

interpretation

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Reason and Rhetoric in Hobbes's *Leviathan*

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I

How is the student of Thomas Hobbes to treat the several systematic versions of his political teaching?¹ In every version Hobbes promotes the peace of the commonwealth by teaching the rights of sovereign power and obligation of subjects to obey the sovereign commands and laws of nature. Always he does so by appeal to that condition of equality and radical insecurity that is the consequence of man's nature and passions in the absence of sovereignty. In each statement Hobbes argues the case for monarchy and attacks the pretensions of priests and other rivals of civil authority. At the same time, there are many and striking differences in Hobbes's account of the passions, natural condition, and laws of nature; in his treatment of the generation of the commonwealth and of the forms it may take; in his response to the challenge of religious to civil authority. To ignore these differences and treat Hobbes's teaching as if it were definitively stated in any one of these versions is to forsake the invaluable help other versions seem sometimes to supply.² To identify as Hobbes's political science a composite of arguments found in some but not all statements of it, on the other hand, is to assume that the interpreter's task must be to reassemble the elements of a teaching which has somehow "come to pieces."³

If Hobbes's student can neither neglect nor exploit uncritically the several statements of his teachings, might he not find in the fact of their existence a clue as to the fundamental intention underlying Hobbes's political philosophy, if he could but understand how those statements are related? Do the succeeding versions of Hobbes's political science record a movement, or even progress, of his thought? Do we see here Hobbes's progress from a political science dependent upon a dubious and unattractive account of the human passions to one that merely analyzes "the formal structure of the relations between individuals," or a movement that jeopardizes the essential basis of Hobbes's teaching through the

1. The *Elements of Law Natural and Politic* written and circulated in 1640 was published in two parts in 1649 and 1650. *Elementorum Philosophiae, Sectio Tertia, De Cive* published in 1642, was republished by Hobbes with added notes in 1647, and translated into English and published again by Hobbes in 1651 as *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society*. In the same year he published *Leviathan*. Hobbes published the first and second parts of his *Elementorum Philosophiae* in 1655 and 1658 and a Latin version of *Leviathan* in 1668. References to these works will usually occur in parentheses in the text with abbreviations *El.*, *De Cive*, and *Lev.* as required. Page references are to Pogson-Smith's edition of *Leviathan* and Gert's *Man and Citizen* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

2. Those opting for this method can rarely resist the temptation to import arguments from the other versions. See, e.g., C. B. Macpherson in his Introduction to *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 42 and notes 3 and 4.

3. F. S. McNeilly, *The Anatomy of Leviathan* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 13.

attempt to express it as if a result of his natural philosophy?⁴ Whatever must finally be said of either hypothesis, we note that no one claims that Hobbes himself has indicated by word or deed the clear superiority of the latest version of his teaching to its earlier forms. Might the changed expression of Hobbes's political science then rather reflect his continuing effort to make that science effectual? That the form and even content of *Leviathan* could reflect its author's rhetorical, as well as philosophic, purpose is a suggestion frequently advanced though rarely pursued.⁵ Yet, recalling Hobbes's bold description (in *Leviathan*) of his own political science as a proper subject for public instruction and his repeated condemnation of eloquence in public deliberations, one must consider whether Hobbes's understanding of his own enterprise and of rhetoric does not exclude the possibility we mean to explore.

That Hobbes always deplored the role of rhetoric in the commonwealth's deliberations, we may not doubt. Eloquence is central to the case against ancient democracy Hobbes attributes to Thucydides, for it led to "inconsistency of resolutions . . . and desperate actions undertaken upon the flattering advice of such as desired to attain, or to hold what they had attained, of authority and sway amongst the people."⁶ In the *Elements of Law* Hobbes argues that the misuse of power which can result from the passions of the sovereign will be greatest where sovereignty is in the hands of many assembled together because there every speaker will seek his own benefit or honour by "working on the passions of the rest" (2.5.4). In *De Cive*, the claim that democracy is superior to monarchy because it allows more men "to show their wisdom, knowledge, and eloquence" is compared to the objection to peace "that it is a grievance to valiant men to be restrained from fighting because they delight in it" (2.10.9). The public deliberations of great assemblies fail because success here depends upon eloquence and eloquence distorts the good, the profitable, the honest and their contraries; makes the unjust appear just; reasons from vulgar opinions rather than true principles; is shaped by the hearers' passions; and aims at victory, not truth (2.10.11).

4. While contemporary readers no longer object to Hobbes's "wicked, blasphemous, and atheistical views" now that they share them, they still strain at the "unsavoury gnat which is Hobbes's view of human nature." McNeilly hopes to extrapolate from the progress he detects in successive versions of Hobbes's teaching to a statement freed of this objection. *Ibid.*, 5. Compare Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952), 6–29, 169, and *What is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), 170–96.

5. See, e.g., A. E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," in K. C. Brown, ed., *Hobbes Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 35; Bernard Gert, ed., *Man and Citizen* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 3; Sterling Lamprecht, ed., *De Cive* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), xix. The suggestion is pursued in relation to the theory of authorization by Clifford Orwin, "on the Sovereign Authorization" *Political Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 32. See also Hanna Pitkin's enthusiasm for Orwin's suggestion that the theory constitutes a "rhetorical advance," *Ibid.*, 47. On the rhetoric of *Leviathan* as a whole see also Gary Shapiro, "Reading and Writing in the Text of *Leviathan*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (April 1980), and James Zappen, "Hobbes's *Leviathan*: *Logos, Ethos, and Pathos*," *International Society for the History of Rhetoric*, Madison, Wisconsin, April, 1981.

6. *English Works* VIII, xvi–xvii.

In *Leviathan* Hobbes still argues against sovereign assemblies that the advice of members, who participate by right not knowledge, is given in long discourses which commonly excite rather than govern the passions, and he adds that orators, who are the favourites of assemblies, have greater capacity to injure than defend innocent subjects (2.19, 144–45). For the most part, however, the dangers of eloquence are treated now as reasons why a sovereign should seek advice “apart” rather than from the same individuals in an assembly (2.25, 200–201). As Hobbes’s comparison of the kinds of commonwealth becomes a less conspicuous feature of his political science, so he treats rhetoric now within a general discussion of the qualities of “apt, and inept counsellors” (2.25, 198).⁷

In his *Elements of Law* and *Citizen* Hobbes also views rhetoric as a necessary condition of the dissolution of the commonwealth through sedition. According to both works if there be members of the commonwealth who are discontent, disposed to believe sedition could be rightful, and hopeful of success, there is “nothing wanting to sedition and confusion of the realm, but one to *stir up* and *quicken them*” (*De Cive* 2.12.11).⁸ The leaders or authors of sedition are necessarily at once eloquent and lacking in both “judgment” and “wisdom.” According to the argument of the *Elements* the leaders of sedition as such show that they lack prudence, or the ability to conjecture what is to come by remembrance of things past, since of those who have led seditions twenty have failed for every one who succeeded; they display their lack of wisdom, or of the knowledge of “what conduceth to the good and government of the people” drawn from “a remembrance of pacts and covenants of men made amongst themselves,” since it can be demonstrated by such knowledge or science that “no pretense of sedition can be right or just” (2.8.13). The leaders of sedition are imprudent, then, as they expect to succeed, unwise as they themselves believe one or another of those false doctrines that seem to justify sedition (*De Cive* 2.12.12). In fact, the false opinions adopted and taught by such men were already “insinuated . . . by [the] eloquent sophistry” of Aristotle and others (*El.* 2.9.8). That the authors of sedition must be eloquent is shown by a consideration of their task, for they must both create or augment the sense of injury and provoke rage and indignation. They must make men believe their rebellion just, their discontents grievous, and their chance of success great (*El.* 2.8.14). The successful orators of sedition must “turn their auditors out of fools into madmen . . . enlarge their hopes, [and]

7. The reorganization of the argument in *Leviathan* seems to follow the suggestion of *De Cive* that the inconveniences of democracy which result from the deliberation of great assemblies would disappear if everyone within the democracy would mind his own affairs and the people “would bestow the power of deliberating in matters of war and peace, either on one, or some very few, being content with the nomination of magistrates and public ministers, i.e., with the authority without the ministration . . .” (2.10.15; see also *El.* 2.5.8).

8. The clearest statement of the “formal” theory of sedition in terms of discontent, pretense of right, and hope of success occurs in the *Elements of Law* (2.8.1) but the same theory is implicit in the account of *De Cive* (2.12.1, 2.12.11). See Mathie, “Justice and the Question of Regimes,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Sept. 1976), 452.

lessen their dangers beyond reason . . .” (*De Cive* 2.12.12). If, indeed, great eloquence can create in its hearers the passionate sense of discontent and hope of success as well as the false opinion that their sedition is, or can be, just, rhetoric as “the metaphorical use of words fitted to the passions” would seem not only a necessary but a sufficient cause of sedition and civil war. The success of a political science intended to preserve the commonwealth against dissolution will therefore depend upon its ability to render the potential auditors of such rhetoric immune to its appeal.⁹

When we turn from these to the corresponding account of political dissolution in *Leviathan* we are struck by two changes. Hobbes now holds that the commonwealth can be secured indefinitely against internal dissolution if men make use of the reason they claim to possess, and that what is at fault when commonwealths do perish of internal disorders lies “not in men as they are the matter; but as they are the makers, and orderers” of the commonwealth (*Lev.* 2.29, 247). Nor does Hobbes now mention rhetoric or eloquence.¹⁰ Instead, we observe that Hobbes’s treatment of each of the internal causes of dissolution is itself partly metaphorical; each is compared to some infirmity or disease of the individual human body. Could Hobbes’s failure to mention here what he had previously treated as a necessary if not sufficient condition of sedition imply a new hope of rendering common opinion safe against the danger of eloquence and thus a basis for Hobbes’s hope that the commonwealth might become “immortal”? In any case, we may observe that Hobbes does not here much alter his treatment of discontent and those opinions that can support a pretense to right of sedition.

In all versions of his political science Hobbes proceeds from the examination of the internal causes of dissolution to a discussion of the duties or “office” of the sovereign representative, a discussion at least partly directed to the political dangers just examined. In *Leviathan* this discussion is much expanded and significantly modified. The duty of the sovereign to instruct his subjects in the grounds of his own essential rights as sovereign is given much greater prominence within that discussion. This teaching of one’s subjects is of fundamental

9. Hobbes illustrates the combination of folly and rhetoric and the result of this combination through the story of the daughters of Pelias who were persuaded by Medea to dismember their father and place his members in a boiling cauldron in order to restore his youthful vigor in *De Cive* as in the *Elements*, but his application of this story is altered in the later work so as to suggest a greater concern for the folly of the orator’s hearers—“the common people.” Compare *De Cive* 2.12.13, *El.* 2.8.15.

10. The false doctrines which support a pretended right of sedition are attributed to “unlearned divines” and some of those “making profession of the laws” (2.29, 249–51). Speaking of the example of neighbouring nations as a possible cause of innovation Hobbes speaks of “those that solicit <men> to change” but gives no account of these. Among the “not so great” diseases of the commonwealth Hobbes speaks of the popularity of a potent subject whose flattery and reputation may serve to draw others from “their obedience to the laws” but he does not mention rhetoric or eloquence in discussing the potency of such a subject; he speaks here of Caesar who proceeded to win the people against the Senate after he had won the army and not, as in the *Elements* and *De Cive*, of Catiline. Elsewhere, in discussing the passions that most frequently cause crime Hobbes discusses the unwisdom of “the first movers in the disturbance of commonwealth” but not of their eloquence (2.27, 228).

importance because the rights of sovereignty cannot otherwise be successfully maintained. Neither civil law nor fear of punishment can accomplish this. Those who do not already recognize themselves as obliged by the laws of nature will not acknowledge that they are obliged to obey civil law and will regard punishment or the threat of it as nothing but “an act of hostility” (2.30, 259).¹¹ In all statements of his political science Hobbes speaks both of the necessity that those who teach the young in the universities be themselves fully instructed in the “true and truly demonstrated foundations of civil doctrine” and of the capacity of the vulgar to entertain true doctrine through their public and private instruction by those educated in the universities (*De Cive* 2.13.9; *El.* 2.9.8; *Lev.* 2.30, 260, 264–65). In *Leviathan* Hobbes goes on to answer those who doubt the capacity of the common people to receive this instruction, that the difficulty is rather posed by the “potent” who can hardly digest “anything that setteth up a power to bridle their affections” and by the “learned” who reject anything “that discovereth their errors and thereby lesseneth their authority” (2.30, 260). The capacity of the vulgar is shown by their acquiescence in the “great Mysteries of Christian Religion”; on the basis of this evidence and/or the reasonable character of the true civil doctrine Hobbes can assert that an unprejudiced man “needs no more to learn, than to hear” this doctrine. And indeed he now offers a statement of what must be taught on the pattern of the decalogue.

Success in teaching the true civil doctrine depends upon the discovery of how “so many opinions, contrary to the peace of mankind, upon weak and false principles, have nevertheless been so deeply rooted” in the people. What is discovered thereby is that the greatest part of mankind is diverted by lack of leisure or attachment to sensual pleasures “from the deep meditation, which the learning of truth, not only in the matter of natural justice, but also of other sciences necessarily requires . . .” (2.30, 264). Certainly Hobbes does not speak of this as a capacity for scientific instruction as such—“as for science, or certain rules of their actions, [most men] are so far from it, that they know not what it is” (1.5, 37; 2.30, 264; cf. *De Cive*, “Preface,” 90). Prudence, and eloquence as seeming prudence, are among the “human powers” but the sciences are “small power” since they are possessed by few and by these in but few things and understood at all only by their possessors (1.10, 67). In *Leviathan's* “Review and Conclusion” Hobbes acknowledges that though solid reasoning is necessary to all deliberations if men are to avoid rash resolutions and unjust sentences, reason’s effect will be slight “if there be not powerful eloquence which procureth attention and consent,” and concludes that “reason, and eloquence, (though not perhaps in the natural sciences, yet in the moral) may stand very well together” (547, 548).

If moral science may, or must, be so presented as to combine reason and elo-

11. In *De Cive* Hobbes says it is the duty of the sovereign to root out false doctrines “not by commanding, but by teaching; not by the terror of penalties, but by the perspicuity of reason” (2.13.9). In the *Elements* he remarks only that opinions which are gotten by education, and in length of time, are made habitual, cannot be taken away by force, and upon the sudden . . . (2.9.8).

quence, what should be the nature of this combination? The sciences although they are the “way” of reason are “small power.” Geometry which is the true mother of all sciences and “arts of public use” is least of all acknowledged. Geometry, on the other hand, has the advantage over “the doctrine of right and wrong” that it is not like the latter “perpetually disputed.” Geometry is no matter of contention for it “crosses no man’s ambition” (*Lev.* I. 11, 79). Lack of science, or ignorance of causes, and ignorance of the signification of words, moreover, contribute much to the power of seditious eloquence, for those who suffer from this ignorance must rely on the opinions and advice of others and even take on trust the errors and nonsense of those they have come to trust (I. 11, 78–79). If lack of leisure and concern for bodily pleasures make most men incapable of science, including the science of justice, while science *qua* science is alone free of disputation, must not the successful rhetorical response to the rhetoric of sedition itself somehow resemble science?

In Hobbes’s *Behemoth* one of the speakers doubts whether anything can ever alter the ignorance of the common people of their duty to the public “as never meditating anything but their particular interest” and therefore following others — “the preachers, or the most potent” — in all other things. In response to this doubt the other discussant asks why the science of just and unjust might not be taught like other sciences from “true principles and evident demonstration” and “more easily than . . . the preachers and democratical gentlemen teach rebellion;” to a further doubt as to the existence of this science and the safety of one who should try to teach it, he adds that one writer has already prepared a sufficient demonstration of the rules of just and unjust “from principles *evident to the meanest capacity*.¹² What are those principles from which the rules of just and unjust can be sufficiently derived and how exactly are they “evident” to those of the meanest capacity?

II

How a successful moral science should combine reason and eloquence may perhaps be better understood if we consider that failure of Hobbes’s predecessors to create such a science which led Hobbes to proclaim that moral philosophy is no older than his own *De Cive* (*FW* 1, ix). The failure of Socrates, his successors, and especially Aristotle, to establish moral science as a science would seem to be almost complete. Than much of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, “scarce anything can be . . . said . . . more ignorantly;” the old moral philosophers do little more than describe their own passions and treat “attributes of honour” as if “attributes of nature” (*Lev.* 4.46, 522, 531). Yet if what the moral philosophers have written has entertained men’s affections rather than illuminated their understandings, it is not so clear that those writings have had no effect. We have already noted Hobbes’s

12. *English Works* VI, 212. (Emphasis added.)

statement that the false opinions successfully taught by the orators of sedition were previously “insinuated” by the “eloquent sophistry” of Aristotle and others. In the “Preface to the Reader” of *De Cive*, Hobbes goes so far as to suggest that the opinions of the moral philosophers which derived from their attempt “to prostitute justice . . . to their own judgments and apprehensions” have been the “causes of *all* contentions and bloodsheds” (98, emphasis added). Indeed, Hobbes does not hesitate to describe in this passage a golden age of peace that existed before “the science of justice” was “openly exposed to disputation” by the first philosophers who took this science up. Until this event, subjects recognized that their own security depended upon the preservation of the supreme power and would not “join themselves with ambitious and hellish spirits, to the utter ruin of the state.” Now, apparently in consequence of the prostitution of justice by the moral philosophers, “even the vulgar” claim an equal share of that “prudence” or “civil knowledge” by which the government should be directed and its conduct judged (96).

A clue to the nature of Hobbes’s own rhetoric may be furnished, we think, by reflection upon the considerable effect Hobbes here attributes to his predecessors and the ambiguous relation of this effect to the intention he also attributes to them. The moral philosophers have successfully undermined the natural or immediate authority of all who rule, and even established in men’s opinions as “principles of nature” those “democratical principles” they derived from the “practice of their own commonwealths, which were popular” (*Lev.* 2.21, 165; *FW* VI, 218). The success of Aristotle and other moral philosophers as orators would thus be great were the promotion of democratic principles an adequate description of their intention, but Hobbes does not, at least consistently, maintain that this is so. Rather, Hobbes claims that Aristotle made natural inequality, or the naturally greater ability of some to rule, the foundation of his whole politics and intended thereby the rule of “the wiser sort (such as he thought himself to be for his philosophy)” over those others “that had strong bodies, but were not philosophers as he . . .” (*Lev.* 1.15, 118; *De Cive* 1.3.13; *El.* 1.17.1). Measured against this account of their intention, the rhetoric of the philosophers has achieved a doubtful result; the foolish have seldom sought, or acquiesced in, the rule of the wise nor have the wise always, often, or almost ever mastered by force those “who distrust their own wisdom”. In one passage of *De Cive* Hobbes appears even to suggest that the philosophers “who might securely and quietly have lived under the natural jurisdiction of kings” are instead “tormented with perpetual cares, suspicions, and dissensions” in consequence of their own “invention” of the (false) civil science.¹³ In any case, Aristotle’s founding of political science upon natural inequality has “weakened the whole frame of his politics and given men colour and pretences, whereby to disturb and hinder the peace of

13. This seems to be the meaning of Hobbes’s interpretation of the fable of Prometheus (*De Cive* 2.10.3, note) especially when compared with that other fable of the ancients reported in the “Preface” (97).

one another" (*El. I. I. I*). It would seem that the moral and political philosophy of Socrates and his successors has established, by the success of its rhetoric, the dominance of individual private opinion, or rather passion, over public authority, a pretext for the ambitious, and much support for this claim at the level of common opinion. This result can be connected to the assumption that wisdom should rule, for the ambitious have obtained thereby the basis of a claim to rule, as wiser than him or them now ruling. For the proud at least, this is more than a pretext, for it has become an admission of inferior wisdom not to rule, or have one's opinion prevail with him that does. When, finally, the "ghostly" claim to supernatural wisdom is combined with the belief that ruling is justified by the wisdom of those who rule, the way is prepared for the division of spiritual and temporal authority and the subordination of the latter to the former. What is not established by the old moral philosophy, in any event, is the true rule of wisdom, or even that of those philosophers who considered themselves the wise, over the unwise. Indirectly, the actual result of that moral philosophy could better be described as "the suppression of philosophy by such men, as neither by lawful authority, nor sufficient study are competent judges of the truth" (*Lev. 4.46, 536; EW VI, 283*).

In order to determine the character of Hobbes's proposed remedy for this situation for which his predecessors are, at least partly, responsible—a situation defective from the point of view of both philosophy and commonwealth—and to identify the rhetorical dimension of this remedy it will be useful to consider briefly the accuracy of Hobbes's account of the claims of the old civil philosophy.¹⁴ If we may doubt whether Hobbes has done justice to the reasons for the claim of Socrates and his followers that philosophers should rule, we cannot deny that this claim was made. What Hobbes does not acknowledge is that those who claimed that the evils which beset political life would not cease until philosophy and political power coincided were hardly more confident than Hobbes of the prospects for this coincidence. Although the argument for this coincidence could be made within the perspective of political life—perhaps only within that perspective—the political efficacy of this argument was doubtful to those who made it; philosophy must also practice, or call upon, a rhetoric that can soothe the indignation provoked by the very hearing of such a proposal.¹⁵

If, in the second place, there is a partial truth to the assertion that the old political science was founded upon natural inequality, or the possession by some of greater wisdom by nature whereby these ought to rule over the others, the teachers of that political science did not expect many, if any, actual regimes to reflect this inequality very exactly. Nor did they apparently expect any regime to be "founded upon this inequality" if by this is meant the clear acknowledgement and acceptance of the greater wisdom of those who rule as their title to rule. Where

14. For a general discussion of its accuracy see Joseph Cropsey, "Hobbes and the Transition to Modernity" in Cropsey, ed., *Ancients and Moderns* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 225–28.

15. Plato, *Republic* 498d.

the claim of wisdom to rule is accepted at all, this is likely to occur only within a wider accommodation of several conflicting claims to rule; for example, the claim of wisdom or virtue may sometimes obtain a limited recognition as a ground on which the more potent claims of wealth and number can be adjusted.¹⁶ The immense task for rhetoric in the creation of a regime that significantly reflects natural inequality and the virtual impossibility of a rhetoric that could fulfill this task are both illustrated by Socrates' suggestion that the city in speech of the *Republic* might be established by persuading all the adult inhabitants of some city to depart leaving their children to be raised by the founders of the new order (541a), or by the "noble lie" he proposes to secure fraternal dedication to the common good and acceptance of the city's hierarchical organization (414b–415d). By the latter especially, Socrates implies that an order which corresponds to natural inequality, even though beneficial to the city and all its members, will be accepted, if at all, only when it is misrepresented, by a powerful rhetoric, as the direct result of divine agency. Just as in securing the rule of the lovers of wisdom, rhetoric must apparently overcome great resentment or indignation.

We may begin to indicate Hobbes's point of departure from the teaching of his predecessors if we recall an image Socrates employs to account for the nonrule, and even contempt, of philosophers which Adeimantus, like Hobbes, had observed (487c–489b). Socrates compares the city to a ship whose owner, the people, is neither very perceptive nor knowledgeable concerning navigation. Members of this ship's crew, the politicians, as represented here, contend with one another in order to obtain control of the rudder. They doubt whether there is any true art of navigation and suppose that this art, if it does exist, could never be combined with what is clearly valuable—the art of obtaining the rudder, whether by persuasion or force. The possessor of the true art of navigation does not rule but is despised because his art is not acknowledged, while the art he does *not* possess is valued. The possibility of his rule would depend upon the combination of those two arts, or the persuasion of the shipowner that there is an art of navigation. Hobbes notes the somewhat similar fact that even the vulgar suppose themselves to possess an equal share of prudence, or civil knowledge, as something attained without any great care or study and therefore deny that there are any others wiser in this than themselves. In *De Cive* this unwillingness of most men to admit that others might have a better claim to the civil science is presented as a consequence of that prostitution of justice accomplished by Socrates and his successors. In *Leviathan* the same conviction of almost all men that they are more prudent than the vulgar, "than all men but themselves and a few others, whom by fame, or for concurring with themselves, they approve," has become an argument for the equality of prudence, albeit facetiously (*Lev.* I. 13, 94–95). Hobbes does not deny the disastrous consequences of the contention for rule, nor

16. Aristotle, *Politics* 1283^b10–35. See also H. V. Jaffa, "Aristotle" in Joseph Cropsey and Leo Strauss, eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), 113–14.

perhaps even the existence of some kind of art of navigation, but neither does he seek to persuade those who contend for rule, of the existence of that art.

Hobbes insists, in all presentations of his political teaching, that the claim that there is a natural inequality of wisdom among men justifying the rule by some over others, which was a foundation of Aristotle's doctrine, must be denied (*El.* 1.17.1, *De Cive* 1.3.13, *Lev.* 1.15, 117–18). What we must consider here is how far this denial has itself a rhetorical character. Hobbes says the Aristotelian claim must be denied because it is against both “reason” and “experience.” The claim is against “experience”, or denied by prudence, in the first place, because, as we have seen, those supposing themselves wiser have seldom if ever successfully imposed their claim. Whatever the conclusion to be drawn from this experience, which we have observed was familiar to Hobbes's predecessors, Hobbes also offers a kind of explanation for this experience: “there are very few so foolish, that had not rather govern themselves, than be governed by others” (*Lev.* 1.15, 118). Once the experienced unwillingness of the supposedly less wise to accept the rule of others as wiser than themselves is understood in this way, it becomes possible to conclude that natural human equality must be universally acknowledged as a necessary condition for the securing of peace and establishing of government. The universal acknowledgement that no man is by nature the superior, or ruler, of any other and the actual enjoyment of an equal liberty consistent with this acknowledgement will perhaps content men who have claimed an equal or even superior share of that wisdom whereby they have supposed the commonwealth is governed. Of course, the Aristotelian claim is also denied “by reason” inasmuch as it has previously been demonstrated that even the strongest can be killed by the weakest in the natural condition. We must observe, however, that although this demonstration is said to show that “the inequality that now is has been introduced by the laws civil,” Hobbes's conclusion that equality by nature must be acknowledged is not based on this demonstration from reason but on the argument developed from experience. Thus natural equality is to be admitted “if nature have made men equal” or “if nature have made men unequal.”

Although the requirement that natural equality be acknowledged is deduced as necessary for peace in view of the unwillingness of most men to admit that any other is wiser than they are, it may be objected that what is required for peace corresponds with what “reason” teaches, in any case. In fact, all reason teaches in all three accounts of the natural condition is “how brittle the frame of our human body is, which perishing, all its strength, vigour, and wisdom itself perisheth with it; and how easy a matter it is, even for the weakest man to kill the strongest . . .” (*De Cive* 1.1.3). Does this teaching effectively contradict the Aristotelian claim that there is a natural inequality among men in wisdom or virtue which justifies the rule of some by others? When he summarizes reason's teaching in *De Cive* Hobbes specifically names “riches, power, nobility of kindred,” but not prudence or wisdom, as forms of inequality shown by reason to “come

from the civil law" (1.3.13). In *Leviathan* Hobbes says simply that "the inequality that now is" is introduced by the civil laws perhaps because in the account of the state of nature in this work he has specifically denied that there is a natural inequality of prudence that is a basis for rule. Men are equal not only by reason of their vulnerability to violent death at the hands of others but also in "the faculties of mind." Men are indeed even more equal in the only relevant mental faculty, prudence, than in bodily strength since prudence is only experience, "which equal time equally bestows on all men, in those things they equally apply themselves unto" (*Lev.* 1.13, 94). The vain conceit of most that they are more prudent than others derives from partiality and proves that prudence is equally distributed since the satisfaction of all with their share of some good is the best sign of an equal distribution.¹⁷ If it be true that prudence is experience and that all men will obtain an equal measure of this over the same period of time in what "they equally apply themselves unto," we must note that Hobbes has already acknowledged in the eighth chapter of *Leviathan* that all do not by any means apply themselves equally, that "the causes of this difference . . . are in the passions," and that prudence is in fact a natural virtue unequally possessed by various men, even if less subject to inequality than "judgment" or "fancy" (*Lev.* 1.8, 52–57).¹⁸ Hobbes's thematic analysis of prudence does not indicate the equality of prudence but the converse. The analysis does however confirm the wisdom of those who would rather govern themselves than be governed by the wise, for the difference in men's passions which is the cause of the difference in their natural wit is a difference between those who do and those who do not desire power or dominion over others. Hobbes does assert that a "plain husband-man is more prudent in affairs of his own house, than a Privy Counsellor in the affairs of another man" (*Lev.* 1.8.56) though not that the plain husband-man could perform the Privy Counsellor's office well; the equality of prudence is not so great as to justify a share of all or anyone in rule but enough to restrict the intervention of Privy Counsellors into the daily affairs of plain husband-men. We may conclude in any event that what is added in *Leviathan* to the argument from "reason" against the Aristotelian claim of natural inequality refutes that claim, if at all, only by appeal once more to a kind of prudence, or even common opinion. The case for equality of prudence is thus based on prudence, or common opinion, or the passionate refusal of men to admit any others wiser than themselves.

If it is peculiar to rhetoric that the principles out of which its arguments are drawn "are the common opinions that men have" (*EW* VI, 426), it becomes possible to speak of Hobbes's insistence that human equality by nature be acknowledged as a rhetorical claim, or even to say that the Hobbesian commonwealth, at least in *Leviathan*, has itself a rhetorical foundation. The fundamental role of the

17. See Descartes, *Discourse*, Part I (at the beginning) for another version of the same "argument."

18. It may also be doubted on the latter account whether prudence is entirely distinct from judgment and fancy.

acknowledgement of natural equality within Hobbes's political science is indicated by the fact that it is a necessary and sufficient condition of that reasoning whereby we see that we are bound to obey the sovereign representative, and the several laws of nature, and a standard for the sovereign in the ordinary performance of his office. If, further, the Hobbesian commonwealth not only affirms natural equality but also permits, or even encourages a great inequality in the things "necessary to commodious living" and obtained through the industry of individuals this latter result too is at least consistent with Hobbes's perception of common opinion: "Want is less a disgrace than stupidity; for the former can be attributed to the inequity of fortune; the latter is attributable to nature alone" (*De Homine* 11.8).

III

"At the centre of Hobbes's political theory lies the concept of the state of nature."¹⁹ Although we cannot hope to examine here the role of rhetoric in the structure and content of *Leviathan* as a whole, we do intend to illustrate in this concluding section of our discussion how far rhetorical considerations enter into Hobbes's treatment of the natural human condition especially as it departs from that furnished in the *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. We hope to show that the novel features of this account admit of such an explanation and, so understood, constitute a valuable indication of the character and broader aim of Hobbes's rhetoric in *Leviathan*. This analysis may also supply an alternative to that interpretation which finds in this chapter Hobbes's substitution of a formal analysis of rational deliberation for his earlier and dubious reliance upon an unattractive and arbitrary account of human nature.²⁰ On the latter reading of *Leviathan* Hobbes's concern for, or "obsession" with pride or the passionate desire for glory has vanished, or is vanishing, from his central political argument. If Hobbes remains a "pessimist" concerning human nature, his "pessimism" is now to be seen as a merely private view and no part of his political science.

Can one say that Hobbes "does not miss an opportunity [in *Leviathan*] of diminishing the importance of glory in his psychological and political arguments 6?"²¹ At least four of the six considerations Hobbes advances concerning mankind to distinguish human society from that of the irrational creatures involve glory, comparison, or reputation (*Lev.* 2.17, 130–31).²² Summarizing his argument to the end of the twenty-eighth chapter, Hobbes says he has "set forth

19. McNeilly, *Anatomy*, 159.

20. *Ibid.*, 146.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Though there are closely parallel treatments of this question in the *Elements* and *De Cive* there are significant revisions in each version and especially in *Leviathan*—Hobbes did not merely preserve something from the earlier works. See notes 23 and 28.

the nature of man (whose pride and other passions have compelled him to submit himself to government) . . ." and explains the title of the present work *Leviathan* by reference to God's words to Job: "he [Leviathan] . . . is king of all the children of pride" (*Lev.* 2.28, 246). Vainglory is treated as the most important of the passions which cause crime and especially criminal sedition (2.27, 228–29), and apparently as the more important of the two passions "whose violence, or continuance maketh madness" (1.8, 57). Since madness is understood by Hobbes to constitute the excess of passion itself we may almost conclude that "vainglory, which is commonly called pride and self-conceit" characterizes human passion as such.²³ If vanity is a less obvious and explicit concern in *Leviathan*, and especially in the discussion of the state of nature, than previously, it has hardly disappeared from Hobbes's teaching. Nevertheless, we must consider whether it has become superfluous to Hobbes's discussion of the state of nature and consequently of minor importance to Hobbes's argument as a whole. Does Hobbes's account of the principal reasons why the state of nature is a state of war no longer depend upon the pursuit of glory?

The improved argument Hobbes's *Leviathan* is said to contain can be summarized thus: while self-glorifying violence can result from the pursuit of glory, competitive violence can result whenever men have incompatible objectives; the possibility of either leads to a general diffidence, to anticipatory violence, and so to a state of war. Hobbes, on this account, supposes nothing as to the specific nature of individuals, or human nature generally, but only works out the calculations of any individual who must act in relation to others "when the specific nature of these others is indeterminate."²⁴ A man may reasonably initiate anticipatory violence when he fears violence from some other within a condition of general diffidence; he may fear violence from that other not only when he suspects that other of pursuing an incompatible objective or glory but also when he suspects that the other may himself initiate anticipatory violence for any of these same reasons including fear of anticipatory violence. "Diffidence" and "anticipatory violence" within a formal analysis of rational deliberation constitute a "hypothetical" argument which replaces that of the *Elements* and *De Cive*.²⁵ In those works Hobbes had argued that man is driven into conflict with others "because of the nature of his passions as an individual" so that even if violence were not caused by the incompatibility of objectives it would result from the universal and "relentless drive for glory which is the chief cause of conflict."

The error in this interpretation begins to emerge when we consider Hobbes's preface to *De Cive* which is supposed to constitute evidence of a transition from an earlier political science based upon a specific account of human nature to the

23. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 11–12.

24. McNeilly, 165.

25. Whether the argument is hypothetical may be doubted even on McNeilly's understanding of anticipatory violence: it is finally hypothetical only in the sense that it is deemed reasonable "only if there should be an opportunity of making precautionary war" to do so (166).

formalized version of *Leviathan*. In reply to those who object that he has assumed men wicked by nature, Hobbes observes that “though the wicked were fewer than the righteous, yet because we cannot distinguish them” anticipation and self-defense is required of even the most honest (p. 100). To say that what operates here, as in *Leviathan*, is “not the nature of human motives . . . but the bearing of the unknown on rational deliberation” is not exact. Hobbes’s “honest” man does not know which of the others is “wicked” or “righteous” but he must have an account of human nature which encompasses the more dangerous possibility. Similarly, though anticipatory violence may be caused by fear of anticipatory violence the condition of diffidence within which this can occur presupposes a certain understanding of human nature, or of the range of its possible forms, on the part of the diffident; the diffident must be able to conceive of a possible cause of violence in human nature other than the fear of anticipatory violence itself. It can also be shown that vanity, or self-glory, as a possible form of human nature remains essential to the existence of diffidence even in the treatment of the state of nature in *Leviathan*.

In his account of the causes of quarrel in *De Cive* Hobbes calls glory “the chief source of violence” yet admits that “the most frequent” source is the incompatibility of objectives. This would indicate incoherence in Hobbes’s argument as stated here, only if we understand glory as a specific and isolated human motive. Hobbes’s incoherence vanishes when we recognize that the human concern for glory or comparison can enter into the very choice of objectives and cause, or contribute to, their incompatibility. And indeed Hobbes says in *De Cive* that “man scarce esteems anything good, which hath not somewhat of eminence in the enjoyment . . .” (2.5.5).

In *Leviathan* Hobbes introduces “equality of hope” as the result of “equality of ability” and from this derives enmity and war out of competition (I.13, 95). Has Hobbes thus found a sufficient cause of violence in the mere incompatibility of objectives, or in the scarcity of the means whereby desires may be satisfied? We should observe rather that Hobbes new notion of “equality of hope” follows his expanded and revised treatment of “equality of ability.” As we have already seen, Hobbes argues in *Leviathan* for the first time that men are equal not only in their physical vulnerability but also in their faculties of mind; in arguing this latter he notes that “such is the nature of men . . . they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves . . .” For Hobbes this becomes a proof of equality of wisdom but it is not, of course, an acknowledgement of equality as it exists in men’s beliefs. One can say that Hobbes derives “equality of hope” from “equality of ability” only when he expands his account of the latter to include the vain conceit of most men as to their own wisdom. Not equal hope of obtaining but equal fear derives from equality of ability when this is confined to the recognition of how brittle the frame of our body is.²⁶ In *Leviathan* then, though diffidence

26. “Dans cet état, chacun se sent inferieur; à peine chacun se sent-il égal.” Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois* I.1.2.

may occur whenever "two men desire the same thing which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy," we must recall again that "man, whose joy consists in comparing himself with other men, can relish nothing but what is eminent" (2.17, 130). The probability and possibility of a true "incompatibility of objectives" depends upon the fact that at least some men proceed in this way, or that all men can imagine that some might. That vanity, or the concern for what is eminent, remains an essential element of the argument which shows that the state of nature is a state of war, is finally suggested by the fact that "the desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living" is a passion that inclines men to peace, at least when it is accompanied by the hope of obtaining these things by their own industry (1.13, 98).

If, as we have argued, vanity, or the concern for reputation, remains essential to Hobbes's account of the generation of quarrel in the natural condition, we must nevertheless acknowledge that its explicit role within his argument is reduced. More exactly, glory as a separate and specific cause of violence is mentioned after rather than before competition for "gain." Nor is this the only change of this kind within Hobbes's argument. In the earlier statements and especially in *De Cive* Hobbes had also identified the "combat of wits" as a cause of violence; if glory is the *chief* cause of the "desire to hurt" and "appetite to the same thing" its most *frequent* source, disagreement of opinion concerning religious "doctrines or politic prudence" causes "the fiercest, or the greatest discords which are . . ." (*De Cive* 1.1.5). In *Leviathan* men's vain esteem of their own wisdom is incorporated into the "proof" of equal faculties of mind, while their differences of opinion are included among the "trifles" for which those who seek glory contend (*Lev.* 1.13, 96). We may doubt whether this change indicates that Hobbes no longer supposes differences of opinion concerning "religious doctrine" or "civic prudence" an important cause of contention or civil strife; the greater part of *Leviathan* is directed to the problem for the commonwealth posed by errors of religious doctrine. It is therefore reasonable to consider whether Hobbes's altered treatment of these differences of opinion as also of the priority of the pursuit of glory could be intended to contribute to the practical solution of the problem these create for the commonwealth. There is, we believe, a general consistency between the changes in Hobbes's account of the natural condition here and other revisions in his teaching concerning the nature of the commonwealth which supports this suggestion.

If the pursuit by two or more of some objective they cannot jointly enjoy obtains a kind of priority over the pursuit of reputation in *Leviathan*, this change may be considered in relation to Hobbes's understanding of the possibility and manner of satisfying those pursuing these ends within civil society. In *De Cive* Hobbes argues that "gain" can be obtained through the society of others, even if it could be sought yet more successfully through dominion, were this obtainable (1.1.2). As we have seen, the desire of things necessary for commodious living coupled with the hope of obtaining these through our own industry is a passion

which inclines men to peace (*Lev.* 1.13, 98). Society does not at all advance “the cause of my glorying in myself,” on the other hand, according to *De Cive*, and no great or lasting society can be based on this pursuit (1.1.2). Those forms of commonwealth in which there is opportunity for this pursuit are to this extent inferior to that in which there is none (*De Cive* 2.10.9). Since, further, “ambition and greediness of honour cannot be rooted out of the minds of men” those who think themselves wiser than others and show it by harming the commonwealth if they cannot do so otherwise must be led to “an ambition to obey” by the “constant application of rewards and punishments . . .” (2.13.12). In *Leviathan* Hobbes still speaks of the application of rewards but understands the aim of these to extend beyond the mere restraint of ambition:

their use and end . . . is then done, when they that have well served the commonwealth, are with as little expense of the common treasure, as is possible, so well recompensed, as others thereby may be encouraged both to serve the same as faithfully as they can, and to study the arts by which they may be enabled to do it better (*Lev.* 2.30, 270)²⁷

If the proper use of rewards can encourage something other than the mere “ambition to obey”, could the concern for comparisons or what is eminent be transformed into the pursuit of those goods associated with commodious living? We have already noted Hobbes’s observation that the peculiarly human pursuit is of what is eminent since man’s joy consists in his comparison of himself with others. We may now observe that this thought obtains its most radical form in *Leviathan*. In the *Elements of Law* Hobbes had said that while bees pursue a common good, men seek such goods as are distinct and therefore cause contention; in *Leviathan* the bees are naturally inclined to their private good and *thereby* procure the common good while man determines what is good by its eminence—comparison is not a result but a cause of the human pursuit of goods that are distinct and eminent (*El.* 1.19.5; *De Cive* 2.5.5; *Lev.* 2.17, 130).²⁸

We have seen that in *Leviathan* men’s vain esteem of their own wisdom, which is expressed in their differences of opinion concerning civic prudence and religious doctrine in *De Cive*, becomes part of an argument for the equality of prudence and we have suggested that this argument is dubious both on its face and when compared to what Hobbes has said about prudence previously in *Leviathan*. So far as Hobbes’s aim remains that of persuading his readers that they should not “suffer ambitious men through the streams of [those readers’] blood to wade to their own power” (*De Cive*, “Preface,” 103) the rhetorical merit of his new argument is considerable and it is augmented by other changes in his teach-

27. Compare also the extent and status of Hobbes’s treatment of the prevention of idleness in *De Cive* (2.13.14) and *Leviathan* (2.30, 267).

28. The account in *De Cive* falls between those of *The Elements* and *Leviathan*: the natural appetite of the bees is “conformable and they desire the common good, which among them differs not from their private” while man “scarce esteems” what “has not somewhat of eminence in the enjoyment, more than that which others do possess.”

ing.²⁹ Though men's vain esteem of their own wisdom is not satisfied by participation in the governance of the commonwealth it is not violated by the need to admit the greater wisdom of some other. Equality of hope becomes central to the account of quarrel in the natural condition, and equality of right fundamental to Hobbes's treatment of the laws of nature. Equity as the acknowledgement of natural equality among men has moreover an increased role in guiding the sovereign representative in the performance of his office and a new role of great importance in the judicial interpretation of the laws of the commonwealth.³⁰

Differences of opinion concerning religious doctrine are no longer named at all among the causes of quarrel in Hobbes's treatment of the natural condition in *Leviathan* though the basis of religious belief in ignorance of natural causes is accorded considerable importance in Hobbes's examination of the "qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace and unity" earlier in the same work (*Lev.* 1.11, 78–81). If such differences retain their significance we can only suppose that Hobbes includes them among the "trifles" for which men seeking glory invade one another (1.13, 96). That men's differences of opinion might be understood as a contention over "trifles" is not immediately obvious. In the *Elements of Law* Hobbes had supposed it a duty of sovereigns "to establish the religion they hold for best" since "eternal is better than temporal good" (2.9.2) though in *De Cive* he is less sure of this (2.13.5). Nor is the question of who should govern ignored by the partisans of opposing religious doctrine.³¹ Differences of opinion concerning religious doctrine may *become* a contention over "trifles," however if it be agreed that "inward faith" that Jesus is the Christ and obedience of the sovereign is all that is required for salvation and that this faith is consistent with any external actions, even of worship, required of subject by sovereign, and these are the teachings of *Leviathan*.³²

In the *Elements of Law* Hobbes had deplored the lack of progress in moral and civil philosophy evidenced by the fact that the writers on this subject have not resolved but exacerbated controversy while every man continues to think "that in this subject he knows as much as any other, supposing there needs thereonto no study" but that supplied by "natural wit." He had contrasted this lack of progress with the several benefits to mankind resulting from the efforts of those who compared "magnitudes, numbers, times, and motions and how their proportions are to one another;" this difference Hobbes attributes to the fact that these latter men

29. To eliminate differences of opinion or reduce these to their passionate basis is consistent with the aim Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., has attributed to Hobbes of avoiding founding politics or rule on political opinion as such. "Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65 (1971), 99–100.

30. In *Leviathan* the requirement to seek peace if obtainable is immediately followed by the rule that a man content himself "with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself" (1.14, 100). In *De Cive* the same rule is presented as the ninth law of nature and a sequel to the prohibition of pride (1.3.14).

31. See *English Works* VI, 243, 275.

32. On Hobbes's authorization theology see Orwin, "On Sovereign Authorization," 35–38.

have proceeded “evidently from humble principles” while the civil philosophers have taken “vulgarly received” opinions as their principles (I.13.3). Hobbes names these same benefits of scientific progress in *Leviathan* but now these are enumerated as the things men must lack in that condition of war to which their natural passions carry them (I.13, 96–97).³³ Although, or because, Hobbes continues to deny the common opinion that “there needs no method in the study of the politics (as there does in the study of geometry)” and even to suppose that “the politics is the harder study of the two” (2.30, 271), he makes little effort to persuade men of the need or difficulty of that study or that they should accept the rule of those who profess it. If Hobbes attempts to correct men’s “vain conceit” of their own wisdom, his correction tends rather to the acknowledgement of natural equality and the acceptance of a politics and society based on equality of right than to the recognition of that “harder study” of the politics. Within classical political science rhetoric is called upon to assuage the indignant popular reaction to the claim that wisdom, or those devoted to its pursuit, should rule. On Hobbes’s understanding of men’s “vain conceit” we could say that this reaction is at once the acknowledgement that wisdom is a title to rule and the angry denial of most men that there are others wiser than themselves. For ancient political science so far as the common opinion recognizes, or can be represented as recognizing, the claim of wisdom, that opinion implies a basis on which the claims of the many, the wealthy, and the wise might be harmonized. In principle, the political task becomes in large measure the subordination of the spirited element, which is the basis of anger, to wisdom; political justice is the result of this subordination.³⁴ For Hobbes, on the other hand, inequality of wisdom as a possible basis of rule must be denied. Hobbes seeks rather to derive from men’s passionate denial that others are wiser than themselves their belief in equality of right. As “getting opinion from passion” is a form of rhetoric, Hobbes’s response to men’s vain esteem of their own prudence must be acknowledged as a new and powerful kind of rhetoric (*El.* I.13.7, 2.8.14).

33. In the *Elements* Hobbes speaks only of the absence of “ornaments and comforts of life, which by peace and society are usually invented and procured” (I.14.12) and in *De Cive* of the lack of “pleasure and beauty of life” (I.1.13). The famous enumeration occurs only in *Leviathan*.

34. See Plato, *Republic* 441–42. If the pursuit of wisdom is itself a form of the pursuit of glory or power, as it is for Hobbes, this subordination is ruled out. If the spirited element is to be civilized it must rather be subordinated to appetite so far as this is possible.