Continuance, as those occasioned by Difference in Opinion, especially if it be in things indifferent" (IV, v, 207, emphasis in text).²⁷ By calling the Lilliputian scripture their "Alcoran," Swift nods toward an even greater expansion of religious toleration. If "egg eating" is now symbolic for how one ought to worship God, the implication would be that humans should worship God in whatever way they find convenient. Turning to the fourth curiosity mentioned above, regarding the duration of Gulliver's voyage, while keeping egg imagery in mind, we find further evidence for this possibility.

In chapter four, Gulliver says he stayed in Lilliput about nine months,²⁸ and he later modifies the claim slightly and says he stayed in Lilliput for nine months and thirteen days.²⁹ But these claims contradict Gulliver's account elsewhere of his duration in Lilliput. For at the start of Part I, Gulliver tells us that he was shipwrecked on the fifth of November 1699 (I, i. 16), and that he departed Lilliput on the twenty-fourth day of September 1701 (I, viii, 65), which would mean Gulliver was in Lilliput twenty-two months, not nine. His trip exceeded nine months by roughly thirteen months.³⁰

The inconsistency is strange, as is Gulliver's, or Swift's, choice of nine months.³¹ Of course, one is tempted to explain the inconsistency as a slip on the part of the author, but it is worth reflecting on the number to see whether there is any significance. Moreover, the repetition of the number thirteen inclines one to the view that the miscalculation is not the product of chance. Why, if the discrepancy is intentional, did Swift (or Gulliver) choose to say he was only in Lilliput nine months when he was in fact there for much longer? Why not seven or eight, or ten? Or why not remain consistent, for that matter? Nine months is, of course, the normal period of human gestation. And coupling this with the unforgettable image of an egg as the principal source of a religious dispute, it starts to sound like the symbol and the number suggest a theme of birth or pregnancy in the chapter. Let me tentatively suggest that, in this chapter, which seems to be about the indifference of matters of sectarian disputes, such as transubstantiation, Swift may be pointing to an even more deeply held religious belief within Christianity, the belief that ostensibly separates Christians from non-Christians, namely the miraculous character of the birth of Christ. Swift may hereby subtly indicate that this question, too, is a matter of cosmic indifference. But even further, by choosing nine months, Swift inconspicuously points to his answer to the question. But he also indicates, by burying this possibility, that he sees no reason to bring to light his disagreement with those who insist on the miraculous character of Jesus' birth. For if, ultimately, such a question is a matter of indifference, why would one need to insist on one's own view?

This argument is not to deny that the choice of the egg represents the Eucharist; rather, I am arguing that while the story inclines one to the view that Swift held the question of transubstantiation a matter of indifference, he surreptitiously points to more fundamental Christian dogma and reveals that this question, too, is a matter of indifference. Swift hides his true object beneath a thick veil, and he has principled reasons for covering his tracks on this question, as I have argued. We moderns, heirs to the Enlightenment, have difficulty fathoming why an author would obscure his true thought, but we must recall that Swift is widely recognized as a critic of modernity.³² And if Swift was a critic of the teaching of modernity, we must be open to the possibility that Swift was critical not only of the content of modern philosophy but also of its mode of teaching or making public its views.

The next chapter helps us to understand why Swift suppresses his theoretical critique of religion. For his protagonist is also indifferent to the religious dispute between Lilliput and its neighbor, and he acts accordingly. Gulliver's indifference in the theological debate

is reflected in his failed attempt to reconcile the two parties, whose differences seemed, from his vantage point, utterly meaningless.

As previously mentioned, the two rival religious sects inhabit different islands and are at war with each other. The king or emperor of Lilliput (there is some confusion regarding which he is) implores Gulliver to destroy his rival, but Gulliver has no such inclination:

“And so unmeasurable is the Ambition of Princes, that he [the Lilliputian Emperor] seemed to think of nothing less than reducing the whole Empire of *Blefuscu* into a Province, and governing it by a Vice-Roy; of destroying the *Big-Indian* Exiles, and compelling that People to break the smaller end of their Eggs, by which he would remain the sole Monarch of the whole World. But I endeavored to diver him from this Design, by many Arguments drawn from the Topicks of Policy as well as Justice: And I plainly protested, that I would never be an Instrument of bringing a free and Brave people into Slavery. And when the Matter was debated in Council, the wisest part of the Ministry were of my Opinion”. (I, v, 44)

So, Gulliver aims to thwart the Prince’s ambition, and to reconcile the two parties. Instead of destroying the rival empire’s navy, as he was instructed to do, Gulliver captures all their ships. This reflects Gulliver’s confidence, at least at this point in his journey, in his extraordinary political skills, but, much like the other stupendous feat he performs in chapter five to rescue the queen’s palace, Gulliver’s piddling attempt to reconcile the warring parties is not well received. Indeed, it, along with the extinguishing of the fire in the royal palace, was the chief cause for the charges of treason against Gulliver that led to his ultimate flight from Lilliput.

In this case, Gulliver underestimates the seriousness with which humans (or, in this case, Lilliputians) take matters of cosmic insignificance. His short-lived, failed attempt to reconcile the Lilliputians and Blefuscudians reveals Gulliver’s inadequate appreciation of the strength of human attachment to sectarian theological opinion. Matters of theoretical insignificance can take on important real-world meaning; they can be matters over which people are willing to fight, to kill, and to die. Here we see a failing of Swift’s invented, stranded, hapless mariner, Gulliver, who fails to see the futility of the attempt at harmonizing rival religious sects completely. Gulliver had to learn, in comic fashion, the limits of his political hopes. The episode shows the permanently powerful pull of religious belief, and consequently, the necessity of shared religious beliefs for the health of civil society. So, while the episode may achieve the more limited goal of opening some readers’ eyes to the ridiculous character of some religious disputes, it also points, at the same time, to the fact that they are often irremediable.

The interpretation of Swift’s religious teaching in *Gulliver’s Travels* offered here presents an extraordinarily non-sectarian Swift whose profound thought and daring writing have escaped the notice of many an interpreter. While there may be good reason to declare the book’s author, Jonathan Swift, dean of the Anglican Church, a traditionally pious man who holds fast to church dogma, the book itself frequently points the reader in a less than orthodox direction.³³ This is not to deny that the book seems to be confusing or even contradictory regarding religious matters. But if Swift intentionally concealed his teaching on religion, as he believed those who harbored doubts should do, and shrouded his theoretical critiques in outlandish allegories, confusion and debate would arise as a matter of course. Indeed, it would partly achieve the author’s paradoxical aim. Swift may have been radical in thought, but in deed he could be quite conservative.³⁴ The perennial debate, the argument over Swift’s piety, is partly the result of a deliberate decision on Swift’s part, a decision guided by carefully thought-out principles not to make his true views widely known. For Swift doubted that modernity’s goals were achievable or even, for that matter, desirable; people, especially insofar as they are members of a political community,

need to live by shared religious dogmas, and the attempt to remove dogmas and to live our lives solely guided by reason or science is a conceit of modernity. Accordingly, men ought generally to live their lives in outward conformity with the religious dogmas of their day and limit their critiques to indirect and difficult-to-discern lessons. I hope to have offered here enough evidence to lead an impartial reader of *Gulliver's Travels* to consider seriously the possibility that, in the last analysis, Swift's famous satire's chief object of ridicule is religion.

As Swift is "dangerous to write about because he is cleverer than his readers," Brady (1978), p. 346 a full understanding of Swift's views on religion in *Gulliver's Travels* would require similarly close attention to the religious practices of the remaining three main countries Gulliver visits. I have provided the beginnings of such an undertaking here by focusing on the first land Gulliver visits and, along the way, I have also pointed to some of the key religious differences among the other lands Gulliver visits. Ultimately, such an undertaking would require a full delineation of Swift's hierarchy of religious-political regimes presented in *Gulliver's Travels*.

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Notes

- ¹ Gulliver's second focus of study was medicine, which would include some study of natural science. This means Gulliver would have been uniquely qualified to reflect on the various religions he encountered as well as the rule of scientific priests in Laputa.
- ² A related, minor point: Gulliver would likely have undertaken his study of language at Emanuel College, as study of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were part of the curriculum. And Gulliver regularly boasts of being a cunning linguist. We thus see that his original purpose for studying languages would likely have been linked to his study of religious texts. Gulliver lists High and Low Dutch, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and *Lingua Franca* as the languages he can speak, or has the "least smattering of" (Swift 2002, I, ii, 25). To my point about possibly having studied Hebrew at Emanuel College, Gulliver omits Hebrew from the list of languages he can speak. But this could possibly be explained by the fact that Hebrew was a dead language at the time. See also II, i, 74; II, viii, 119; III, ii, 136; IV, ii, 196; as well as II, v, 99.
- ³ Gulliver's first voyage was with Captain Abraham Pannell, "with whom [he] continued three Years and a half, making a Voyage or two into the *Levant*" (I, i, 15). Pannell is a surname that may mean "panel maker," or may mean "Son of Payne." Or is Swift playing name games and using Pannell as an etymological combination of Greek and Latin—All nothing? In any event, we hear of another, unreported, voyage to the Levant at the beginning of Part III (III, i, 129). Regarding Gulliver's trip to the Levant, see (Kristol and Mansfield 2017).
- ⁴ To these three considerations, let me add two more considerations. Our protagonist's Christian name, Lemuel, is rather obscure. It appears once in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible, in the final chapter of the book of Proverbs. King Lemuel is otherwise unknown, but Jewish tradition has identified him with Solomon. Proverbs 31 consists of two poems, a poem about a wise king and a poem about a virtuous wife. The first poem admonishes wise kings to refrain from drunkenness, advice which the

protagonist of our book does not follow. And regarding a virtuous wife, our Lemuel seems to be, at best, indifferent. My fifth, final, and most speculative point: there are thirty-nine chapters in *Gulliver's Travels*, and there are thirty-nine articles of religion found in the English Book of Common Prayer, the text distinguishing the Anglican church, of which Swift was a Dean, from the Roman Catholic.

- 5 According to Charles Beaumont, "Swift has used no Biblical quotations or allusions in *Gulliver's Travels*." (Beaumont 1965, p. 53) Beaumont draws the inference that the absence of any direct reference to Christianity reveals that the book is uninterested in such matters. To his point, God is only mentioned once (I, ii, 29), and there is a single reference each to gods (II, iv, 95) and demigods (III, vii, 166). Christianity is mentioned six times (thrice in III, I; III, xi; and IV, xii), including a reference to Christendom (IV, v).
6 By limiting Gulliver's travels to unknown lands where Christianity is unknown, Swift suggests the non-universality of Christianity.
7 There is an interesting possible exception. When confronted with the possibility of summoning the ghost of any human who has ever lived when he visits Glubbudbrib, Gulliver does not appear to be particularly interested in summoning Christians. The only Christian he seems interested in speaking to from among the scores of thinkers, writers, and political actors—mostly men from Ancient Greece and Rome—is Sir Thomas More. More is included among a list of six men who were executed by political forces for holding fast to their beliefs, a list to which, Gulliver tells us, no seventh *can possibly be added*. Would not a pious man include Jesus among those who were wrongfully executed by the state? Does not the inclusion of More—the only non-ancient figure mentioned—point to Jesus, making the latter's omission even more conspicuous?
8 "At first sight it may seem odd that Swift, if he wrote *Gulliver's Travels* as a treatise on political theory, should have paid so little attention to ecclesiastical affairs. . . Swift probably had no intention of including in his satire anything which would give his enemies renewed grounds for accusing him of blasphemy, as they had done ever since the publication of *A Tale of the Tub*." (Case [1945] 1958), p. 109.
9 "A Letter from Capt. Gulliver, to his Cousin Sympson" prefaced to the 1735 Dublin edition (p. 254), italics in text.
10 If *Gulliver's Travels* is a work of political philosophy, it is already a strange member of that genre. For by writing a fantastic novel, Swift already departs from the mode of most political theorists of his time, who chose principally to present their political theory in treatise form. The most obvious example is Hobbes' *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1994), to which Swift directly points as an object of his criticism in the Preface to *A Tale of the Tub* (Greenberg and Piper 1973, p. 284). John Locke had also recently published his *Two Treatises on Government* (Locke 1999). There are exceptions, like Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (Mandeville 1988). But in choosing a story, and by putting his arguments in the mouth of a questionable protagonist, Swift resembles the ancient political thinkers, "who rather chose to have the Science of justice wrapped up in fables, than openly exposed to disputations" (Hobbes 1998, Author's Preface, p. 97). See also Machiavelli (1998), *Prince*, Chs. XVII and XVIII. That the author of "The Battle of the Books" would side with the ancient manner of writing would be unsurprising. But it is worth noting that Swift also had important "recent" predecessors who also used literature to advance political wisdom, including Miguel Cervantes (1547–1616), William Shakespeare (1564–1616), and, a little further back, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321).
11 Priests are found in Lilliput (I, ii), Brobdingnag (II, vi), and Lagado (III, iii); Prophets and Scriptures are mentioned in Part 1, Ch. 4. For allusions to sacraments, see I, iv, 41; III, v, 158; and IV, v, 207. Regarding the sacrament of communion, see Cunningham (1991). For possible miraculous occurrences, see I, v, 46 and II, v, 100.
12 III, xi, 182–184.
13 The inhabitants of Brobdingnag observe the sabbath on Wednesday, perhaps a reference to the pagan god Oden. A more compelling piece of evidence of Brobdingnagian paganism is their recognition of multiple gods (II, iv, 95).
14 Bloom (1964) posits that the Struldbugs, that wretched race of immortals, is meant to represent the only institution on earth that makes claims to immortality, the Church. For the Struldbugs, like the Church at the time, was forbidden from public trust or purchasing land: "[Gulliver's criticism of the Struldbugs] echoes the views prevailing in England after the Reformation on the importance of limiting church lands, especially those of the Roman Catholic Church. Modern times are characterized by an immortal body inhabiting, but not truly part of, civil society—a decrepit body with a dangerous tendency to aggrandize itself. Death is preferable to the extension of life the Church offers; and civil society is safe only so long as that body is constrained by law" p. 252.
15 Gulliver says he contracted such a love and veneration for the inhabitants of Houyhnhnmland that he "entered on a firm Resolution never to return to human Kind. . ." (IV, vii, 218). He returns only after having been expelled, and upon his return to England he does his best to reconstruct his society with horses by immediately buying two young stallions which he kept in a stable (IV, xi, 244). The evidence that the Houyhnhnms have no religion is largely inferred by omissions Gulliver explicitly points out. The Houyhnhnms have no literature or books whatsoever, which would include Scriptures (IV, iii, 199). They have no laws, and thus no lawgiver of the highest order (IV, v, 210; but they do have poetry, IV, ix, 230). And their treatment of the dead is entirely free from ceremony (IV, ix, 231–232). It seems that they are perfectly rational creatures, so much so that they apparently have no need for names or even clothes (Cf. Genesis 2:20, 2:25, 3:7).
16 Gulliver indicates that "the Lilliputians are not significantly different from Europeans, and especially that they resemble Europeans in their religious attitudes, institutions, beliefs and customs" (Kallich 1970, p. 14).

- 17 According to Harold Williams, in his first edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, "the satire of this part [Part I] is directed against the civil and ecclesiastical polity" quoted in Kallich (1970), p. 3.
- 18 According to Greenberg and Piper (1973), "The High-Heels stand for the Tories, or high-church party; the Low-Heels for the Whigs, or low-church party. George I favored the Whigs; the Prince of Wales (afterwards George II) indicated favor to both parties, hence his hobble" 30, footnote 1. According to Kallich (1970, p. 24), the first to make the connection between the Lilliputian domestic dispute and the Tories and the Whigs was John Hawkesworth in *The Works of Jonathan Swift* (Womersley [1774] 2012, Vol. IV, pp. 42–43).
- 19 Swift expends considerable energy throughout *Gulliver's Travels* satirizing or otherwise critiquing Latitudinarianism, for example, and Anglican Rationalism.
- 20 The association with the Eucharist is well established in the secondary literature: "W. C. Taylor (65) in 1840, Arthur E Case (74) in 1945, and Martin Kallich (2–32) in 1970 have associated the Big and Little Endian controversy in Part I of the book with disputes between the Anglicans and Romans over Eucharistic practice." As Cunningham says, the association is obvious (347).
- 21 According to Kallich, "The gloss written by WC Taylor for his edition of the *Travels* (1840) is the first to equate the egg with the sacrament of the Eucharist, an identification which, as we have seen, was adopted by Case in our time, for it was the interpretation of this ritual that in large measure brought on the Reformation and divided Christendom." (1970, p. 28). While the identification seems persuasive, we are still left with the question of why Swift chose to represent the sacrament with an egg? "The choice of the egg... demonstrates the absurdity of the origin of the dispute." (ibid, p. 27). Kallich further says the egg is chosen because it is "homely" and thus a proper object of ridicule (ibid, p. 30). But there are homelier victuals than egg, so the question has not been adequately answered.
- 22 Although it was developed later by Rubner, the rate-of-living theory in Biology points out the correlation between size and life expectancy. See Rubner (1908) and Speakman (2005).
- 23 It is just over one half of one percent of the entire recorded history of the Lilliputians. 3/500 is 0.6%.
- 24 If Gulliver arrives in Lilliput in late 1699, and the Hebrew calendar says Jesus' birth occurred in the year 3761, then recorded history to that point would consist of 5460 years. The literature says that the war between Lilliput and Blefuscu is likely a reference to the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713). As I have indicated before, and as others have argued, there is no reason why Swift could not have multiple references in mind. The satire can operate on multiple levels.
- 25 I, iv, 41.
- 26 The prayer in Luke runs thus: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."
- 27 Cf. Hobbes *De Cive*, Ch. 1, §5: "Furthermore, since the combat of wits is the fiercest, the greatest discords which are, must necessarily arise from this contention. For in this case it is not only odious to contend against, but also not to consent. . . Which may appear hence, that *there are no wars so sharply waged as between sects of the same religion, and factions of the same commonweal*, where the contestation is either concerning doctrines or political prudence." Emphasis mine.
- 28 "My chief Design at present being only to relate such Events and Transactions as happened to the Publick, or to my self, during a Residence of *about nine Months* in that Empire" (I, iv, 39, emphasis mine).
- 29 I, vi, 52.
- 30 In "A Letter from Capt. Gulliver, to his Cousin Sympson," Gulliver humorously shifts the blame to the printer for these mistakes, accusing him of having carelessly confounded times, mistaking the dates, and even getting months and years wrong (pp. 255–56). While these remarks may be a "cover for his own carelessness," David Womersley, editor of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift, declares, "it seems a safer principle at least to entertain the possibility that irregularities in the text of *Gulliver's Travels* are mischievous, carefully planted Swiftian snares for the reader (and editor), rather than automatically to dismiss such irregularities as the consequence of inadvertence or carelessness" (Womersley [1774] 2012, Vol. 16, p. xxi). Swift himself, in "An Apology for the, etc." of *A Tale of a Tub*, suspiciously denies that he engages in numerology for the purposes of hiding dangerous meanings, calling such belief in the virtue of numbers superstitious. In this case, Swift plays with a distinction between the numbers three and four (Greenberg and Piper 1973, p. 268).
- 31 Here I note that Gulliver, the "author" of the book, is writing about himself as a character. Gulliver may have learned important lessons during his many voyages, and, by the time he writes, he may no longer share the religious optimism that he did when he visited the land of the Lilliputians.
- 32 Consider the "Battle of the Books" in Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. See also, Bloom's "An Outline of *Gulliver's Travels*" (1964). As Strauss says in the preface to the American Edition of *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, "I concluded in other words that we must learn to consider seriously, i.e., detachedly, the possibility that Swift was right when he compared the modern world to Lilliput and the ancient world to Brobdingnag" (1952, p. xv). Also, Strauss's "What is Political Philosophy?" (Strauss (1988b)) and note Strauss's specific mention of Gulliver on p. 25). Regarding Swift's potential esotericism, see Leo Strauss, "Persecution and the Art of Writing" (Strauss (1988a)); note especially his mention of Gulliver's Houynhnms (p. 23).

- ³³ Starkly opposed views are widespread regarding Swift's religious devotion: Martin Kallich calls Swift a "Typical Protestant" (Kallich 1970, p. 30) and says he was, "thoroughly orthodox without question and a vigorous supporter of his church. . ." (Kallich 1970, pp. 20–21). But according to Paul Cantor, "Swift was a distinguished Protestant cleric and rose to being dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. One would expect a prominent churchman to be orthodox in his religious beliefs. But Swift was closely associated with the most notorious freethinker of his day, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, and some of his contemporaries publicly questioned Swift's religious orthodoxy" (Cantor 2014, p. 73). George Orwell goes even further: "Swift shows no sign of having any religious beliefs, at least in any ordinary sense of the words. He does not appear to believe seriously in life after death, and his idea of goodness is bound up with republicanism, love of liberty, courage, 'benevolence' (meaning in effect public spirit), 'reason' and other pagan qualities" (Orwell 1968, p. 212). Or, as Professor Allan Bloom pithily and paradoxically proclaims, "Swift, the Tory and the High Churchman, was a republican and a non-believer" (Bloom 1964, p. 240).
- ³⁴ But perhaps even reactionary: "Rousseau was not the first to feel that the modern venture was a radical error and to seek the remedy in a return to classical thought. It suffices to mention the name of Swift" (Strauss 1965, p. 252).

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