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# Reading and Writing in the Text of Hobbes's *Leviathan*

GARY SHAPIRO

CRITICS HAVE OFTEN SUGGESTED that Hobbes is a paradigm case of a philosopher whose own style of writing violates the norms he sets down for rational discourse. Philosophy, he says, “professedly rejects not only the paint and false colors of language, but even the very ornaments and graces of the same.” More specifically he says that metaphors must be “utterly excluded” from “the rigorous search of truth . . . seeing they openly professe deceit, to admit them into counsel, or reasoning, were manifested folly.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, attention focuses on his flair for the dramatic or metaphorical, as in the great *mise en scene* that is the state of nature or in the overriding metaphor in which the state is regarded as an artificial man. Now while I agree that Hobbes is a crucial case in determining the interplay of philosophical themes and literary modes (and I approach this distinction with some caution), I want to attend to some rather different aspects of his philosophical writing. In doing so, I will limit myself to his acknowledged masterpiece, the *Leviathan*, which is the mature fruit not only of his thought on ethics and politics but also of his reflections on the problematics of philosophical communication.

Hobbes concludes the *Leviathan* by arguing that common opinion is superficial in its assumptions that neither reason and eloquence nor courage and timorousness can exist in the same man. This choice of apparent opposites is significant and extends beyond Hobbes's reference to Sidney Godolphin, who remarkably combined these and other qualities. That Hobbes does make this reference to an individual reveals his interest in the *application* of his theories; but the most important case of the combination of courage and fear is in the idea of the state projected in his book, and the best example of the combination of reason and eloquence is in that book itself. Courage has a place in warfare between states or in the defense of the commonwealth against rebels; fear of the laws will be the proper attitude of the citizen in the normal condition of the commonwealth. Leo Strauss has pointed out Hobbes's decisive turn away from the Greeks in basing morality upon the fear of death. What I am interested in, however, is the conjunction of reason and eloquence, which is no less decisive for Hobbes's own philoso-

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<sup>1</sup> *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, 11 vols. (London: John Bohn, 1839), vol. 3, *Leviathan*, chap. 8, pp. 58–59 (cited hereafter in this edition).

phical procedure (at least in the *Leviathan*). Eloquence, or rhetoric, suggests to us ornamentation and appeal to the passions. We expect Hobbes, with his militant championship of science and his denunciation of misleading literary flourishes, to be on his guard against rhetoric. We might think that he is making a plea for his own plain style when at the end of his Review he says, "There is nothing I distrust more than my elocution" (p. 711). But we must not confuse "eloquence" with "elocution"; the first is rhetoric, whereas the second is only an aspect of rhetoric. "Elocution" is Hobbes's own translation, in his compendium of Aristotle's rhetoric, of the term *lexis*, which is most often translated now as "style" or "diction." In distrusting his elocution Hobbes is not distrusting the invention and arrangement of his discourse. These are the other two aspects of Aristotelian rhetoric, and it is with their help, as we shall see, that Hobbes claims a prudent authorship over the whole of his book. As Strauss and others have pointed out, Hobbes's admiration for Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was an abiding one, whatever his misgivings may have been about Aristotle's politics and metaphysics. It will be important to return to this Aristotelian background later in order to assess Hobbes's agreements with it and his divergences from it. But it is worth noting at this point that our author is deploying that background quite deliberately.

I want to suggest, then, that Hobbes's literary strategy consists not so much in an unconscious and occasional lapse into metaphor as in the deployment of a complex rhetorical structure that runs through the whole of *Leviathan*. The rhetorical order with which I will be concerned is that which Hobbes constructs from the activities of reading and writing themselves—and which he extends to include authorship and authorization, letters patent, and the authority and interpretation of texts in general, including *the* book of Western culture. Hobbes has sprinkled his most fascinating text with a variety of pointers as to how one should read the *Leviathan*, but these have been largely ignored by the critics. In summing up the hermeneutics developed in his own interpretation of Scripture he counsels that

it is not the bare words, but the scope of the writer that giveth the true light, by which any writing is to be interpreted; and they that insist upon single texts, without considering the main design, can derive no thing from them clearly. (Chap. 43, p. 602)

What follows is an attempt to sketch something of the scope and main design of the *Leviathan* by taking into account Hobbes's own pervasive concern with matters of reading, writing, and textual interpretation and authority. Many readers have pointed out that the last two parts of his book, comprising more than half of the bulk of the whole, must lead to some serious modification of the author's reputation as a secular political theorist drawing his inspiration from a mechanical model of nature. For these two parts, "Of a Christian Commonwealth" and "Of the Kingdom of Darkness," are concerned with religious doctrine; and so an important strain of Hobbes scholarship has come to focus on the question of whether Hobbes can be serious in his apparent concern with the religious foundations and consequences of his political argument. It is not remarked with equal frequency that Hobbes's *approach* to religion in these parts of the book is oriented almost exclusively to the written text of the Bible and grounded in a theory of interpretation which makes a significant connection between meaning and power. My suggestion is that these concerns are not addenda designed to fit the book into the context of contemporary religious controversy but are in fact clues to the scope and design of the whole.

After reading the concluding parts of *Leviathan* one returns to the beginning to see whether this suggestion is born out. In his introduction Hobbes gives a piece of advice about how to read the first part of the book, "Of Man." Faced with the question whether wisdom comes from reading of books or men, Hobbes quotes the classical maxim *nosce teipsum* but gives it the amazing translation "read thyself" (rather than "know thyself"). Nor is this a casual use, for the remainder of the introduction plays elaborately upon the idea that by reading one's self one comes to read other men. The metaphor continues by pointing out that with oneself as a base one can make "legible" again "the characters of mans heart, blotted and confounded as they are." (Here it is helpful to recall that a *character* is originally a written mark, document, or statement.) In the text-oriented world of the Renaissance, then, Hobbes rejects the authority of books in general but fails to escape from the metaphysics of the book altogether.<sup>2</sup> His own book is to be a device by which the reader will go through a new kind of rhetorical education, passing on from reading himself to becoming an "author" of the commonwealth and finally learning how it is that we interpret any text whatsoever. Of course this seems to be inconsistent with Hobbes's reputed rejection of metaphor and analogy. Let me make just the brief suggestion that Hobbes has one foot in the literary and analogical world of the Renaissance and the other in the emerging mechanism and nominalism or the seventeenth century. He rejects metaphor and analogy consistently enough when it is a question of learning about nature by transferring or analogizing from human properties; but he is quite assured in his reliance on similarity in moving from man to the artificial man, the art or artifice involved being that of writing, and in expecting the reader to produce a self-reading analogous to the one Hobbes sets down in the book.<sup>3</sup>

If a metaphor is a transference from one realm to another, then what counts as, or is perceived as, a metaphor will depend upon the categorial framework in terms of which we mark the proper divisions of such things; for the notion of transference presupposes an initial mapping of some kind. This is what Heidegger seems to have in mind when he says that metaphor exists only within metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> Now I am calling Hobbes's use of reading and its associated terms a "metaphor" only in a provisional sense in order to indicate that contemporary Anglo-American philosophical tastes would probably find there to be some transference here. (Some contemporary French philosophers, on the other hand, might see Hobbes as anticipating their own metaphysics of the text, in which understanding and reading would be proper variants of one another.) Whether Hobbes himself was conscious of coining a metaphor, or accepting one in great currency in his own literary culture, or deliberately choosing to equate understanding and reading

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<sup>2</sup> Berel Lang has pointed out to me that the *OED* gives "understand" as one meaning of "read" at this time; if "read thyself" were an isolated usage in Hobbes I would certainly accept that equivalence and leave the matter there. In fact, "read thyself" is part of a rather complex set of notions drawn from reading, writing, and textual interpretation such that its absence would still make that complex worth investigating. Indeed, the possible equivalence of understanding and reading suggests to what extent Hobbes's work is continuous with the Renaissance tendency to construe all understanding on the model of the reading of books. For the background of this metaphysics of the book see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), chap. 16, "The Book as Symbol."

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault offers a suggestive account of the transition from a view of the world based on resemblance and analogy to one in which representation is primary. Here representation is understood so as to stress the distinction between objects represented and the linguistic or other means of representation. See *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), chaps. 2, 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Only within metaphysics is there the metaphorical." Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957); see Ronald Bruzina "Heidegger on the Metaphor and Philosophy," in Michael Murray, ed., *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 184–200.

is a very interesting question. The most interesting reading of Hobbes will be the one that sees him with the greatest power over his cultural and linguistic materials; therefore, I assume that whatever the traditional origins of Hobbes's usage, he is employing the idea of reading in a systematic fashion.<sup>5</sup> That is, I assume that Hobbesian metaphysics either forbids transference from the contents of imagination and fancy (such as colors and smells) to the world of bodies, or at least cautions us to be aware that notions such as that of a gray stone are metaphorical; but it allows the translation of *nosce teipsum* as "read thyself" to be nonmetaphorical. In fact, Hobbes's preference for the vocabulary of literacy to discuss matters of understanding may very well be connected with his materialism. If all thought is *really* bodily motion, how better suggest this than by referring to instances of thought by indicating their obviously material embodiments in written texts and the physical operation of scanning lines of black and white characters and turning pages? Speech is less evidently tangible than writing, even if it does consist in vibrations in a medium, and what we usually call thought is the least tangible of all. Aristotle's claim that writing is a sign of speech and that speech is a sign of thought thus contains an at least implicit idealism. This may help to explain Hobbes's apparently schizophrenic attitude toward Aristotle: he vehemently rejects Aristotle's first philosophy because of its admission of disembodied essences while studiously adhering to the *Rhetoric*, which is concerned with the actual words of flesh and blood speakers and writers.

Berel Lang has suggested a helpful typology of authorial stances or points of view in philosophical writing in which he discriminates the expository, performative, and reflective modes.<sup>6</sup> In the expository mode, the writer takes his subject matter to be independent of himself and himself to be capable of giving a detached, impersonal description of it. In the performative mode the writer undertakes to perform a certain act, perhaps inviting us to do the same. The reflective mode consists in producing a persona or characters within the text (as do Plato and Kierkegaard) with whom we do not identify either ourselves or (in all respects) the author but whose thoughts and acts are meant to provoke a continuous inquiry in the reader. Hobbes is often taken to be an expository writer, that is, he is believed to take the same stance toward all philosophical matters which the natural scientist does toward the physical world. Hobbes's own mechanism, allegedly the basis of his ethics and politics, is invoked to support such a reading. However, I think more weight should be given to Hobbes's own description of his procedure. In the introduction, after directing his reader to read himself, Hobbes announces that his book will be of assistance in providing an example of such self-reading:

He that is to govern a nation, must read in himself, not this or that particular man; but mankind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any language or science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be only to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of doctrine, admitteth no other demonstration. (P. xii)

Surely this seems to associate Hobbes clearly with the performative mode, and it would not be surprising to find him making a Cartesian or Augustinian move, even if what is found within is rather different from innate ideas and even if the ultimate object con-

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of Hobbes's interest in linguistic precision, see William Sacksteder, "Hobbes: Teaching Philosophy to Speak English," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16 (1978): 33-45.

<sup>6</sup> "Space, Time and Philosophical Style," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (1975): 263-80.

structed from those materials is not a God on Cartesian lines but that “mortal God” which is the commonwealth. I think that such an interpretation is correct, even if it does require supplementation. For one thing it may help to free us from the compulsion to give an exclusively mechanistic reading of *Leviathan*. In the act of reading himself, Hobbes begins with sense; the book’s only passage about the nonhuman world occurs when Hobbes prefaces his reading of our thoughts by explaining “the natural cause of sense” (chap. 1, p. 1). Not only does he note that it “is not very necessary to the business now in hand,” but he ends the Review and Conclusion of the book by hoping for public peace, adding that “in this hope I return to my interrupted speculation of bodies natural” (p. 714). The *Leviathan* is an interruption of such physical studies both because its subject matter is man and because it adopts the performative rather than the expository mode.

There is another important distinction between Hobbes’s physical speculations and the *Leviathan*. Whereas in his view physical science and mathematics are subjects of disinterested curiosity, politics and religion are bound up with questions of authority, right, and power. Writing about such matters is inevitably to take a political stand; in Hobbes’s case it is to offer a proposal to the sovereign or potential sovereign who is the ultimate intended reader of *Leviathan*. That Hobbes should devote so much of his book to criticizing other views of the state, Christianity, and philosophy is not merely part of the polemical spirit of this allegedly fearful writer; it also follows from his own view of the political nature of philosophical writing. So an examination of the political dimensions of reading, writing, and the interpretation of texts will be of use in showing that Hobbes’s “read thyself” is not only the mark of the performative mode but is *legislative* as well. In Aristotelian terms *Leviathan* would be an instance of deliberative rhetoric.

Let us briefly return to the structure of *Leviathan*. “Read thyself” is said to be especially appropriate to the first of the book’s four parts. Once acquainted with the matter and the artificer of the commonwealth, we can proceed to learn what it is like to authorize the sovereign. To describe the construction of the state as authorization is more than a pun; the idea is that having learned to read ourselves we then proceed to inscribe what we have read on a larger tablet. Reversing Plato, who also speaks of the state as the individual writ large, Hobbes suggests that we can read the small characters first and then proceed to the writing. The emphasis thus shifts from the Platonic conception of man, state, and cosmos as naturally harmonious mirrors of one another to the voluntaristic note that is first struck in Hobbes’s talk of human art animating an artificial man. One of the basic problems for the Platonic state is education, which must find a way of instilling virtue despite or through the mass of popular stories and religious teaching about men and gods. Hobbes’s sovereign faces a parallel problem, but it has to do with the authority of a single book, the Bible, which has replaced Homer and the writings derivative from him, and with the schools of philosophy and the universities which have relied on the texts of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Given the role of the Bible and the variety of political interpretations it has received, Hobbes suggests that the anarchy of interpretations is productive of political anarchy. Such a parallel clearly existed in the time of the apostles: “And as it was in the apostles’ time it must be till such time as there should be pastors, that could authorise an interpreter, whose interpretation should generally be stood to: But that could not be till kings were pastors, or pastors kings” (chap. 42, p. 512).

At least in the case of the Bible, then, reading is conceived as a political act, one which is not to be undertaken at random but only insofar as the sovereign has authorized

an interpretation. The reference to and deviation from Plato is intentional. What is required in the sovereign is not primarily philosophical ability but effective power; here his power must be effective in establishing meaning. The sovereign is a persona authorized by men in order to avoid the state of nature. The sovereign is a persona authorized by men in order to avoid the state of nature. Since a chaos of readings threatens such a relapse into the natural state, the sovereign in his turn must issue a definitive reading of the culture's texts himself or at least authorize another to do so. The sovereign is then both written (authorized) himself and an interpreter of written texts. In addition he is also spoken of as a reader, the privileged and intended reader of human nature in general and of the *Leviathan* in particular, as when Hobbes writes that "he that is to govern a whole nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man, but mankind." Whereas the rest of us engage in the complex formed by reading, writing, and interpretation only in part, or haphazardly, or not at all, the sovereign is necessarily author, text, and interpreter in his own person.

Each of the four parts into which *Leviathan* is divided is concerned with some particular variant of literacy and the practices connected with it. In "Of Man" Hobbes is, as he tells us, concerned to give a guide for self-reading, while "Of Common-Wealth" has to do with our becoming authors of the sovereign. The third part, "Of a Christian Commonwealth," offers both an interpretation of the Bible and a political theory of interpretation. In the last major section, "Of the Kingdom of Darkness," Hobbes assumes the role of the censor, discussing the perversions of the human and Biblical text in a variety of traditions. Reading, writing, interpretation, and censorship could be plausibly represented as an exhaustive list of the functions connected with the written word.<sup>7</sup>

Such a reading of Hobbes (a reading that as far as I know has not been authorized by any sovereign) seems to make the *Leviathan* internally inconsistent in two ways. First, Hobbes is explicit in his criticism of "those men that take their instruction from the authority of books, and not from their own meditation" (chap. 4, p. 24). Second, if it is the sovereign alone who is authorized to interpret Scripture, what are we to make of Hobbes's own complex interpretations of the sacraments, immortality, the authority of the Church, and so much else? The answer to the second challenge may be the easier one. His readings of Scripture are not meant to replace those of the sovereign. In part they are intended simply to establish the sovereign's authority in scriptural interpretation. To this extent they are meta-interpretations, marking out the boundaries within which various sovereigns (either in different countries or in the same country at different times) can produce their own interpretations. If it is suggested that the sovereign should be free to exceed these bounds, by declaring that the Bible is open to a variety of interpretations in matters of importance, the reply is that such an interpretation would itself be an abdication of his sovereignty; for given the connection between central power and a proper reading, such a tolerant interpretation would be like dividing up the state or allowing a separation of church and state. There remain Hobbes's own interpretations of specific points of faith and morals—as in his claim that Christ's "This is my body" and "This is my blood" are not literal and even if so taken could not extend any further than to the bread and wine on that plate at that time (chap. 44, p. 612). Here Hobbes can be seen as providing a powerful *example* of the kind of reading that is the

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<sup>7</sup> There are a number of useful and suggestive remarks about the idea and history of censorship in Tony Tanner, "License and Licensing: To the Presse or to the Spunge," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (1977):3-18.

sovereign's special privilege. The sovereign may very well disagree with some of the specifics of Hobbes's interpretation, but just as in reading himself Hobbes means to provide a key to the sovereign's self-reading, so in his reading of the Bible he performs such an interpretation with the strong suggestion that the appropriate reader should produce a similar one. This is persuasive hermeneutics.

It is important to remember that the sovereign must unite political and ecclesiastical power. Hobbes's argument for a national church rests on the idea that allegiance to religious authority, if it is extranational, or within the state's jurisdiction but independent of it, is indeed allegiance to authority. It is a mystification to deny that religious authority is political authority of a sort; interpretations of the Bible like that of the Levellers are generated by those who aim at power or lend themselves to the pursuit of power. The ideological authority of Hobbes's sovereign (which extends to the universities as well as to the churches) is as crucial to his state as is his police power. Hobbes's materialism, like Marx's, is capable of recognizing that ideas (being bodily themselves, in the last analysis) can have consequences for political action. Accordingly Hobbes gives a brief history of philosophy in his marvelously entitled Chapter 46, "Of Darkness from Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions." Like Aristotle he recognizes that philosophy depends upon leisure. Yet leisure requires more than supplying adequate food, clothing, and shelter. It requires peace, so that the commonwealth by being the mother of peace is the grandmother of philosophy (pp. 665–66). Greek philosophy is inseparable from the history of the Greek cities: "*Philosophy* was not risen to the *Grecians*, and other people of the west, whose *Commonwealths* (no greater perhaps than Lucca or Geneva) had never *peace*, but when their fears of one another were equal; nor the leisure to observe any thing but one another" (p. 666). Since the philosophical schools of the ancients were independent of any explicit authority and proliferated at random, their teachings turn out to be based on the specific characters of their members, rather than on the universal properties of mankind. According to Hobbes their natural philosophy "was rather a dream than science . . . [while] their moral philosophy is but a description of their own passions" (p. 669). All is based on the diversity of taste as one would expect in cities that possess no clear lines of authority. Just as the ancient philosophers misread the text of human nature, the schools of the Jews misread that of the Bible, corrupting "the text of the law with their false commentaries and vain traditions" (p. 670). Like Bacon, Hobbes sees philosophy as being properly a kind of power. It depends upon the power of the commonwealth, which provides the leisure and peace for its exercise; it may enhance that power with a proper conception of the commonwealth or it may constitute a threat to the commonwealth by encouraging the atomization of political power. Philosophy is no idle discourse for Hobbes; its schools and the universities are real social powers and must therefore come under the authority of the sovereign.

To return to the first problem, however—whether *Leviathan* is to have a rational or a textual authority—is to raise the question to what extent the analogy I have been stressing between reading one's self and interpreting a text can be justified. For Hobbes does criticize textual authority as a substitute for rational thought, and he sometimes seems to invoke a classical distinction between natural reason and the interpretation of revelation which would certainly weaken the analogy if not destroy it altogether. In the case of natural reason, Hobbes seems to be unequivocal when he says,

Words are wise men's counters, they do but reckon by them: but they are the money of fools, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, or a Thomas, or any other doctor whatsoever, if but a man. (Chap. 4, p. 25)

(It would be intriguing to explore the metaphor of monetary value and the keeping of accounts used to explain Hobbes's whole division of names in the rest of the chapter "Of Speech," especially because Hobbes concludes the chapter by telling us that metaphors and tropes "can never be true grounds of any ratiocination.")<sup>8</sup> Now it should be noted that his objection to the veneration of Aristotle and Cicero has to do with both the way in which they wrote their books and the tradition of their teaching and interpretation. He compares their writing to that done by grammarians: just as the latter simply transcribed the language of the time or the poems of Homer and Virgil into rules of language and rules of poetry, so Aristotle and Cicero derived political rights "not from the principles of nature, but transcribed them into their books out of the practice of their own commonwealths." Hobbes indicates the fearsome power of the book in adding that "by reading of these Greek, and Latin authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit . . . of favoring tumults . . . ; there was never any thing so dearly bought, as these western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latin tongues" (chap. 21, pp. 202–3). The passive readings *of* and *in* the tradition generate external violence and conflict; a more active and aggressive reading and writing may be expected to forestall the need for external violence. Since Hobbes intended to reform the universities so that they would no longer be centers of seditious opinions, we must not suppose that his attack on the authority of books (and of ancient authors and Catholic philosophers in particular) has much in common with a more modern liberalism that would encourage free and unlimited inquiry. Hobbes is interested in a special kind of inconsistency that arises in privileging these texts: favoring political liberty as they do, and remembering the inevitable political dimension of all education and interpretation, any official preference given to these very texts must be contrary to their own principles. No such inconsistency would follow from a Hobbesian sovereign making the *Leviathan*, or something like it, an official text. Hobbes's own book is equally a work of eloquence and reason or of science and rhetoric. If the *Leviathan* has no special authority as a text, it still possesses a rhetorical structure that facilitates a self-reading along Hobbesian lines. Hobbes's own book is meant to overcome the dichotomy between the principles of naive textual authority (reading books) and that of naive empiricism (reading man).

In a recent article, "Hobbes' Method in *Leviathan*," Marshall Missner argues against placing too much weight on the "read thyself" of the introduction.<sup>9</sup> According to Missner "read thyself" suggests a method of qualified introspection which is at odds with the scientific claims of the book. He seeks to strengthen his case by adding that not everything Hobbes thought to be important in it is of philosophical significance. It is generally agreed, he says, that the whole last half of the book, which "purports to show that all of his [Hobbes's] doctrines are confirmed by statements in the Bible," is irrelevant to "the soundness of his basic ideas."<sup>10</sup> This seems to me typical of what I shall call the standard view of *Leviathan*. I find it worth considering in order to clarify the purpose of my own rhetorical reading of the book. It begins by taking "read thyself" as a *mere* form of words which if it is to mean anything philosophically respectable must be a recom-

<sup>8</sup> Money could be seen as an obviously material text whose meaning is fixed once and for all by the sovereign; coins must be inscribed and are discarded once they are no longer legible. As Gary Stonum has pointed out to me, the fact that the unit of English currency is called a sovereign could very well have been taken by Hobbes as corroborating his monetary metaphor. For some salient examples of similar metaphors in Marx, Nietzsche, and others, see Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," *New Literary History* 6 (1974):5–74.

<sup>9</sup> *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (1977):607–21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 620–21.

mentation to look inside oneself *in general*; that is, it discounts any special force or idea that might be connected with the notion of reading itself. This of course makes it easy to dismiss the whole second half of the book; but if it were noticed that Hobbes begins and ends his treatise with considerations pertaining to the written word, we might wonder if the “scientific” reading of *Leviathan* was in need of some qualification. The implicit principle I have followed in seeking to see the sense of these passages about reading is one which aims at accounting for as many of the book’s aspects as possible in such a way that they are integral to its purpose. This means that only as a last resort will they be dismissed as errors, misleading metaphors, concessions to the religious or cultural demands of the times, and so on. Of course such an approach runs the risk of constructing a kind of aesthetic unity out of a book that may be misleading with respect to its true intentions; Hobbes himself suggests that Aristotle’s theory of separate essences may have been produced only because of his fear of sharing the fate of Socrates (chap. 46, p. 675).

Still, it might be claimed that it is not so much a question of what Hobbes intended as of what he actually accomplished in philosophy. If he was somewhat unclear himself as to what philosophy is or what issues are philosophically relevant, we at least are in a better position in this respect. Indeed, it may be inevitable that any interpretation of a text that has become classical or canonic in some way (if only as a standard part of university reading lists) must reflect the philosophical orientation of the interpreter. Hobbes comes close to formulating this hermeneutic principle in his discussion of the Bible, the authority of Aristotle and of the universities (one more reason for thinking it philosophically relevant). Of course he would add that these philosophical orientations must be understood in terms of the power represented, possessed, or desired by the philosophers in question. However, in the absence of a sovereign who could actually bring an effective end to what Hobbes considers the unfortunate plurality and sectarianism of philosophy that has prevailed since the Greeks, philosophy remains an essentially contested concept or discipline in our day as much as it was in Hobbes’s. Different conceptions of philosophy will find support in different parts of Hobbes’s text: the standard view will focus on what Hobbes has to say about science and mine will consider the possibility that his introduction is intended as a frame which modifies and qualifies the remainder of the book. Such interpretations are indeed risky undertakings, as Hobbes recognizes, for one who is himself “a good or evil man” (p. xii) may impose his own character on what he reads.

Let me suggest that taking the rhetorical aspect of *Leviathan* seriously is not so much a choice of one or another version of what is to count as philosophical, but an attempt to recognize Hobbes’s own awareness of the dispute. Missner says that “Hobbes presents two methods for gaining knowledge in the *Leviathan* but says very little in the body of the work about which of the two methods he actually will use.”<sup>11</sup> The two methods Missner has in mind are the prudential and the scientific, or in terms I would prefer, the rhetorical and the philosophical. Now I have already suggested that Hobbes believes it a mistake to think that this is an exclusive choice and that he says as much in his Review and Conclusion, a place where we might naturally expect some methodological reflections and clarifications. The dispute between rhetoric and philosophy has a long and complex historical career, with which Hobbes was certainly familiar; most commentators have pictured his early “humanist” phase as a deliberate rejection of scholastic

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 615.

philosophy for the path of learning and eloquence. His belated conversion to philosophy can perhaps be understood not as a repudiation of that rhetorical culture but as an enrichment and redirection of it.

Here we touch upon an important point of agreement between the standard interpretation of Hobbes and the more novel interpretation by Leo Strauss. Although Strauss's language and orientation are quite distinct from Hobbes's Anglo-American readers, his view of the ultimate significance of Hobbes's method is much like Missner's. Strauss says for example that "the antithesis between classical and modern political philosophy, more accurately, between Platonic political philosophy and that of Hobbes, reduced to principle, is that the former orientates itself by speech and the latter from the outset refuses to do so."<sup>12</sup> According to Strauss, Hobbes is so radically opposed to the idea that human opinion as such could be true that he must reject both the rhetorical and dialectical modes of the tradition for the sake of a new scientific method in politics. But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that what Hobbes distrusts is not so much opinion and discourse in general as the ambiguities and irresolution of spoken language and conversation. Certainly, his account of the Bible and of ecclesiastical history indicates a confidence in the possibility of an authoritative writing and interpreting. And the chaos of competing wills and voices in the state of nature is stilled at the point where reason induces men to become authors of a sovereign power. Strauss thinks that Hobbes's materialism must exclude any confidence in the powers of human language; yet, as in the case of some of the Greek sophists, a materialistic metaphysics may be closely connected with a highly developed interest in rhetoric and communication. If Strauss has concentrated his attention on the structure of the *Leviathan* in particular, rather than construing Hobbes's philosophy as a whole from a variety of his writings, this connection between writing and power might have been more evident to him. From the perspective developed in this essay it seems plausible to think that Hobbes himself ought to be interpreted in terms of his most definitive work; he is still enough of a humanist to take the book as the basic means of intellectual communication.

Like Descartes, Hobbes offers his readers a book that will lead them to engage in a rational self-examination and to discover a guarantee of security in that which is apparently insecure; just as doubt leads to absolute certainty, so fear and the struggle for power lead to the absolute state. While Descartes sometimes speaks of innate ideas being inscribed in the mind, Hobbes expands the metaphor drastically, rejecting innateness while making us the writers. Hobbes's nominalism leads him to stress the power and force that is involved in all giving of names, a process he usually designates as "imposition." Because of this primary connection of language and power, Hobbes's use of the reading and writing complex differs considerably from the role it plays in Descartes, where the mind's reading of its own characters is very much in the theoretical and contemplative tradition. Accordingly Descartes is not, as is Hobbes, much concerned with the varieties of interpretation and the struggles between them. Accepting Bacon's principle that knowledge is power, Hobbes sees the problem of philosophical communication, that is, of his own reading and writing, as the question not simply of how to produce a true statement about the nature of the state but how to persuade the reader to perform a number of connected acts of reading, writing, and interpreting.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> The connection between Baconian and Hobbesian rhetoric deserves more study. Stanley Fish has offered a convincing reading of Bacon's essays as exercises by which the reader is encouraged to adopt an experimen-

In comparing the power of science and eloquence—which are both subordinate to that greatest human power that is concentrated in the state—Hobbes ranks eloquence higher because it is “seeming prudence.” Prudence is a kind of *wit* having to do with an unusual sense of how a number of details are conducive to a large design—so, translated into rhetorical terms, *arrangement* (chap. 8, p. 60). The sciences are “small Power” because they are acknowledged by few and irregularly by those; and science cannot easily expand its powers over those who do not currently understand it, or as Hobbes puts it, “Science is of that nature, as none can understand it to be, but such as in a good measure have attained it” (chap. 10, p. 75). As we have seen, Hobbes takes the *Leviathan* to combine eloquence and reason. Its readers must be supposed then, as already having the capacity to reason it out themselves (“perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it—or at least similar thoughts”). What power the book will have—and it is clearly intended to gain such power—will be a consequence mainly of its eloquence. This eloquence is, in part, the “seeming Prudence” of the author. The author, let us remember, is originally an *auctor*, an owner, an originator, and cultivator. By his power over the structure of the whole work Hobbes shows himself to be such a powerful author, and he suggests that we all, as authors of the commonwealth, are also authors of the interpretations of its writing—its laws and scriptures. *Leviathan* does not seek only to replace the authority previously accorded to Aristotle, Cicero, and so on, but to articulate a new conception of authority that will in turn revise our notions of reading, writing, and the philosophical text.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the book Hobbes is proud that he has been able to carry it off without citing the ancients, thus establishing an independently powerful text that is very much in the language of the nation whose sovereignty it justifies. Jacques Derrida speaks of the tradition, Rousseau being its paradigm, which “has always associated writing with the fatal violence of the political institution.”<sup>15</sup> Hobbes indeed belongs to this tradition in a sense, although he antedates its romantic form. What is remarkable is the fact that he takes the association of writing and political power to exhibit the value and necessity of each and that he interweaves the two themes so masterfully not just in the doctrine but in the form of his own text.

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tal attitude toward the text, that is, to read himself, although in a different sense than Hobbes intends. See Fish's “Georgics of the Mind,” in *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Hobbes, it should be noted, was Bacon's secretary and, according to Aubrey, was praised by Bacon for his exceptional understanding of the writings dictated to him. See John Aubrey, “Life of Thomas Hobbes,” in *Brief Lives and Other Selected Writings*, ed. Anthony Powell (London: Cresset, 1949), pp. 241–42.

<sup>14</sup> On developments and variations in the conception of authorship, see Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 36.