

Interpretation

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Interpretation

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Book Reviews

David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) xx + 234 pp., text edition \$25.00.

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It is the great merit of David Johnston's *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* that he offers a compelling solution for a major problem facing the student of Hobbes's political teaching. In the twenty-ninth chapter of *Leviathan* Thomas Hobbes claimed for the first time that the internal causes of the dissolution of the commonwealth could be overcome once and for all (*Leviathan*, 167, original edition, 1651). What can explain Hobbes's bold new claim? Not the mere establishing of civil and moral philosophy as science, for Hobbes will later claim that he had already accomplished this when he published *De Cive* (*De Corpore*, Epistle Dedicatory, viii–ix). Might Hobbes's new hope nevertheless be linked to some or all of those features of *Leviathan* that distinguish it from earlier versions of his political teaching? In *Leviathan* Hobbes has supplemented his account of sovereign right and the obligation of subjects with a theory of authorization that is much admired by some of his recent students.¹ In *Leviathan* he has quietly abandoned the once common opinion that one of a ruler's duties is to promote his subjects' eternal welfare by establishing those religious doctrines and practices most likely to advance it, an opinion he had affirmed when he enumerated those same duties in his *Elements of Law* and still acknowledged, albeit hypothetically, in *De Cive*. In *Leviathan* Hobbes pays much more attention to the organization and administration of sovereign power than previously, much less to the identification and comparison of the kinds of commonwealth; indeed, considerations belonging to the latter discussion in the *Elements* and *De Cive* now point towards, if not beyond, Locke's account of the distinction between legislative and executive. In *Leviathan* the acknowledgement of natural human equality acquires a new prominence both within Hobbes's formation and enumeration of the natural laws and as a standard against which the sovereign's performance of his office is to be measured. Finally, the nature and basis of religious belief, the reconciliation of theological and civil obligation, and even the interpretation of scripture which had comprised the subject of four out of twenty-nine chapters of the *Elements* and six out of twenty-eight chapters of *De Cive* have become the theme of more than half of *Leviathan*. Johnston's *Rhetoric of Leviathan* shows how the several novelties of *Leviathan* can be related to one another and to Hobbes's new hope of ending the chaos characteristic of western political life. On the basis of a generally plausible account of

Hobbes's changing conception of the aim of political philosophy, Johnston develops a shrewd interpretation of *Leviathan's* structure and leads us far towards a more adequate understanding of Hobbes's fundamental intention.

Although Johnston does not deny the continuing significance of Hobbes's discovery in middle age of the great explanatory power of axiomatic reason revealed in Euclidean geometry for his political science, he insists that the key to understanding *Leviathan* is that it marks Hobbes's renewed interest in the same problem of effectively transmitting ideas which had led him earlier to praise Thucydides so highly. Although Hobbes did intend his 1640 manuscript, *The Elements of Law*, to influence political debate by changing his readers' opinions, his political argument was there developed in a form "essentially scientific as opposed to rhetorical in design"(26). Nor could Hobbes have expected such a logical demonstration to achieve his political aim for he repeats in that same work his longstanding conviction as to the power of rhetoric and impotence of scientific reason to shape popular belief(28–29, 61). That he did proceed so can only be explained by supposing the *Elements* intended for a restricted readership, or that the political world for which it was composed seemed less desperate to Hobbes than it soon would, that Hobbes still hoped that reason as a "natural human capacity" might be made to master the passions despite his own analysis of its weakness, or simply that Hobbes had not as yet conceived of any alternative. In any case, if Hobbes had subordinated the task of political persuasion to that of scientific exposition in his *Elements*, in *Leviathan* he "reversed the priorities" (70). According to Hobbes's political argument, first stated in his *Elements* but never importantly modified, the fear of death guided by a rational account of its causes and the means of avoiding it can lead men "to curb their other passions and subject themselves to a common sovereign" but this "key behavioral proposition" is drawn from an account of human nature with which reality may or may not coincide. Increasingly disturbed by the actual extent of this divergence and armed with a more sophisticated analysis of its causes, Hobbes had arrived in *Leviathan* at a new understanding of his enterprise: "the aim of political philosophy should be to change the world, not merely to explain it"(70). To Hobbes, it seemed now to be both necessary and possible to transform the imaginative world of his contemporaries—their culture—so as to remove those features of their theological and metaphysical understanding that resisted the establishing of political authority on a rational basis. Hobbes's own metaphysics and theology are linked to his political argument as they serve this polemical aim. The new aim also implies a new audience: Hobbes had addressed his *Elements* to the powerful, hoping indirectly to shape public opinion through the universities; impressed by the growth of literacy he hopes in *Leviathan* to directly influence the many.

In his *Elements*, Hobbes treated reason as a natural human capacity—if he did think it acquired, this did not seem to him worthy of mention—able to govern the passions except when undermined by the various possible abuses of

speech; in general, men know that death is the greatest evil though they may well fail to discover the best means of avoiding it(94–95). In *Leviathan* Hobbes stresses reason's acquired or artificial character and concedes a large new importance to the fear of invisible spirits as a passion that can overcome the fear of death, leading ignorant and superstitious men to think there is a worse evil than death(96–101). Here the antithesis of reason and rhetoric is replaced by the "opposition between knowledge, reason and science on the one hand and ignorance, superstition and magic on the other"(109). We can see this change in the revised psychology of *Leviathan* as Hobbes seeks now to eradicate the illusions which sense and imagination can generate, to establish a natural explanation of madness as excessive passion, and to overthrow Aristotle's anthropomorphic account of motion. More importantly, the recognition of this opposition at the heart of *Leviathan* enables Johnston to explain Hobbes's preoccupation with scriptural exegesis and theological argument far more adequately than have those others who have in recent years even acknowledged these parts of the work. (Johnston shows, for example, that Warrender's claim that divine sanctions underpin Hobbes's theory of obligation is "virtually the opposite of the truth"[150,n.35]). Though Hobbes's political philosophy as such in no way depends upon theological premises, his discussion of scripture and theology is necessary in order to shape his readers' opinions so that they might be ready to accept his rational account of authority. *Leviathan* is essentially a work of rhetoric in the service of an enlightenment that will secure the primacy of the fear of death over that other fear which is the seed of religion, purge Christianity of those elements that have made it a "carrier of superstition and spiritual darkness", and even establish the authority of science, which "cannot prove that the principles upon which it rests are true"(131).

Hobbes's treatment of Christianity was hardly designed to make his political doctrine seem more palatable by showing its consistency with the ordinary principles and prejudices of Christians; on the contrary, Hobbes shocked and meant to shock those prejudices, for the success of his venture depended upon their extinction. In particular, the false opinions of Christians as to the immortality of the soul, the significance of miracles, and the meaning of the "kingdom of God" must be uprooted if political authority is to be rationally secured. This result may be obtained if our interpretation of revelation is governed always by reason—both the rules of logic and what we know of the operation of the natural world—and by the recognition that the aim of scripture is not to advance our understanding of the natural world but to show us the way of salvation. In fact, as Johnston shows, Hobbes's refutation of the soul myth and of the dark doctrines of hell and purgatory that hinge upon it and have constituted a "dagger aimed at the heart" of every commonwealth that has had to endure the presence of Christianity derives directly from Hobbes's materialist metaphysics and is only confirmed by a dubious reading of apparently contrary scripture. Hobbes counters the threat posed by the belief in magic, miracles and

prophecy on the other hand without denying the metaphysical possibility of supernatural events; he does so, Johnston argues, both because the argument that admits the possibility of the miraculous while draining it of political potency is more effective given his readers' presuppositions and because no rigorous proof is possible for the scientific as opposed to the magical interpretation of the world(157). What Hobbes can and does do is to implant "suggestions of deception and insinuations of dishonest intentions" in his readers' minds that will eventually erode their superstitious beliefs—to think through the distinction Hobbes draws between genuine and false miracles is finally to conclude that all miracles are "the concoctions of ignorant, superstitious minds"(161). Hobbes's readers are likely to reach the conclusion he means them to reach long before they have accepted his metaphysics. As to the Biblical references to a kingdom of God that papists and presbyterians have differently exploited to support their own claims to authority, Hobbes argues from scripture that this, properly understood, can only refer to that worldly kingdom of God and his chosen people, which was established first by the covenant between Abraham and God, renewed by Moses, and abolished when Saul became king and which will be reestablished by Jesus at the time of his second coming. Contrary to the Christian view that the New Testament perfects and accordingly ought to direct the interpretation of the Old, Hobbes uses his account of the Mosaic pattern to explain the function of Christ and even as a model for all subsequent commonwealths.

At the outset we recalled Hobbes's new hope in *Leviathan* that the internal causes of political dissolution might be overcome. On the basis of Johnston's interpretation as so far described, the grounds of this hope are unclear for the recognition of the roots of religious superstition in human nature may seem only to exacerbate the problem Hobbes must resolve. His task is no longer to expose and so eradicate abuses of reason associated with religion, but to transform the culture, or souls, of his readers. In fact, according to Johnston, Hobbes saw his own time as one that favoured this task despite the fact that his teaching radically departed "from the Practice of the greatest part of the world, especially of these Western parts . . ." (*Leviathan*, 193). Hobbes's understanding of this opportunity is obscured, however, by his use of the atemporal antithesis of state of nature and commonwealth; to see this understanding we must turn rather to his reading of history and especially of the "genesis, corruption and decline of Christianity"(190). If, as we mean to argue, Johnston's discussion does not lead us to an altogether satisfactory account of Hobbes's assessment of Judaism and Christianity or of the reason in this for Hobbes's new optimism, it is the great merit of *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* that it compels us to recognize the huge importance of this question for any adequate comprehension of Hobbes's enterprise and of our own world as it has been shaped by that enterprise.

Johnston rightly recognizes that Hobbes's discovery of the natural seed of

religion in men's fear and ignorance affords no basis to distinguish true religion from superstition and that if rational inquiry into natural causes may lead one to an idea of deity as a first cause this has no more to do with the religious beliefs of Christians than with those of the gentiles. What is less certain is whether he rightly concludes from these considerations that there is no meaningful distinction for Hobbes between the religion of the gentiles, which as a part of "humane Politiques" has been used by its authors to make men more obedient to civil authority, and the religion of Jews and Christians, which Hobbes labels "Divine Politiques" because undertaken "by God's commandment and direction . . ." (*Leviathan*, 54;191,n.11). Though it be true for Hobbes that "all religions . . . have grown in the soil of ignorance and superstition"(191) and that Moses no less than the gentile legislators used religion for a political purpose(192–193), there does seem to be for Hobbes a distinction between the religion of the gentiles on the one hand and both Christianity and Judaism on the other and this distinction would seem to contain both a problem and a promise from his standpoint. Because he does not see the special problem constituted by Judaism and, later, Christianity, Johnston can recognize but not define their special promise. Certainly, Johnston does show that Hobbes's attack upon Christianity—in its papist or Presbyterian forms—and its central doctrines aims at more than its transformation into a civil religion compatible with, or supportive of, Hobbes's teaching on sovereignty. He indicates why the collapse in turn of papal, episcopal, and presbyters' power could lead Hobbes to think that a radical assault upon Christianity impossible for more than a millenium might now succeed. He perceives Hobbes's enthusiasm for the radical religious freedom that resulted from the decline of Christianity, though he concludes that Hobbes's "political concerns" and especially his doubt whether enlightened rationality can be "self-sustaining" would "not permit him to endorse any truly general freedom of belief"(205). The insufficiency of Johnston's account begins to appear in his treatment of this dilemma.

Johnston insists that we must reformulate "the antithesis between order and chaos implied by Hobbes's analytical argument" as this opposes absolute sovereignty in the commonwealth to a state of nature defined by the breakdown of political authority. Now we see that we must distinguish between any ordinary political breakdown and such a situation of cultural upheaval or "ethical chaos" as characterized Hobbes's own time. Yet if we must understand the state of nature thus, how are we to reformulate its alternative? How, more exactly, are we to conceive this alternative in light of Hobbes's equation of the religious freedom of his time with the condition of the early Christians—a condition Hobbes both praises and condemns as leading finally to the rise of that ecclesiastical power that would destroy freedom and endanger all civil authority? If, as Johnston observes, enlightened rationality is not self-sustaining, it needs to be shown how the "politics of cultural transformation" is to proceed within the Hobbesian commonwealth once established. Johnston supposes that the role of

rhetoric might be restricted to its use in uprooting the “weeds of superstition,” yet on his own account this task must be a continuing one. Johnston does associate Hobbes’s omission of the promotion of his subjects’ eternal welfare from his enumeration of the sovereign’s duties and his new concept of authorization with his new concern for public opinion but fails to explain the contribution of the former change or to show how the latter truly adds to the already unlimited natural right of the sovereign “new rights previously those of his subjects”(81).

Having observed that “the origin, corruption and decline of Christianity” is the central theme of the Hobbesian account of history set out in Parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan* Johnston writes chiefly of the corruption of Judaism and of the origin of Christianity as an attempt to renew Judaism destined to fail because infected by this same corruption. By “corruption” here Johnston means the introduction from the Greeks of elements of superstition and, especially, demonology. Terming it “the decisive event in the decline of Judaism” Johnston attributes to this corruption the fact that the doctrines and ceremonies invented by Moses no longer sustained authority(194). Yet according to Hobbes the conflict between political and priestly leaders characterized the Jewish experience long before its exposure to Greek superstition; indeed, in the generation after Joshua “the greater part of the people . . . took occasion as oft as their Governours displeased them, by blaming sometimes the Policy, sometimes the Religion, to change the Government, or revolt from their Obedience at their pleasure . . . and did everyone that which was right in his own eyes . . .” (*Leviathan*,255). If, “from the first institution of God’s Kingdome over the Jews the Supremacy of Religion was in the same hand with that of the Civill Sovereignty” this was no better understood by the Jews than by Hobbes’s contemporaries. What, then, could be the meaning or value of a Judaism or Christianity freed of its corruption by the superstitious demonology of the Greeks? Johnston suggests that Moses gave the Jews a religion that was “monotheistic—and perhaps essentially rational” and that Christ asked men “to return to their ancient and simpler faith in the one true God”(194,195). Yet it would seem to have been this same monotheism that led the Romans to make an exception to their usual policy of complete religious toleration in the case of the Jews and Hobbes seems to confirm the Romans’ identification of the Jews as a people who must think it “unlawfull to acknowledge subjection to any Mortall King or State whatsoever”(Leviathan,57). Nor can one easily distinguish a pure from a corrupt Christianity in terms of any difference, say, between the actual teachings of Christ and the beliefs of those Jews and gentiles who accepted his teaching for Christ himself spoke the language of superstitious demonology when he cast out devils. (Hobbes’s explanation that Christ intended to teach not natural science but what is needful for salvation must collapse in light of Johnston’s demonstration of the necessary cultural foundations of a rational commonwealth.)

If Hobbes's analysis of the Jewish experience before and after the election of Saul as king and of the Christian experience before and after the conversion of civil rulers to Christianity reveals some special obstacle to the implementation of his political teaching, might we not find in this same analysis a clue whereby we might begin to understand Hobbes's new hope of overcoming the causes of civil strife? Or is the radical transformation of Christianity Hobbes intends only another way of describing its complete elimination? As we have seen, Johnston stresses Hobbes's recognition of the extent of his departure from the "practise of the greatest part of the world, especially of these Western parts" and the new grounds for pessimism constituted by his identification of the natural seeds of superstition. But the gulf between Hobbes's teaching and western practice is not wholly the product of Judaism or Christianity. According to Hobbes's preface to *De Cive* the Socratic embrace of civil and moral philosophy has been the ultimate cause of comparable dangers and mischiefs for the commonwealth to the extent that Hobbes still observes in *Leviathan* that "there was never anything so dearly bought, as these Western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latine tongues." (*Leviathan*, 111). Nor, indeed, is it correct to say, as Johnston does, that the treatment of the causes of sedition in *Leviathan* is distinguished from Hobbes's earlier accounts by the weight he now attaches to "public opinion or ideology" as opposed to "objective conditions" (78). In the *Elements* and *De Cive* eloquence, or rhetoric, was at least a necessary and possibly a sufficient condition of sedition, for it can both augment and create the passionate sense of discontent, hope of success, and pretense of right that jointly suffice for this result and the false opinions used to justify such action are "those previously . . . insinuated by the eloquent sophistry" of the ancient civil philosophers (see Mathie, "Reason and Rhetoric in Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *Interpretation*, 14/2,3 (1986), pp. 283–284).

If then the entire elimination of Christianity and Judaism from these "Western parts" would not remove this other obstacle to Hobbes's teaching, might their transformation otherwise understood serve this purpose and account for Hobbes's new hope? Here we can only observe as others have done previously, that Hobbes's restatement of his teaching on the sovereign representative in *Leviathan* in the language of authorization ought to be understood in light of his use of that same language to explain how the person of God was borne first by Moses, secondly by Christ, and thirdly by the apostles and their successors including now the civil sovereign.² Bearing at once the person of those who have covenanted to obey him and that of God, Hobbes's civil sovereign overcomes the separation of civil and "ghostly" authority and bestows a new kind of freedom upon his subjects precisely as he takes upon himself whatever sin might otherwise have been incurred by them in those acts they perform in obedience of him. The issue posed by *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*—though not an issue for its author—is whether Hobbes may not have sought to overcome the continuing threat to civil life posed by the Socratic tradition in "these West-

ern parts” through a new freedom of conscience grounded in the theory of representative authority as derived from his reinterpretation of Judaism and Christianity. Reflection upon this issue could also lead one to question Johnston’s assumption that Hobbes’s admiration of Thucydides for writing as “a wise man should . . . write (through in words understood by all men), that wise men only should be able to recommend him” does not influence the subsequent transmission of his own political teaching(71). However this may be, the present work is of great value for causing us to seek out that larger political aim served both by Hobbes’s political argument and by his treatment of biblical theology; its failure may be to underestimate the contribution of the latter to the former.

NOTES

1. See, especially, David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Johnston praises this work (80, n.28) while recognizing that Hobbes does not seem to regard this innovation as do Gauthier and he.(82–83).

2. Clifford Orwin has remarked that to “authorize the sovereign is above all to appoint him to bear our person to God and to take the rap” for doing so which is to “confer upon subjects a novel freedom . . . to act singlemindedly in their worldly interests ” (*Political Theory* 3,no.1,p.38). Harvey Mansfield Jr. says that “Hobbes invented modern representative government as an attack on Christianity” yet may have borrowed the very idea of it from Christianity. (*American Political Science Review* 65, no.1,p.109).

Death and the Disinterested Spectator: An Inquiry into the Nature of Philosophy. By Ann Hartle. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.) 263 pp.:cloth,\$49.50; Paper,\$16.95).

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Ann Hartle’s second book is in more than one way linked to her earlier book on Rousseau. Here as there, Augustine’s life of prayer is the foil that sets off the proud life of the philosopher. Here as there, death is given center stage. Here as there, the texts chosen to study how a philosophic life differs from a religious life—Plato’s *Phaedo* and Descartes’ *Discourse* in the new book, Rousseau’s *Confessions* in the old—are, as philosophic works go, out of the ordinary. The majority of books classified as philosophical by librarians are argumentative. The books through which Hartle conducts her inquiry into the nature of philosophy are, or at least seem to be, biographical and even autobiographical.

In *The Modern Self in Rousseau’s Confessions* Hartle tried to show that what Rousseau offers in the *Confessions* is not a chronicle of his life but rather “a

philosophical work of art." In somewhat the same spirit, she urges in *Death and the Disinterested Spectator* that the *Phaedo*, the dialogue from which we thought we learned how fearlessly Socrates met death, and the *Discourse*, the autobiographical narrative that seemed to fill us in on Descartes' intellectual history, are "poetry" rather than "history": "The *Phaedo* is a myth . . . the *Discourse* . . . a fable" (p. 6).

One remarkable consequence of this emphasis on the artfulness of the books left to posterity by their provident philosophic authors is that only Augustine's book—*Heilsgeschichte*—retains the status of history.

The present review will not do the job of studying and appraising Hartle's two books together, though I believe a just appreciation of her thought would require it. It will not even be minimally adequate to the new book by itself, whose high ambition is apparent from its title and whose patience with sometimes excruciating literary subtlety and complexity is quite overwhelming. Hartle's eye for detail and ability to raise questions about all manner of literary and argumentative *qualia* are astonishing. I shall merely try to explain and comment on the four chapter headings. These are: Chapter I, Socrates: Penelope and the Bee; Chapter II, Augustine: The Look of Pity; Chapter III, Descartes: Occupation and Preoccupation; Chapter IV, Conclusion: Death and the Disinterested Spectator.

Socrates: Penelope and the Bee. Penelope's name comes up at *Phaedo* 84a. Bees made their entry at 82b and are reintroduced at 91c, when Socrates says that he doesn't want to go off like a bee leaving his stinger in his friends. Hartle treats the two comparisons, both of which are cautionary, as sayings that want to be seen *through* and looked *at*, as though they cross out something that was to be steted as well.

The context of the Penelope comparison is Socrates' address to Cebes, which starts, roughly, in the middle of 77a. Seemingly ministering to the fear of self-dispersion at death (77e), though in truth asking a *ti esti* (what is it?) question about the soul, Socrates proposes that they consider what the characteristics are of things that do and things that do not disintegrate. He answers that things that stay self-same are likely to be simple and thus not subject to disintegration, whereas things that alter belong to the class of composites liable to extinction. To the former class belong, for instance, the equal itself (perhaps one should sometimes translate as "the just plain equal") and the fine itself. To the latter belong men and horses and cloaks and any other things which, while sometimes called by the same name as the various *itselfs*, bear a whole lot of other names besides; hence are composites. Now the complex things just conjured up—that is, men, horses, cloaks—are of course complex in a variety of ways. Men, the subject of our immediate interest, are (for instance) compounds of soul and body. Their bodily part can be seen (like their cloak?) and heard (like the voice of the lyre?). But what of their soul? It is invisible, inaudible,

intangible. The soul is as imperceptible as the *itselfs* are. Since, then, the soul and the immutable *auta* (peculiarly well represented by the equal *itself*, upon which all the mathematical sciences depend) are similar in this one respect, why not suppose souls to bear the further likeness to the *itselfs* of being indissoluble?

The argument just sketched is followed by a fervent description of the philosopher's soul as intent on "gathering itself into itself" (80e), withdrawing from bodily community, and "as much as possible" giving itself to "concentration." Thus the conversation with Cebes goes over the same ground as the earlier address to Simmias (starting at 64c). It confirms that inasmuch as being dead is a state of detachment of soul from body, and living philosophically is the effort at such detachment, it would be irrational for the philosopher not to welcome death as consummation. A philosopher who desires, or tries, to avert the final "break" after a life devoted to untying soul from body would be recompounded with body many times, thereby turning his own cathartic enterprise into something as pointless as Penelope's work of weaving and unweaving her father-in-law's funeral shroud.

I feel far less secure than Hartle in identifying one thing in a Platonic dialogue as edifying *mythos* and another as *logos* (perhaps also edifying). Moreover, I suspect that "Penelope's *anenuon ergon*" (idle labor) is a stock comparison. I am therefore disposed to construe the suggestion that the picture of a philosopher wedded to life in the body is absurd (in the technical sense of the word as well as the colloquial) "straight." It is not at all clear to me that Indian stories of metempsychosis and the *scala naturae* that goes with them are inserted solely for the benefit of nonphilosophic types (note the Buddhist raft image at 85d and compare Odysseus's raft). Being so foolishly innocent as to believe that the authors of serious literature, while no doubt teaching, and even addressing different audiences diversely, are nonetheless also studying something for themselves, trying to get it clear, working it through by writing it out (as do mathematicians), I tend to think about and by means of Platonic images, stories, and arguments toward what I guess to be the subject under investigation. This leads me to pay less attention to *who* said something than does Hartle. Once spoken, words and thoughts are "out there" for me, in the mini-cosmos of the dialogue. As a consequence, Socrates' simile of Penelope's weaving and unweaving joins up with 73d on the one hand and with Cebes' question at 87bff on the other.

Stephanus 73d belongs to the dialogue's section on recollection (which anticipates Hume's "association by contiguity vs. by resemblance"). A cloak figures there, as a term in the following analogy—cloak:cloak's user or owner::lyre:lyre's user or owner::body:soul. Stephanus 87b belongs to the passage after the disquisition on misology: Cebes asks whether the relation of soul to body mightn't be like that of a weaver to the last cloak he wove and wore.

With the best will in the world I cannot manage to become persuaded of the

dramatic individuality of Cebes and Simmias. But their two images of weaver and lyre seem to me to be tapped from the same well of *deep likenesses* from which Socrates' pun on *autos* (self) (the dialogue's opening word) also springs. The life in those images (and they are all images of life) is too palpable for me not to feel pressed to use them to think with. Are not Goethe—who sings of “weaving life's living cloth” (*und weben des Lebens lebendigen Kleids*)—as well as the modern biologist—who investigates how cells weave organs and how organs reweave themselves in the injured living being—using Cebes' image? Or, again, don't our own most simple and most sophisticated notions of structure, organization, system derive from Simmias' image of soul as the body's harmony? It is hard for me not to attribute to Plato, the maker of the drama, a similarly naive interest in the character and source of the life of living things. Feeling entitled to put the three men's metaphors for life together, I also take metempsychosis and the longing for deliverance from the wheel of rebirth naively, as expressing revulsion at life.

Hartle's way of reading differs in that she much more strenuously demarcates dramatic individuality. Convinced that Simmias and Cebes are yokels in philosophy, she takes little interest in their “mere metaphors.” Socrates is the one to go to for instruction. And Socrates, as we all know, tends to “irony.” Accordingly Hartle gives oblique readings primacy. *Prattein anenuton ergon* (engaging in idle labor) refers, for example, to Socrates' weaving and unweaving of arguments for the soul's immortality. He weaves them in the daylight; he unweaves them on the sly. Just as Penelope's true purpose is not to get Laertes' funeral cloak completed, but rather, to avoid a decisive confrontation with the suitors, so Socrates is “feigning.” He weaves the various arguments for the soul's invulnerability, permanence, divinity to still the fear of death. He unweaves them, that is, hints at the arguments' lack of cogency (e.g., pp. 57, 73) because he loves truth more than he loves himself or his friends.

For Hartle, the Penelope image also stands for the need, while living the life of a philosopher, continually to reinstate the “loosening” of soul from body (“theoretical virtue”) and the ruling of body by soul (“practical virtue”). The work is never done, and is in that sense “futile,” because what was so strenuously unwoven reweaves itself.

Finally, the Penelope image is used to let ring out some version of Husserl's passionately embraced conception of “philosophy as infinite task”: “The philosopher's ‘immortality’ is his entrapment in an endless task” (p. 200). Although there is no “final solution,” that should not make us hate arguing. Hartle deems the section on misology, which falls at the center of the dialogue, its “crucial section” (p. 52). “It is here that the brief exchange between Socrates and Phaedo occurs,” which according to her concludes with a “pact” between them (p. 53), as a result of which Phaedo becomes something more (or less) than a chronicler of Socrates' last day. Phaedo, if I understand Hartle correctly, will tell Echecrates “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” (as it really was) not as the eyewitness.

ness but as the soul-witness, who would protect what was most “*eigentlich*” (authentic) about Socrates, would testify. Most authentically Socratic is not Stoic impassivity but love of discourse or argument. The extremity of evil is not death but hatred of logos (89d, but compare 83c).

Whether [particular] . . . arguments are true or false, the life of argument is good. It is at least a holding action against the irrational. By remaining unchanged, by holding fast to the life of argument, Socrates brings about a change in those present. In Phaedo’s words, he ‘cures’ them. . . . This, it seems to me, is the real meaning of Socrates’s last words [about owing a cock to Asclepius] (p. 59).

“Socrates’s cure is accomplished,” according to Hartle, “by means of the distinction between truth and certitude” (p. 59).

As for the simile of the bee (pp. 14, 55, 72, 78, 81, 211), the stinger that Socrates says he may have left in his friends, and which they need perhaps remove, is some possible untruth. On p. 54, Hartle identifies it as actual deception: Socrates, to avoid seeming pitiable, used Phaedo’s love and loyalty to have him frame an account that would make it appear that philosophy is “useful” for removing the fear of death (*cf.* p. 215). Not so. Philosophy cannot console human beings for their not being divine. Philosophy lacks pity, because the divinity to which its practitioners strive to assimilate themselves is stark, merciless, beautiful *nous theoretikos*.

Augustine: The Look of Pity. The God of Augustine does console. At least, one may hope He will. He who created human beings and their world from nought and who maintains them in being does not despise us for being human, all too human:

The Christian belief in the immortality of the soul is not based on the overcoming of the human as such. The resurrection of the body means human immortality, not the immortality of the ‘purified’ disembodied mind (p. 121).

Descartes: Occupation and Preoccupation. Hartle, like a fair number of other commentators on intellectual history, has grave doubts about the “legitimacy of the modern age.” These doubts are succinctly expressed by the three main words of her chapter heading. Descartes, in Part III of the *Discourse*, when describing the rules of his “interim morality,” speaks of the philosophic life (the life given over to the “cultivation” of one’s reason) as an “occupation.” In context this is the *mot juste* because it expresses the “transvaluation” of philosophy into a useful profession. Henceforth philosophy is a *metier*, an expertise that has “techniques” and uses technical language. And it is to be “useful.” Quoting the passage toward the end of Part I of the *Discourse*, where Descartes writes “I always had an extreme desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false in order to see clearly in my actions and to walk with assurance

in this life," Hartle italicizes the phrase "in order to" and comments: "The goal is certitude in action; the ability to distinguish the true from the false is not for its own sake [as it was in premodern philosophy]. . . ." Contemplative knowledge is no longer distinguished from know-how, and know-how practical (political wisdom) is on the way toward becoming know-how technological. While this type of reading of the *Discourse* (which Hartle backs up by minute and meticulous analysis of the text) is familiar, her claim that there runs through the *Discourse* a kind of "preoccupation" with death is, I believe, somewhat of a novelty (see pp. 146ff). She does not, she writes, "mean to suggest that he [Descartes] is pathologically obsessed by the fear of death," but rather "that he understands the activity of philosophy in its relation to mortality" (p. 147). One thesis of her book is, if I understand her correctly, that philosophy is always a totalizing life-choice in the face of death. This is what she seemed to argue in her book about Rousseau. In *Death and the Disinterested Spectator* even the Socratic renunciation of totality is, I believe, exhibited in some such Heideggerian frame.

Supposing for the moment that Hartle's reading of the *Discourse* is just and that "modernity" has Cartesian "roots" (cf. the "tree of knowledge" in Descartes' "Letter to the Translator of the Principles"), what is wrong with Descartes' "project" and its execution since? The question is clearly ridiculously too large, since answering it would require, among other things, that one take stock of what is wrong politically, economically, socially, intellectually in today's world, and discriminate which ills are the result of Descartes' program. Hartle's book does not openly ask the question, though I do believe her book points in some such direction. Shrink the question: What's wrong with Descartes' program? Hartle's answer seems to me to be strikingly like that of Eva Brann, Karl Lowith, and others. It is the purist's answer: Descartes's program is neither fish nor fowl, neither pagan nor Christian. It is, to use Brann's coinage, a "perversion" of Christianity. She writes:

Pride is at the very heart of the philosopher's attempt to escape death [by assimilating himself to Mind Divine]. Hope is possible only on account of God's compassion. . . . [The] change in the notion of the divine, the change from disinterested spectator to compassionate actor [is] what makes possible (but not inevitable) the modern project undertaken in Descartes' *Discourse*. Descartes attempts to begin from nothing, to rebegin philosophy as a purely human activity and as an imitation of the divine compassion. . . . Descartes rejects both the Socratic notion of philosophy as an endless task [Husserl and Penelope conflated] and the Augustinian dependence on a compassionate God. The certitude of his self-assertion is the beginning of the task of reversing the effects of original sin (p. 135; cf. pp. 202ff, 207).

In a small essay entitled "A Note on Eva Brann's 'Roots of Modernity'" (*St. John's Review*, Winter 1985), I tried to record some of my reasons for questioning this line of thought. Briefly, it seemed to me that the founders of mod-

ernity were not obliged to agree with Hartle that “hope is possible *only* on account of God’s compassion.” Where does Hartle stand when she so pronounces? Another way of putting my objection would be to urge that the founders of modernity may well have held that “reversing the effects of original sin” and “reversing the effects of the *doctrine* of original sin” are two different things. Long before them, Julian of Eclanus wrote to Augustine:

You ask me why I would not consent to the idea that there is a sin that is part of human nature. I answer: It is improbable, it is untrue, it is unjust and impious. It makes it seem as if the devil were the maker of men. It violates and destroys the freedom of the will . . . by saying that men are so incapable of virtue that in the very wombs of their mothers they are filled with bygone sins (In Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p.387).

Julian, it seems, held that God would be malicious if a natural human disposition could not, by natural discipline, be turned toward good. Augustine’s doctrine of original sin outraged Julian’s religious sensibilities.

Distinguishing doctrine from fact does not presuppose religious conviction. I am not maintaining that Descartes’ coming out on the same side as Julian is due to his sharing Julian’s piety. It is possible, though not necessary, that it was for rhetorical reasons that Descartes cloaked his project (of delivering human beings from teachings that made miracles *necessary* if life was to be endurable) in an argument purporting to show that God cannot be the devil (alias malicious demon). The audience he was addressing and hoped to win over was, after all, Christian.

Indeed, it is Hartle rather than I who seems to hold that Descartes, the manifestly superior man who flatters and goads his audience with suppositions of human equality and who describes his choice of a philosophical life as a choice of metier, could only have done these things as a lapsed Christian. At least, she writes as though the baneful choice of making philosophy “useful” which she exposes by her analysis of the *Discourse* could only have been made by a rebel, not against the Christian church but against the Christian God:

The whole of Descartes’s project, as the search for self-reliance and certitude, begins to appear as the struggle against the effects of original sin: sickness, pain, work, death, and the so-called darkening of the intellect. Descartes . . . is attempting to do what faith believes that only God can do. From this point of view, Descartes’s whole enterprise is . . . based on the most monstrous pride. This view is only confirmed by the fact that he presents his project not as a matter of pride but as an undertaking of the greatest compassion and, indeed, like Redemption, for all mankind (p. 208).

I have several difficulties with the just-cited passage. First, I am unconvinced that the search for certainty, the fascination with rational necessity, is a peculiarly Cartesian item. Parmenides’ goddess, Plato’s Socrates in the *Republic*, Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* all speak of the “unshakeable” (*bebaiotate*

arche). I agree with Hartle that Socrates in the *Phaedo* looks like what Peirce called a “fallibilist.” But I would need to hear in far greater argumentative rather than literary detail about what Hartle calls “the distinction between truth and certitude” before I could alter my present conviction that Dewey (mentioned by Hartle in a note on p. 251) is historically in the right in claiming that modern philosophy inherits the search for certainty from ancient thought. Consequently, Descartes’ enterprise of laying (or finding) firm foundations does not, to me, seem dependent on Christianity in that odd Hegelian way in which the rebel is dependent on what he rebels against. Second, while I acknowledge the grave difficulty that, from the standpoint of any kind of orthodox Christianity, knowing non-acknowledgment of the truth of the doctrine of original sin, on the ground that the doctrine is not based on fact, must appear as itself a symptom of original sin (“darkening of the intellect” to the truth that “the truth is not in us”), I do not, in the cited passage, find reasons for judging Descartes and his project from that religious perspective. And I am troubled by the suggestion that “this view,” which is, presumably, the Augustinian one in and by which Descartes stands condemned, is “confirmed” by Descartes’ presenting his project as one of “compassion.” “Compassion.” Hartle explains in a footnote, is her translation of Descartes’ own word *generosité*. I haven’t tracked the word in Paul Robert’s *Dictionary of the French Language*, but doesn’t it refer to the sort of largesse that is supposedly distinctive of people of *gens*, noble men and women (*cf.* the “*gennaios* falsehood” of the *Republic*)? If my understanding of Descartes’ word is just, then Hartle seems to me to be loading the dice by not allowing Descartes the option of a morality of noblesse oblige that bypasses Christianity instead of being its product. Her reply, I imagine, will be to saddle me with questions about how I would square the *Discourse’s* opening paragraph about the equitable distribution of good sense with noblesse. That would be fair. I would thus be led to study Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, since that is the book where the morality of benevolence which Hartle so much mistrusts, in Descartes and in the world today, is subjected to the most thoroughgoing scrutiny and critique. It is, I believe, also the book which first most vividly states the thesis that modern times, our times, are an epoch of “secularized Christianity.”

Conclusion: Death and the Disinterested Spectator. Wonder is the last chapter’s major theme because, according to a famous passage in the *Theaetetus* and another in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, wonder is the source of philosophy. Surely, not only of philosophy? If wonder is a stepping back, an acknowledging that breaks loose from “everyday immersion in action, in the web of means and ends” (p. 8), then the stance that is today so glibly called “aesthetic” meets the description. While Hartle, quoting Husserl in a footnote, acknowledges that nonphilosophers, too, “wonder” or are “curious,” she pays amazingly little attention to these other folk (Galileo watching the incense lamp swing, Miranda

exclaiming “How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, that has such people in it,” Monet painting his haystacks, any and all of us some of the time, for the reasons mentioned in the opening paragraph of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*). She so little explains what it is about philosophers’ wonder and contemplation that give it the palm (although stargazing and painting haystacks are no different from philosophy in being “useful” only extrinsically) that I feel genuinely unclear about what philosophy *is* according to her.

Much of the textual analysis and argument in Hartle’s *Inquiry into the Nature of Philosophy* steers toward fighting the idea that philosophy is or ought to be useful. It ought not “change” the world (as Marx, who is clearly enemy number one though his name is never mentioned, thought it should) because it is powerless to make the world better. Moreover, to expect philosophy to be publicly consequential is not only to endanger the public realm but also to ruin what philosophy is—the inherently pleasurable activity of noticing and thinking that has no purpose beyond itself. I may well have missed something, but it looks to me as though the trinitarian hierarchy of making, doing, thinking of the *Republic*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Diogenes Laertius’s “Life of Pythagoras” is simply taken over, with no attention paid to the possible need for finer discriminations. The case for the philosopher’s life given over to thinking being an essentially self-serving life is repeatedly stated in terms of the thesis that “philosophy claims to overcome death” (see especially p. 71) and assumes a “more than human stance” (p. 8 and throughout). But *what* it is that the philosopher *thinks about* and the *manner* of his thinking and precisely why such thinking is best described as straining toward divinity—these things are not explained.

We are given one clue: Tragedy and the stance of the tragic protagonist when he gains knowledge of his former ignorance (*anagnorisis*) are somehow held to come closest to philosophy (e.g., pp. 194–95). This suggests that for Hartle it is not wonder but terror that is the beginning of philosophy. Indeed, she does so write:

Philosophy begins as an escape from death and thus presupposes mortality. Then it returns to its conditions and becomes a meditation on death. Socrates’s discourse about death on the day of his death is both a diversion from death, a passing the time while waiting to die, and an unblinking steady looking at death (p. 219).

The fear of death allows the question of the soul’s nature to come out of obscurity (p. 71).

From these passages it is evident, to answer my own question about the philosopher’s subject matter, that one of the things he thinks about is the human soul, self, mind and whether these are one and the same or different. But what about all the other things that people on philosophy departments’ reading lists talk about, for instance space, time, matter, the principle of noncontradiction, the

nature of mathematical knowledge, the logical relations between norms and facts? Are these in or out? And on what principles? I could certainly imagine an argument according to which all such questions depend on or are included in the question about the nature of the soul. Perhaps such an argument is implicit in Hartle's book. I wish it were explicitly developed.

But even when I confine myself to the express topic of Hartle's book I must ask why do questions about the soul's nature presuppose fear, fear of death? Isn't life at least as much the "horizon" of death as death is the horizon of life?

The free human being thinks of nothing so little as of death and his wisdom is not a meditation on death but on life (Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV, Proposition 67).

It was because I thought that the *Phaedo* is of the same persuasion as the passage from Spinoza's *Ethics* just cited that I included some of my own reactions to its imagery earlier in this review. Perhaps Hartle would reply that what she is describing is how one becomes "free" in the relevant sense. Then my question becomes, why through terror, why not through love? Another way of putting this is, I suppose, why does sublimity (in Kant's or Burke's sense) outrank beauty?

I very much hope that the generally dissenting tone of this review does not obscure the fact that I found *Death and the Disinterested Spectator* very much worth reading. It is beautifully written and full of fine aperçus. Conceivably, if the hints on pp. 196ff were further developed—hints about proceeding from wonder to inquiry via acknowledging and delineating discrepancies in feeling, thought, and attitude—much of our disagreement would fall away. As it stands, it looks to me as though Hartle's book tries to do the impossible—conflate Plato and Aristotle with both Husserl and Heidegger.