

Words Poorly Used #141 — Leviathan

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, “leviathan” is described and historically accounted for:

leviathan (n.)

late 14c., “sea monster, sea serpent,” sometimes regarded as a form of Satan, from Late Latin leviathan, from Hebrew livyathan “dragon, serpent, huge sea animal,” of unknown origin, perhaps from root l-w-h- “to wind, turn, twist,” on the notion of a serpent’s coils. If so, related to Hebrew liwyah “wreath,” Arabic lawa “to bend, twist.” Of powerful persons or things from c. 1600. Hobbes’s use is from 1651.

An aquatic animal mentioned in the Old Testament. It is described in Job xli. apparently as a crocodile; in Isa. xxvii 1 it is called a piercing and a crooked serpent; and it is mentioned indefinitely in Ps. lxxiv. 14 as food and Ps. civ. 26. [Century Dictionary]

Both Higgs and Hobbes use the leviathan as metaphor to discuss government, the former as an anarchist, the latter as a statist — first as a bad thing, second as a boon to civilization. Consulting the above Biography WWW site, its authors contend that “Hobbes argues for the necessity and natural evolution of the social contract” While Goodreads.com quotes Higgs as follows:

In debates between anarchists and statist, the burden of proof clearly should rest on those who place their trust in the state. Anarchy’s mayhem is wholly conjectural; the state’s mayhem is undeniably, factually horrendous.

What images come to your mind when you encounter the word, “leviathan?”

— Kilgore Forelle