

ARTICLE

HOBBS THE PESSIMIST?

Continuity of Hobbes's views on reason and eloquence between *The Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*

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A GROWING SENSE OF PESSIMISM?

In the wake of a reappraisal of the role of rhetoric in the humanities and even natural sciences, Hobbes's stance on rhetoric has become the subject of thorough study but widely divergent interpretations. His open hostility to the art of eloquence is well known but so is his own use of rhetorical devices, especially in *Leviathan*. Some prominent Hobbes scholars go so far as to allot a significant role to Hobbes's allegedly changing attitude on rhetoric in explaining the differences in style and content between the early political works, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (1640) and *De Cive* (1642), and the later *Leviathan* (1651). Quentin Skinner, for example, has argued in his important recent book that it has not been sufficiently recognized that Hobbes's involvement in the art and practice of rhetoric must be assigned a critical role in describing and explaining these differences.¹ And while employing a different and much wider interpretation of the term 'rhetoric' than Skinner, David Johnston has claimed that *Leviathan* is an intensely polemical work that differs significantly in style and content from the earlier works, arguing that 'this dramatic change in literary form was connected with important changes in the substance of his political theory, and [was] ultimately symptomatic of an underlying metamorphosis in his conception of the nature and aims of political philosophy'.²

Despite differences in emphasis, these interpretations have an important element in common, namely the great role they assign to a growing sense of pessimism on Hobbes's part about the inherent quality of reason

¹ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996) e.g. pp. 4–5.

² David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan. Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton, 1986) 68.

to commend its truths to any rational being.³ I shall call this the ‘pessimistic argument’. According to Skinner, this pessimism cleared the way for a reappraisal of the value of rhetoric as well as a reconsideration of all the leading elements in the classical *ars rhetorica*: ‘*Leviathan* embodies a new and far more pessimistic sense of what the powers of unaided reason can hope to achieve’.⁴ In Skinner’s view, Hobbes’s life and activities can be divided into three periods: a humanist phase, in which his literary activities were stamped by the rhetorical–classical culture of Renaissance England. This was followed by a scientific period, in which Hobbes sought to build his political philosophy on secure, scientific foundations (in the form of axioms and general principles), followed by rigorous deductions of the laws of nature. This second phase is characterized by an optimism regarding reason’s teaching capacities. Reason has an intrinsic capacity to persuade us of whatever truths it has discovered. There is no need for any rhetorical persuasion; indeed rhetoric is inimical to the pursuit of scientific truths. But in the 1640s Hobbes began to realize that reason and rhetoric, *ratio* and *oratio*, should be combined in order to develop a persuasive civil science. While the relation between reason and rhetoric remains a brittle one in Hobbes’s thinking, *Leviathan* witnesses a reappraisal of the value of rhetoric and the entire humanist culture, now ‘endorsing the very approach he had earlier repudiated’ and showing ‘a willingness to put its precepts into practice’.⁵

³ See e.g. F. G. Whelan, ‘Language and its abuses in Hobbes’ political philosophy’, *American Political Science Review*, 75 (1981) 59–75, on 71:

Hobbes’ mood oscillates between confidence in the efficacy of his demonstrations and outraged wonder at the tenaciousness of errors and absurdities; but in the end the astuteness of his observations of irrational features in political behavior overshadows the assumption of rationality required by his system’; cf. also M. Missner, ‘Skepticism and Hobbes’ political philosophy’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (1983) 407–27, esp. 419–21. C. Condren, ‘On the rhetorical foundations of *Leviathan*’, *History of Political Thought*, 11 (1990) 703–20, esp. 703–5.

⁴ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 347.

⁵ *Reason and Rhetoric*, 11 and 12. Skinner’s formulations vary considerably, and some are not easy to reconcile with one another. On the one hand: *Leviathan* includes ‘a general expression of hostility’ as well as ‘a number of specific criticisms of the classical theory of eloquence’ (p. 344). Hobbes never ‘came to express any positive enthusiasm in *Leviathan* for the art of rhetoric’ (343) and ‘never came to view the *ars rhetorica* with positive favour’ (346). He ‘never overcame these suspicions of the *ars rhetorica*’ (343). He often repeated ‘his earlier criticisms’, e.g. in the case of the crucial doctrines of *inventio* and *dispositio* when he speaks out ‘as violently as ever against the assumption that the “invention” of arguments involves the collection of commonplaces’ (359) or ‘raises a number of doubts about rhetorical *elocutio*’ (344). On the other hand: Hobbes ‘came round to endorsing’ rhetoric and the culture of humanism (11), ‘defending a humanist understanding of the relations between reason and rhetoric’ (356). He speaks with ‘positive respect of those possessing a talent for eloquence’ (358), ‘became more and more interested in the formal study of rhetoric’ (12), echoes ‘with

The reason why Hobbes reverted to this humanist ideal of a union between reason and rhetoric is that he had become pessimistic about the inherent quality of reason to commend its truths to rational men. Most people simply refuse to be led by their own natural light, lacking ‘the habit, the ability or the concern to reason correctly’, as he writes in an annotation to the 1647 edition of *De Cive*.⁶ *Leviathan* is full of observations about error, ignorance and superstition, which are the result of a neglect of reason and science. Because people fall ‘vehemently in love with their own new opinions (though never so absurd)’, as Hobbes writes in *Leviathan*, they often refuse to accept the fruits of the clearest scientific demonstrations.⁷ According to Skinner, this stress on people’s perceived sense of their own interests ‘not only introduces a new concept into Hobbes’s civil philosophy, but one that bears much of the weight of his scepticism about the efficacy of rational argument’.⁸ The result is far from trivial: ‘Hobbes presents us not with two different versions of the same theory, but with two different and indeed antithetical theories, as well as with two correspondingly antithetical models of philosophical style’.⁹

This pessimistic sense of the powers of unaided reason is stressed even more by Johnston, who sees it as representing a significant difference between *The Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*.¹⁰ According to Johnston, in the early work Hobbes considered reason as a natural capacity, making rationality a natural state of mind. It might be distorted by rhetoric – hence Hobbes’s hostility in this work towards this art – but to eliminate this distortion of reason people should simply eliminate the misuse of language that causes it. Later Hobbes was not so sure that reason will assert itself. Johnston argues that Hobbes stressed in *Leviathan* the opposition between knowledge, science and reason on the one hand and ignorance, superstition and belief in magic on the other, no longer focusing on the contrast between

fascinating closeness’ some classical formulations of the rhetorical case. And so forth. While we must certainly allow for some flexibility on Hobbes’s part in writing about and using rhetoric, Skinner’s varying vocabulary does not strengthen his argument that we can speak of a volte face in Hobbes’s attitude towards rhetoric. For some other pertinent criticisms of Skinner’s picture of Hobbes’s three periods, see P. Zagorin, ‘Two Books on Thomas Hobbes’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60 (1999) 361–71, esp. 363–8, and K. Schuhmann, ‘Skinner’s Hobbes’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 6 (1998) 115–25.

⁶ *De Cive* XIV.19, ed. by H. Warrender (Oxford, 1983) 215: ‘homines qui recte ratiocinari non solent, vel non valent, vel non curant’. The translations come from *On the Citizen*, ed. and trans. by R. Tuck and M. Silverthorne (Cambridge, 1998) 164; cf. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 347 n. 96.

⁷ Ch. 7 (p. 48/EW III. 53). I have used R. Tuck’s edition (Cambridge, 1991, rev. student edn 1996), but give also references to the Molesworth edition (London, 1839; reprint Aalen, 1966): OL – *Opera Latina*, EW – the *English Works*.

⁸ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 348.

⁹ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 12.

¹⁰ An important difference, however, between Johnston and Skinner is that the former does not see any fundamental break between Hobbes’s early humanist-rhetorical period and his scientific one (cf. his chapter 1, esp. pp. 22–3).

reason and rhetoric, which had been the main theme of *The Elements*. The contrast became now one between enlightenment and superstition. According to Hobbes's own experiences in the turbulent times of the 1640s, people, ignorant and superstitious as they are, are easily led by these forces of darkness, that is, by a belief in the occult and darker powers. Hobbes had realized that his earlier model of man as a fundamentally egoistic but rational creature, guided above all by fear of death, did not fit the facts of human behaviour. These facts were that most people are superstitious, gullible, and irrational, and that such features are ingrained in them. Hence what Hobbes wants to do in *Leviathan*, according to Johnston, is to initiate a 'cultural transformation' by bringing people to see their own blindness, thereby leading 'men toward that enlightened, rational understanding of their own interests which he believes will form the firmest foundation possible for a truly lasting commonwealth'.¹¹

According to this interpretation, the extensive discussions of irrational beliefs, Christian mythology, magic, the obscure terminology of the scholastics, and false interpretations of certain passages from Scripture in books III and IV of *Leviathan*, must be viewed in the light of this aim, for these false and irrational beliefs and opinions were threatening the absolute power of the sovereign. This aim, and the concomitant strategy of exploding these beliefs, make *Leviathan* a substantially different work from his earlier works. With this 'new and more complicated portrait of man (a rational egoist guided above all by fear of death) from the realities of human behavior', Hobbes's view of political philosophy itself has shifted: 'The aim of political philosophy should be to change the world, not merely to explain it'.¹² Its tone therefore is far more rhetorical and persuasive, because Hobbes now not only wants to demonstrate the truth of his political argument but also 'to promote rational modes of thought and action'.¹³

The growing sense of pessimism then is an important feature in recent accounts of Hobbes's intellectual career, because it led Hobbes to (re)appropriate the art of rhetoric, which resulted in a political philosophy,

¹¹ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 150; cf. 137, 184, and *passim*.

¹² Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 69 and 70. While the differences between *The Elements* and *Leviathan* are emphasized by Johnston, his formulations vary from time to time: for example on p. 130 he writes that

[t]he theological argumentation of *Leviathan* is essentially different from that of Hobbes's earlier works because the central aim of that argumentation is new

(i.e. ultimately changing the habits and thoughts of men), but three pages later he writes that

the change in form and methods . . . represents neither an abandonment nor in any essential sense a modification of his original purposes. The final aim – to bring into being a commonwealth based upon firmer, more rational foundations than any that had ever existed before – remained unchanged.

¹³ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 132.

partly different in content and style from those of the earlier works. Since the term 'pessimism' as used by these critics refers to Hobbes's thinking on reason and human nature, it is *prima facie* unclear how Hobbes could combine this pessimism with an optimistic sense about his own attempt to transform culture and the 'human psyche' (so Johnston).¹⁴ Leaving this aside, the alleged shift in his evaluation of human nature is held to affect his political theory as a whole and his conception of the nature and aims of political philosophy. But is there such a significant shift? I think not. Obviously, the theme of continuity and development of Hobbes's thought is large, and I shall therefore limit myself to a critical look at the textual evidence adduced for this pessimistic argument, focusing primarily on the influential accounts of Johnston and Skinner.¹⁵ While not neglecting the fact that *Leviathan* contains much material that does not have an equivalent in *The Elements*, I think the differences have been exaggerated, and the motives which are thought to have caused these differences have been misconstrued.

I shall first deal with Hobbes's alleged change of style and the concomitant shift in his evaluation of the power of rhetoric and its capacity to evoke images. Then I shall discuss his changing perception of man, which caused that change in style and argumentation.

'LONG DEDUCTIONS, AND GREAT ATTENTION': DEDUCTION VERSUS PERSUASION

It is a platitude to say that the style of the early 'scientific' works differs markedly from the highly polemic, rhetorical and imaginative style of *Leviathan*. In *The Elements* the development of a genuinely scientific analysis of justice and policy, in which for example the laws of nature are deduced from man's passion, was accompanied by a deductive, sober style. Hobbes himself draws attention to this fact: '[f]or the style, it is therefore the worse, because I was forced to consult when I was writing, more with

¹⁴ A. P. Martinich has suggested that Hobbes's 'pessimism' about human nature is a product of his Calvinist education at Magdalen Hall in Oxford: *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge, 1992) 4–7. However, as P. Springborg, acknowledging a debt to J. Sommerville, has pointed out, the Calvinist synods were not impressed by Hobbes's Calvinism, and *Leviathan* was banned by the Synod of Utrecht ('Hobbes on Religion', *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. by T. Sorell (Cambridge, 1996) 371 n. 12). Though this in itself does not constitute a counter-argument, other general Calvinist notions are not Hobbesian, such as the emphasis on one's private conscience in matters of faith, man as a social animal, the subjugation of the State to the Church, and the contention that believers know truths revealed by faith. Cf. Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (London, 1992) 42, 110–11, 143.

¹⁵ In a forthcoming article on Hobbes's views of religion and church government I shall argue that here too there is much continuity between *The Elements* and *Leviathan*, much more than critics such as Johnston and R. Tuck have assumed.

logic than with rhetoric' – a perfectly traditional rhetorical topos of modesty!¹⁶ The outcome, as Skinner writes, 'is a prose embodying a degree of austerity that even Hobbes's Tacitist contemporaries rarely sought to achieve'.¹⁷

Though it would be foolish to deny the much greater employment of all sorts of rhetorical devices in *Leviathan*, so admirably analysed by Sacksteder, Prokhovnik and above all by Skinner,¹⁸ playing down these devices in *The Elements*, as Skinner seems to do in order to make the difference between the works as wide as possible, cannot be justified.¹⁹ We find several images, ranging from brief metaphors to extended similes (though some of them might not have been recognized as such by a seventeenth-century author²⁰): the order of our thoughts with the movement of water that 'followeth a man's finger upon a dry and level table'; thoughts with 'stars between the flying clouds'; seeing with remembering; naming with setting up markers; painting with signifying; evidence/truth with sap/tree; colours with sounds; hope of men to better their estates with 'the hope that all gamesters have while the cards are shuffling'; life of men with a race; burning from passion with the burning of coals; sedition with sickness and distemper; daughters of Pelias with eloquence, and so forth.²¹ There are pointed and witty remarks ('for need of little is greater poverty than need of much'; 'where every man is his own judge, there properly is no judge at all'; 'to make that law to-day, which another by the very same means, shall

¹⁶ I have used F. Tönnies's edition (London, 1889, repr. with a new introd. by M. M. Goldsmith, London, 1969) but also give references to the Molesworth edition (EW = English Works). The quotation is on p. xvi/EW IV.xiv. Note that the phrase 'more with logic than with rhetoric' does not exclude the use of rhetoric.

¹⁷ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 308; cf. 394: 'a style of studiously scientific neutrality'.

¹⁸ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 304–8 (on *The Elements* and *De Cive*) and 376–425 (on *Leviathan*); cf. W. Sacksteder, 'Hobbes's philosophical and rhetorical artifice', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 17 (1984) 30–46; R. Prokhovnik, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Hobbes's Leviathan* (London, 1991).

¹⁹ Cf. Schuhmann's remark on Skinner's attempt to minimize these traits in his 'Skinner's Hobbes', 122 + n. 20; cf. Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 24, 27 and 61–2, without offering any examples however. Johnston weakens his claim that *The Elements* is 'far from free of rhetoric and polemic' (24) by suggesting elsewhere that Hobbes must have regarded *The Elements* 'as diametrically opposed to' any design to shape public opinion directly (76).

²⁰ Hobbes's comparison of the impact of external objects on the brain with the effects of wind and stones on water (L.iii.1) is an example of an image that has to be taken in a fairly literal sense. Hobbes described sense perception in terms of local motion in our body, caused by external objects rather like a stone that moves the water; see C. Leijenhorst, *Hobbes and the Aristotelians: the Aristotelian setting of Thomas Hobbes's natural philosophy* (diss. Utrecht, 1998) ch. 2.

²¹ I.iii.3 (Tönnies 10/EW 11), I.iii.3 (10/11), I.iii.7 (11–12/13), I.v.1 (18/20), I.v.6 (20/22), I.vi.3 (25/28), I.viii.2 (33/37), L.ix.18 (46/51), L.ix.21 (47/52), II.v.4 (142/167), II.viii.1 (169/201), II.viii.15 (178/212). The 'state of nature' may also be considered as a kind of extended metaphor (cf. T. Ball, 'Hobbes' Linguistic Turn', *Polity*, 17 [1985] 739–60, on 756); T. Sorell, *Hobbes* (London–New York 1986) 146 n. 3: 'a venture in rhetoric, broadly conceived'.

abrogate to-morrow'; 'there wanteth nothing thereto, but a man of credit to set up the standard, and to blow the trumpet').²² There is irony ('which how well it pleaseth God, may appear by the hideous punishment of Corah and his accomplices'), examples (on the pleasure of seeing men in danger; 'two men'), and disingenuous naiveté ('it seemeth strange to me', 'as if it were possible'; 'I cannot see how . . .').²³ There are references to fables ('fly sitting on the axletree', Pelias and his daughters), stories (wonderful healing by St Alban) and sneering remarks (on schoolmen inventing a new name, 'as they made a new passion which was not before', on scholastic jargon, being 'nothing but the canting of Grecian sophisters', and so forth). Not to mention beautifully memorable phrases such as: 'Harm I can do none, though I err no less than they'.²⁴

These rhetorical and stylistic traits notwithstanding, the aim seems clearly to present the reader with a scientific theory of politics, containing deductions, definitions and demonstrative reasoning. But it is precisely this scientific character that, according to the pessimistic argument, has hindered an easy acceptance of its doctrines by the reader. Though Hobbes used several devices to overcome the drawbacks of a scientific form,²⁵ he seems to be aware that the scientific form is not a successful medium for transmitting his ideas to a broader public. His hostility towards rhetoric as an art diametrically opposed to science and reason did not prevent him, according to Johnston, from believing that scientific argumentation cannot compete with the vivid and imaginative means of rhetorical persuasion, by which ordinary people are easily captivated and taken in. Gradually the priorities began to change, finally resulting in the writing of *Leviathan* in which ample room is made for a vivid, rhetorical style, replete with images, metaphors and all sorts of rhetorical devices. As Johnston argues:

Leviathan can be seen as the closing point of a circle that begins with a contrast between the power of the visual image and the powerlessness of the merely conceptual proposition for creating mental images, moves through the 'dry discourse' of strict philosophical demonstration, and returns once again to the

²² I.viii.6 (36/40), I.xvii.6 (91/106), II.v.7 (143/168), II.viii.1 (169/201).

²³ II.vii.2 (161/191), I.ix.19 (46/51), II.ix.5 (181/216), II.vi.4 (147/173), II.vi.9 (153/181), II.vi.8 (152/180).

²⁴ I.ix.1 (37/41), II.viii.15 (178/212), I.vi.1 (24/26), I.ix.1 (37/41), II.vi.9 (153/181), I.i.2 (1/1). Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 308 mentions climax, epanodos and antithesis as *figurae verborum* which Hobbes employs.

²⁵ Tom Sorell discusses four such devices in his 'Hobbes's UnAristotelian Political Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 23 (1990) 96–108: the brief, confirming summary rule; an appeal to inner experience common to all men; clear, simple definitions; and the interpreted piece of scripture to show that his conclusions are compatible with the divine law and the Scriptures; cf. also his 'Hobbes's Persuasive Civil Science', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 40 (1990) 342–51.

speaking picture of poetry – now to be sure in the service of philosophy rather than history, and of communication to a large audience rather than an elite one.²⁶

The same process has also been illustrated by Hobbes's views on the relationship between the imagination or fancy, producing effective use of *ornatus*, and judgement, responsible for the construction of genuinely scientific knowledge. Skinner for example has argued that '[t]here is no place in *The Elements* for the possibility that the fancy might be capable of cooperating with the judgment in the production of knowledge and hence in the construction of a genuine science', a viewpoint Hobbes is said to wish 'to question and oppose' in *Leviathan*, in which finally the alliance between rhetoric and reason is embraced.²⁷

I think the textual evidence does not show such a clear, neat picture of Hobbes's development. Before considering the texts which have been adduced to illustrate Hobbes's 'conviction about the weakness of the philosophical proposition',²⁸ let me briefly comment on two elements in the argument outlined above.

Johnston employs Hobbes's phrase 'dry discourse' from *The Elements* as referring to the 'strict philosophical demonstration' of *The Elements*.²⁹ Hobbes himself, however, used the phrase here to apply to his *theory* of logic, not to the practice of scientific reasoning in general: '[a]ll this that hath been said of names or propositions, though necessary, is but dry discourse: and this place is not for the whole art of logic, which if I enter further into, I ought to pursue'. Thus, Hobbes took pains that *The Elements* did *not* become a dry discourse by incorporating long, 'dry' sections from his theorizing on names, signification, syllogisms and so forth, on which he was working at that time. This part on *computatio sive logica*, which was the first part of *De Corpore*, finally published in 1655, was apparently already available to Hobbes in a fairly definitive form by 1639, as Schuhmann has suggested.³⁰

²⁶ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 91. Cf. 28–9: 'In *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes continued to contrast the power of rhetoric and its capacity to evoke images with the impotence of conceptual reasoning for the purpose of creating mental impressions and shaping opinions'. This coming full circle (see the quotation in the text) does not fit well with Johnston's stress elsewhere in his book on Hobbes's continued and uninterrupted use of the rhetorical tradition, which 'continued to contribute to the formation of his political thought throughout the rest of his life' (23). The Latin *Leviathan* from 1668, although far from being just a translation of the English work, is completely ignored by Johnston.

²⁷ *Reason and Rhetoric*, 365.

²⁸ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 28, 29 n. 3, and chapters 1–3 *passim*.

²⁹ I.v.11 (22/24). Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 91 and cf. the subtitle of his chapter 3: 'From dry discourse to speaking picture'.

³⁰ See his preface to his German translation of *De Corpore: Elemente der Philosophie. Abt. I. Der Körper*, übers., mit einer Einl. und mit textkritischen Annot. vers. und hrsg. von K. Schuhmann, Hamburg 1997, xviii.

Second, it is often said that *Leviathan* was meant for a wide readership, much wider than that for the earlier 'scientific' works, *The Elements* and *De Cive*. This is plausible. While *The Elements* seems to address the parliamentarians, *Leviathan* is aimed at the gentry. However, I do not think we should exaggerate this difference in intended audience, and not only because of the fact that Parliament was dominated by the gentry. Hobbes's aim in all three works, as has been noted by many commentators, was clearly to shape current opinion. In *The Elements* he says that it 'would be an incomparable benefit to commonwealth, if every man held the opinions concerning law and policy here delivered' (epistle dedicatory). In the Preface to the Readers of *De Cive* he writes that

[m]y hope is that when you have got to know the doctrine I present and looked well into it, you will patiently put up with some inconveniences in your private affairs . . . rather than disturb the state of the country.

In *Leviathan* the same aim of dissuading people from seditious acts is expressed.³¹ In *The Elements* he further writes that if his doctrines were taught in the universities, the profitable effects would soon be visible. The same hopes are expressed in *Leviathan* where he writes that '[i]t is therefore manifest, that the Instruction of the people, dependeth wholly, on the right teaching of Youth in the Universities'. He hopes that one day his book may be read by a Sovereign, who will 'convert this Truth of Speculation into the Utility of Practice'.³² It is therefore doubtful whether we should credit *The Elements* with an 'elitist conception of his audience' as opposed to the 'ordinary people' that *Leviathan* would address, for it is clear that in both cases Hobbes addresses people who were not citizens in the republic of letters.³³ Both were written in English. Moreover, the fact that *The Elements* at first circulated in manuscript cannot count as a decisive argument for an elitist audience in a seventeenth-century context.

I now turn to the textual evidence advanced for the thesis that Hobbes gradually came to the conviction that rhetoric and reason should be in close alliance. It consists of passages from *The Elements*, *De Motu*, the *Answer* to

³¹ *The Elements*, xvi/EW IV.xiv; *De Cive*, ed. by Warrender, 83, trans. by Tuck and Silverthorne, 13; *Leviathan* (491/EW III.713–4)

³² *The Elements* II.ix.8 (183–4/EW IV.219); *Leviathan*, ch. 30 (237/EW III.331), ch. 31 (254/EW IV.358).

³³ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 76 ('elitist conception') and ch. 3 *passim*, in which *The Elements* is consequently described as 'the manuscript'. But see Schuhmann's remark that '[b]oth the *Elements of Law* and *Leviathan* are therefore natural candidates for a high dose of eloquence, for these works were written for a public which did not claim citizenship in the republic of letters' ('Skinner's Hobbes', 121–2). Yet, he also writes (p. 122) that 'Skinner correctly points out' that *Leviathan* was addressed to 'a new type of audience, an audience at once broader and less-well educated' (Skinner, 426, where, however, Skinner entertains doubts about this interpretation). Cf. Zagorin, 'Two Books on Thomas Hobbes', 366–7.

Davenant, and *Leviathan*. I begin with a central passage from *The Elements* where Hobbes writes that

[e]loquence is nothing else but the power of winning belief of what we say; and to that end we must have aid from the passions of the hearer. Now to demonstration and teaching of the truth, there are required long deductions, and great attention, which is unpleasant to the hearer; therefore they which seek not truth, but belief, must take another way, and not only derive what they would have to be believed, from somewhat believed already, but also by aggravations and extenuations make good and bad, right and wrong, appear great or less, according as it shall serve their turns. And such is the power of eloquence, as many times a man is made to believe thereby, that he sensibly feeleth smart and damage, when he feeleth none, and to enter into rage and indignation, without any other cause, than what is in the words and passion of the speaker.³⁴

The contrast between eloquence and demonstration is obvious, but whatever the sort of rhetoric he was later to espouse, it was certainly not *this* eloquence. For at this level, that is of constructing his political philosophy, he was invariably negative about the role of orators and *dogmatici* in the public domain because their aspiration was only to ground civil science on the shaky foundations of their own opinions which they tried to inculcate in their audience by heavy pathos and rhetoric. Hobbes's aim in this section is to show that an author of sedition cannot have but 'little wisdom' but must possess great oratorical powers. After a discussion of the features of an author of sedition, Hobbes concludes that

[t]his considered, together with the business that he hath to do, who is the author of rebellion, (viz.) to make men believe that their rebellion is just, their discontents grounded upon great injuries, and their hopes great; there needeth no more to prove, there can be no author of rebellion, that is not an eloquent and powerful speaker, and withal (as hath been said before) a man of little wisdom.

Orators and sedition were always closely connected in Hobbes's mind. This passage is in line with his attacks on orators voiced twenty years earlier in his 1629 essay on Thucydides and with his remarks much later in *Leviathan* where he calls orators '[f]avourites of Sovereigne Assemblies, [who] have

³⁴ *The Elements* II.viii.14 (177/EW IV.211–12). On the phrase 'serving one's turn' see Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 257 n. 45 (not mentioning this occurrence of the phrase) who writes that this phrase by this time meant 'stigmatising self-interested behaviour'.

great power to hurt, [but] little to save'.³⁵ The passage from *The Elements* cannot therefore be taken as a stage in Hobbes's coming full circle in his use, rejection and qualified use of rhetoric, because the term 'rhetoric' apparently has several connotations (the practice of orators in public, the practice of using rhetorical devices in writing, the formal study of rhetoric, the art of eloquence as part of the *studia humanitatis*, etc.)

A few years later, in 1643, Hobbes wrote *De Motu* (also known as *Anti-White*) which is a critique of Thomas White's *De Mundo* but went far beyond that in developing Hobbes's own views on natural philosophy. At the beginning of his critique, he answers White's contention that 'philosophy should not be treated logically', distinguishing between the honest ends of speech and the corresponding arts (logic, history, rhetoric, poetry).³⁶ Logic is used when we want 'to demonstrate the truth of some assertion universal in character', 'by explaining the definitions of names in order to eliminate ambiguity' and then 'by deducing necessary consequences from the definitions, as mathematicians do'. It is therefore a simple form of speech, without tropes or figure; metaphor is 'therefore opposed to the aim of those who proceed from definitions'. The historical style is used when we narrate something, and hence it 'admits of metaphors, but [only] of such as excite neither sympathy nor hatred; for its end is not to move the mind [towards performing something] but to shape it. It must not be sententious, either; for a *sententia* is nothing but an ethical theorem or a universal assertion about manners'. Rhetorical style is used for moving the hearer's mind towards performing something, and admits of metaphors and *sententiae*. Poetry is used when we want 'to hand down illustrious deeds to future generations'. Its style does employ metaphors but no *sententiae*. As a reply to White's contention that 'philosophy must not be treated logically', Hobbes answers that 'philosophy is not concerned with rhetoric'. Its aim is 'not to move others towards performing something but to know with certainty'.³⁷

³⁵ See Hobbes, 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides' in *Hobbes's Thucydides*, ed. by R. Schlatter (New Brunswick, 1975) 13; *Leviathan* ch. 19 (132/EW III.175); cf. *De Cive* X.11, ed. by Warrender, 177–8 (trans. by Tuck and Silverthorne, 123). Hobbes later explained – but was it with hindsight? – that he decided to translate Thucydides 'in order to make him speak to the English about the need to avoid the rhetoricians whom they were at that time planning to consult' (*Vita Carmine Expressa*, OL I.lxxxviii; I quote from the trans. by Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 230). It is a well-known fact that Hobbes often associated rhetoric with sedition and rebellion – a point well brought out by F. G. Whelan, 'Language and its abuses in Hobbes's political philosophy', *American Political Science Review*, 75 (1981) 59–75, on 59–60.

³⁶ *Critique du De Mundo de Thomas White*, ed. by J. Jacquot and H. W. Jones (Paris, 1973) I.2–I.3: 106–7. I quote, with some modifications, from the translation of H. W. Jones, *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined* (London, 1976) 25–6.

³⁷ I doubt therefore the accuracy of V. Silver's observation that in this passage Hobbes 'is concerned not so much with the technical integrity of an argument as he is with the integrity of its effect, the way speech works upon other minds' ('Hobbes on rhetoric', *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. by T. Sorell [Cambridge, 1996] 329–45, on 338).

It is doubtful whether this text in any sense embodies Hobbes's 'conviction about the weakness of the philosophical proposition'.³⁸ Hobbes never considered philosophical reason as 'powerless' or 'impotent' for creating mental images. By its very definition, it does not do such things.³⁹ Such words as 'impotence' and 'powerlessness' are therefore ill-chosen, for they might give the false impression that Hobbes thought that conceptual reasoning or philosophical demonstration should ideally be able to summon up mental images but, lacking this power, must be inferior to the power of the visual images which eloquent writers and speakers can evoke. The contrast therefore should not be described as one between 'the power of rhetoric and its capacity to evoke images with the *impotence* of conceptual reasoning for the purpose of creating mental images and shaping opinion'.⁴⁰

The terms in which the distinction between philosophy and rhetoric is put may have been occasioned by White's remarks. In the next case too, Hobbes's tone may have been influenced by the work to which he was responding: his solicited *Answer* to Davenant's preface to the latter's heroic poem *Gondibert*. In this *Answer*, written only six or seven years after *De Motu*, the relationship between reason and rhetoric is considered in terms of the faculties of judgement (responsible for reasoning) and fancy (responsible for rhetoric).⁴¹ As an answer to a befriended poet, it is appropriate that Hobbes addresses the question in florid terms. He describes the two elements of a poem – strength and structure on the one hand, ornament on the other – as two 'sisters' Fancy and Judgement, both begotten by Memory: Judgement is the severer Sister, busying 'herself in grave and rigide examination of all the parts of Nature, and in registring by Letters, their order, causes, uses, differences and resemblances'.⁴² When it comes to the composition of a work of art, Fancy comes into play. She 'findes her materials at hand and prepared for use, and needes no more than a swift motion over them, that what she wants, and is there to be had'. Fancy is dependent on Judgement for her materials. Because any work of art should be a 'Resemblance of truth' which is 'the utmost limit of Poeticall Liberty',⁴³ fancy on her own cannot achieve anything (except for exorbitant fiction which should be avoided). But as long as she traces 'the wayes of true Philosophy', so long will the effects be marvellous and beneficial to mankind: 'All that is bewtiful or defensible in buildinge; or mervaylous in Engines

³⁸ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 28–9 + n. 3.

³⁹ See Skinner's excellent account of the ability that marks a good orator to 'hold forth' the facts of a case in such a vivid way that the audience feels it is present at the event itself (*Reason and Rhetoric*, 182–8).

⁴⁰ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 28–9 (my italics) and n. 3 where reference is made to this text.

⁴¹ The coupling of judgement with reason and fancy with rhetoric is problematic in some of Hobbes's texts, as will be shown below.

⁴² *Sir William Davenant's Gondibert*, ed. by D. F. Gladish (Oxford, 1971) 49 for this and the following quotations.

⁴³ *ibid.* 51.

and Instruments of motion; Whatsoever commodity men receive from the observation of the Heavens, from the description of the Earth, from the account of Time, from walking on the Seas'; and this flourishing of arts and sciences is said to distinguish us from 'the Barbarity of the *American sauvages*'.⁴⁴

Can this passage too be read as embodying a contrast between the power of rhetoric with the impotence of conceptual reasoning for the purpose of creating mental images?⁴⁵ I think not. As before, Hobbes does not show any conviction about the weakness of philosophical propositions. There is no tension here between the visual and the conceptual, between reason and rhetoric, between 'strength and structure' on the one hand and 'ornaments' on the other – each has its own job to do.

According to Skinner, however, this alliance between fancy and judgement in the *Answer to Davenant* differs widely from Hobbes's earlier account in *The Elements*, and points forward to the 'definitive' solution Hobbes was soon to present in *Leviathan*, viz. that the two should cooperate in the production of knowledge. In my view, however, the similarities are more striking than the differences. A confusing element, however, is that Hobbes sometimes uses the terms fancy and judgement as distinguished from reason, whereas at other places he seems to equate judgement with reason (as in the account in the *Answer to Davenant*, discussed above). First, there is the distinction between fancy and judgement as forms of natural wit. In both *The Elements* and *Leviathan*, fancy is defined as 'discerning suddenly dissimilitude in things that otherwise appear the same' and judgement as 'finding unexpected similitude in things': in comparing things,

a man delighteth himself either with finding unexpected similitude in things, otherwise much unlike, in which men place the excellency of *fancy*: and from thence proceed those grateful similies, metaphors, and other tropes, by which both poets and orators have it in their power to make things please or displease, and shew well or ill to others, as they like themselves; or else in discerning suddenly dissimilitude in things that otherwise appear the same. And this virtue of the mind is that by which men attain to exact and perfect knowledge . . . , it is commonly termed by the name of *judgment*.⁴⁶

The syntactical structure of this sentence ('either . . . or else') reflects the distinct yet related activities of the two faculties (as the term 'sisters' in his *Answer to Davenant* and in *Leviathan* also indicates). Both are forms of

⁴⁴ Cf. *The Elements* I.xiii.3 (65/EW IV.72); the wording in both passages is very close, cf. for instance 'bewtifull or defensible in buildinge' (*Answer to Davenant*) with 'either elegant or defensible in building' (*The Elements*). A similar list, not mentioning fancy, occurs in *De Cive*, epistle dedicatory (ed. by Warrender, 74; trans. by Tuck and Silverthorne, 4–5) and *De Corpore* I.7 (OL I.6–7; new critical edition by K. Schuhmann, Paris 2000). It is a typical example of a piece of text that Hobbes inserted in various places.

⁴⁵ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 28–9; cf. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 369–70.

⁴⁶ I.x.4 (50/EW IV.55–6). Cf. n. 56 below.

natural wit, and are discussed under the same rubric of 'quick ranging of mind' or 'Celerity of imagining'. The same account is found in *Leviathan* (chapter VIII) where Hobbes writes that those who observe unexpected similitudes in things are said to have 'a *Good Wit*' (or 'a *Good Fancy*'), while those that observe differences and dissimilitude, 'which is called *Distinguishing*, and *Discerning*, and *Judging* between thing and thing', are said to have 'a *good Judgment*' in case the discerning is not easy. In *The Elements* Hobbes continues by saying that judgement can lead to 'exact and perfect knowledge', while fancy must furnish us with 'grateful similies, metaphors, and other tropes'.⁴⁷ Obviously, there is nothing wrong with *grateful* figures of speech.

This is one way in which Hobbes uses these terms fancy and judgement. They are forms of *natural* wit, and as such are distinguished from reason which is a form of *acquired* wit. When in *The Elements* (I. xiii. 2–4) Hobbes contrasts deductive science, *mathematici*, true learning on the one hand with 'pre-Hobbesian' moral philosophy, *dogmatici*, and persuasion on the other, he is *not* contrasting judgement with fancy but acquired wit with natural wit. Natural wit is based only on use and experience, while acquired wit is developed by teaching and instruction. Hence, people who use only their natural wit without reasoning will never be able to do what Hobbes has finally achieved: to set moral and political philosophy on firm, scientific (that is deductive) footing: 'And yet every man thinks that in this subject [moral philosophy] he knoweth as much as any other; supposing there needeth thereunto no study but that it accrueth to them by natural wit'.⁴⁸ This is not to say that Hobbes wants to exclude natural wit from any investigation into the principles of moral science. On the contrary, he appeals to inner experience common to all men, as when he writes in *The Elements*: 'But intending not to take my principle upon trust, but only to put men in mind of what they know already, or may know by their own experience, I hope to err the less'.⁴⁹ And in *Leviathan* he writes that 'in any businesse, whereof a man has not infallible Science to proceed by; to forsake his own naturall judgement, and be guided by generall sentences read in Authors, and subject to many

⁴⁷ It is clear that Hobbes means that Fancy necessarily needs the data from Judgement, consisting in 'discretion of times, places, and persons' in order to go ahead with her task of presentation. Cf. *Answer to Davenant*: Fancy 'findes her materials at hand and prepared for use', namely by Judgement (ed. by Gladish, 49). From a superficial reading of *Leviathan* ch. 8 one might get the erroneous impression that Hobbes here assigns the 'distinction of persons, places, and seasons' to fancy ('Besides the Discretion of times, places, and persons, necessary to a good Fancy, there is required also an often application of his thoughts to their End; that is to say, to some use to be made of them'; 8: 51/EW III.57; cf. *The Elements* I.x.4 [50/EW IV.56]).

⁴⁸ *The Elements* I.xiii.3 (66/EW IV.73).

⁴⁹ I.i.2 (1/EW IV.1; cf. I.xiii.4 (67/EW IV.74): 'the fault lieth altogether in the dogmatics [. . . who] with passion press to have their opinions pass everywhere for truth, without any evident demonstration either from experience, or from places of Scripture of oncontroverted interpretation'.

exceptions, is a signe of folly'.⁵⁰ But his point is that those who rely solely on their natural wits are inclined to take their vested interests as basic principles and try to persuade others to subscribe to their positions.

Although reason is not the same as judgement they seem to be used interchangeably in some other passages, for instance in the *Answer* to Davenant. And in 'A Review and Conclusion' Hobbes formulates some criticisms which people have raised against the possibility 'that any man should be sufficiently disposed to all sorts of Civill duty' in the following terms:

The Severity of Judgment, they say, makes men Censorious, and unapt to pardon the Errours and Infirmities of other men: and on the other side, Celerity of Fancy, makes the thoughts lesse stedly than is necessary, to discern exactly between Right and Wrong. Again, in all Deliberations, and in all Pleadings, the faculty of solid Reasoning, is necessary: for without it, the Resolutions of men are rash, and their Sentences unjust: and yet if there be not powerfull Eloquence, which procureth attention and Consent, the effect of Reason will be little. But these are contrary Faculties; the former being grounded upon principles of Truth; the other upon Opinions already received, true, or false; and upon the Passions and Interests of men, which are different, and mutable.⁵¹

Here, judgement is closely associated with reason, and fancy with eloquence, that is, the distinction between reason as acquired wit on the one hand and judgement and fancy as natural wits on the other hand does not play any role (as in *Leviathan* chapter VIII).⁵² But when Hobbes answers this objection, the terms of the pairs are listed separately, though there is obvious a close connection between them: fancy and judgement 'may have place in the same man; but by turnes; as the end which he aimeth at requireth'. Judgement is 'sometimes fixed upon one certain Consideration, and the Fancy at another time wandring about the world. So also Reason, and Eloquence, (though not perhaps in the Naturall Sciences, yet in the Morall) may stand very well together'.⁵³ The phrase 'so also' suggests that for Hobbes judgement and reason are not identical. This is also suggested by the example of Hobbes's good friend Mr Sidney Godolphin, who possessed 'cleernesse of Judgment, and largenesse of Fancy; strength of Reason, and gracefull Elocution; a Courage for the Warre, and a Fear for

⁵⁰ Ch. 5, p. 37/EW III.38. In his *Answer* to Davenant, Hobbes praises the poet for drawing on 'his owne store', that is, his own experience (ed. by Gladish, p. 50).

⁵¹ 483/EW III.701.

⁵² It is striking that Skinner, though he writes that Hobbes's 'theory of imagination' is 'first outlined in ch. 10 of *The Elements* and definitively unfolded in the opening three chapters of *Leviathan*', continues to compare this ch. 10 of *The Elements* with the account in the Review and Conclusion of *Leviathan*. He should have compared it with its equivalent in ch. 8 of *Lev.*

⁵³ A Review, and Conclusions, p. 483/EW III.702. Cf. *Answer*, ed. by Gladish, 49 on Fancy flying from Heaven to Earth etc.

the Law'. If reason and judgement were the same, Hobbes would not have listed them separately here.⁵⁴

In either case – (a) judgement and fancy as natural wits as distinguished from reason as acquired wit, and (b) judgement/reason/science (taken as one broad category) as distinguished from fancy/rhetorical *ornatus* – we cannot speak of any clear development in Hobbes's thinking. His position remains roughly the same, often down to the level of words. As we have seen, in *Leviathan* fancy and judgement are described in much the same terms as in the *The Elements*, and there is still no place for any close alliance between the two faculties in science and deductive reasoning, except perhaps for the heuristic function of some 'apt similitude': 'In Demonstration, in Councell, and all rigourous search of Truth, Judgement does all; except sometimes the understanding have need to be opened by some apt similitude; and then there is so much use of Fancy'.⁵⁵ It comes therefore as no surprise to find Hobbes using the very same formulas in his *De Corpore* from 1655.⁵⁶ I cannot agree therefore with Skinner, who seems to equate judgement with reason and science *tout court*, when he writes that '[t]here is no place in *The Elements* for the possibility that the fancy might be capable of cooperating with the judgement in the production of knowledge and hence in the construction of a genuine science', a viewpoint Hobbes wishes 'to question and oppose' in *Leviathan*.⁵⁷ For neither in *The Elements* nor in *Leviathan* (nor in *De Motu* nor in the *Answer* to Davenant) is there any place for such a possibility. Fancy may adorn or present colourfully what judgement (to quote from the *Answer* again) has found and 'prepared for

⁵⁴ Cf. *Leviathan*, ch. 36: 'there is need of Reason and Judgment to discern between naturall, and supernaturall Gifts.' (297/EW III.423). The Latin *Leviathan* reads 'judicio et ratione naturali.' (OL III.309). Cf. my next section on the two ways in which Hobbes employes the term 'reason'.

⁵⁵ Ch. 8 (52/EW III.58–9). 'So much use' only means: to the extent that it can help to 'open up' the understanding, which occurs only 'sometimes', as Hobbes writes. It does not mean: 'very much' or 'many times'. The Latin *Leviathan* (OL III.56) adds even 'perhaps' (*forte*), a word curiously omitted by Skinner in his reference to the Latin text (*Reason and Rhetoric*, p. 374 and n. 216).

⁵⁶ *De Corpore* XXV.8 (OL I.325; new critical edition by K. Schuhmann, Paris 2000). I owe this reference to Karl Schuhmann. Cf. the translation from 1656:

For he that thinketh, compareth the phantasms that pass, that is, taketh notice of their likeness or unlikeness to one another. And as he that observes readily the likenesses of things of different natures, or that are very remote from one another, is said to have a good fancy; so he is said to have a good judgment, that finds out the unlikenesses or differences of things that are like one another.

(EW I.399)

⁵⁷ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 365.

use',⁵⁸ but there is no role to play for Fancy in the *production* of knowledge and in the *construction* of science: as Hobbes explicitly states in *Leviathan*: in demonstration, in counsel, and all rigorous search of truth, 'Judgment does all'.

This should be conclusive evidence against the view that Hobbes, by making allowance for fancy in her role of adorning the truth, was in effect formulating the 'inescapable need for an alliance between reason and eloquence'.⁵⁹ Neither can Hobbes's remark that

Reason, and Eloquence, (though not perhaps in the Naturall Sciences, yet in the Morall) may stand very well together. For wheresoever there is place for adorning and preferring of Errour, there is much more place for adorning and preferring of Truth, *if they have it to adorn*,⁶⁰

be used as testimony of Hobbes's alleged shift of intellectual allegiances. Apart from the fact that presentation is something different from production and construction of scientific knowledge, this remark, which is Hobbes's reply to people who had argued that 'if there be not powerfull Eloquence . . . the effect of Reason will be little', suggests that he does not consider the adornment of truth a necessary thing.⁶¹ If one does adorn the truth, it is a popularizing move: *if* charlatans and 'authors of sedition' dress their lies and falsehoods in beautiful clothes, then we may as well use rhetorical means for adorning the truth, though this is by no means necessary.

⁵⁸ Cf. the list of beneficial effects that the sciences have brought mankind, already quoted above (see n. 44). A careful comparison of the various versions of this list and their contexts in *The Elements*, *De Cive*, *Answer to Davenant*, *Leviathan*, and *De Corpore* shows that Hobbes easily adapts such a passage to the context of a particular argument. In fact, only in his *Answer to Davenant* does he ascribe the presentation of these effects explicitly to 'fancy', as is to be expected in an eulogy of the poet and his work, since imagination and rhetorical *ornatus* belong essentially to the art of poetry. In *Leviathan* ch. 10 he uses the term 'Artificer', which seems to have the same function as 'fancy' in this context:

Arts of publique use, as Fortification, making of Engines, and other Instruments of War; because they conferre to Defence, and Victory, are Power: And though the true Mother of them, be Science, namely the Mathematicques; yet, because they are brought into the Light, by the hand of the Artificer, they be esteemed (the Midwife passing with the vulgar for the Mother,) as his issue.

(63/EW III.75); cf. *ibid.* ch. 30 (232/EW III.324)

⁵⁹ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, p. 346.

⁶⁰ 483–4/EW III.702 (italics mine).

⁶¹ 483/EW III.701. Cf. Schuhmann, 'Skinner's Hobbes', 123, who adds that '[t]his is to say little more than that it makes sense to write popular works on moral topics such as *Leviathan*, but that Hobbes hesitates to affirm the same thing regarding works on physics'. Schuhmann's criticism of Skinner's replacement of 'Hobbes's mild possibility-word "may" [in the phrase "Reason and Eloquence may stand very well together"] by such necessity-words as "need to", "must", "inescapable need", "necessary" etc.' equally applies to Whelan, 'Language and its Abuses', 71 (e.g. 'science not only acknowledges that it must use eloquence.').

Hobbes's position, therefore, on the relationship between reason and rhetoric, and between judgement and fancy, did not undergo any drastic changes. The argument that Hobbes grew more pessimistic about reason's capacity to assert itself and hence became more willing to appropriate rhetorical devices which he earlier had repudiated, is not backed up by the textual evidence adduced.⁶²

REASON AS NATURAL GIFT AND AS ACQUIRED SKILL

According to the pessimistic argument, Hobbes's growing sense of defeatism about the efficacy of reason to assert itself is rooted in his changing view of human nature. While his picture of men, being able to come out of the state of nature by curbing their passions and live under the rule of an absolute sovereign, drew on the postulate that men were able to let the dictates of reason shape their decisions, he came to see that men were often quite irrational in their behaviour. Hence the difference between *The Elements* and *Leviathan*:⁶³ in the first work his tone was still optimistic, since he was confident that reason in man is an inherent attribute and capable of leading him to accept whatever scientific demonstrations would prove: 'reason', as he writes in chapter XV of that work, 'is no less the nature of man than passion, and is the same in all men'.⁶⁴ On the other hand, *Leviathan* is pervaded, according to the pessimistic argument, by a far more pessimistic view of human nature as is shown by the emphasis which is now put on reason as an acquired skill rather than a natural gift, and the picture of man drawn in Parts III and IV as a superstitious and irrational creature.

In *The Elements* Hobbes indeed argues that 'reason is no less the nature of man than passion, and is the same in all men', but this is no different from the account in *Leviathan*, for when read in the broader context of Hobbes's argument, it is clear that he employs reason in at least two different senses: reason as the general term for the faculty of the mind,

⁶² Skinner's further piece of evidence comes from *Behemoth*, but as Schuhmann correctly notes,

this text rather says that civil science must be introduced at the highest level possible, namely at the universities. It is there that preachers are formed, i.e. the kind of people who quite naturally will have to rely on eloquence, and not on demonstration. Only if they are (demonstratively) taught, can they (rhetorically) persuade the illiterate multitude of their civil duties.

('Skinner's Hobbes', 125)

⁶³ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 108: 'Beside it, however, he places another portrait of man as he really is'; Skinner speaks about 'a new and far more pessimistic sense', 'this new scepticism', '[t]hese new doubts' and 'this ever-deepening scepticism', though he does not formulate this in terms of two models of mankind (*Reason and Rhetoric*, 347–51).

⁶⁴ L.xv.1 (75/EW IV.87).

consisting of the cognitive (or imaginative or conceptive) power and the motive power, and reason as the higher capacity for scientific reasoning, involving deductions, syllogisms, the correct uses of terms and so forth. The first is closely linked with Hobbes's account of man's physiology and psychology, and it is this sense of reason which applies generally to every man, in the account of *Leviathan* too. As he writes in chapter 13 of *Leviathan*:

as to the faculties of the mind, (setting aside the arts grounded upon words, and especially that skill of proceeding upon generall, and infallible rules, called Science; which very few have. . . . I find yet a greater equality amongst men, than that of strength. From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends.⁶⁵

It is only to be expected that Hobbes would stress this equality among men, for it is a basic axiom of his account of man's state of nature and how man is able to leave that state by recognizing which way leads to peace. This way out is due partly to the passion of fear of death, which inclines men to peace, partly to reason which suggests 'convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement'.⁶⁶ Hence a law of nature is described as 'a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life'.

Thus Hobbes's statement in *The Elements* that 'reason is no less the nature of man than passion, and is the same in all men' refers to this general sense of reason, as the following words show: 'because all men agree in the will to be directed and governed in the way to that which they desire to attain, namely their own good, which is the work of reason'.⁶⁷ Likewise, expressions similar to those found in *Leviathan* are used to describe the law of nature: '[t]here can therefore be no other law of nature than reason, nor no other precepts of natural law, than those which declare unto us the ways of peace'. I give these well-known quotations only to show that in *both* accounts, 'reason' refers to the inherent capacity of human nature which enables men to come out of the state of nature.⁶⁸ Hence we cannot take

⁶⁵ 87/EW III.110.

⁶⁶ Ch. 13 (90f./EW III.116f.)

⁶⁷ I.xv.1 (75/EW IV.87); *ibid.* for the next quotation.

⁶⁸ This is not to say that there are no differences between the account of the state of nature that Hobbes gives in the three works. See the balanced position of F. Tricaud, 'Hobbes's conception of the state of nature', in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. by G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford, 1988) 107–23. In general, I am of course far from suggesting that Hobbes's political philosophy did not undergo any modification – the concept of authorization is a well-known case (on which see D. P. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan* (Oxford, 1969)). For some other examples, see Goldsmith's introd. to his edn of *The Elements* (on the laws of nature) and K. Schuhmann, 'Hobbes and the Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle', *Politica e diritto in Hobbes*, ed. by G. Sorgi (Milan, 1995) 1–36, on 32–3 (on Hobbes's growing opposition to Aristotle's dictum that liberty can exist only in democracies) – but it is another thing to explain such a modification in terms of a growing pessimism on Hobbes's part.

Hobbes's formulation in *The Elements* that '[r]eason is no less the nature of man than passion, and is the same in all men' in order to conclude that this 'optimistic note is completely absent from Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan*' and that he 'no longer argues that reason is a natural attribute shared by all men'.⁶⁹

Reason in the more restricted sense of science and 'the arts grounded upon words' is indeed an acquired skill, and one which is only increased 'by study and industry':

There is no other act of mans mind, that I can remember, naturally planted in him, so as to need no other thing, to the exercise of it, but to be born a man, and live with the use of his five Senses. Those other Faculties . . . are acquired, and encreased by study and industry; and of most men learned by instruction, and discipline; and proceed all from the invention of Words, and Speech.⁷⁰

Although the phrase that reason is 'acquired, and encreased by study and industry' is not found in this very wording in *The Elements*, the whole context of his argument in the latter work is similar, namely that ratiocination is not an inborn faculty of men, but involves hard work in which man can often go wrong. As Hobbes writes in *The Elements*: '[a]s the invention of names hath been necessary for the drawing of men out of ignorance, by calling to their remembrance the necessary coherence of one conception to another; so also hath it on the other side precipitated men into error'.⁷¹ Much the same account is found in *Leviathan* where he writes that

Reason is not as Sense, and Memory, borne with us; nor gotten by Experience onely; as Prudence is; but attained by Industry; first in apt imposing of Names; and secondly by getting a good and orderly Method in proceeding from the Elements, which are Names,

ultimately leading to science, defined as the 'knowledge of Consequences'.⁷² The main ingredients of his conception of science – reason leading men from their conceptions to the use of the right names and then to the correct joining of these names into true propositions, and these into syllogisms – are present in both accounts, and so is his warning that during this process many things can go wrong.

⁶⁹ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 95. By the same token, it is not convincing to suggest, as Skinner does, that only in *Leviathan* it was that 'Hobbes came to believe that most people are moved less by force of reason than by their perceived sense of their own self-interest' (*Reason and Rhetoric*, 427; cf. 347–50). Already in the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Elements* Hobbes wrote that 'as oft as reason is against a man, so oft will a man be against reason', and that mathematics is free from disputes because there 'truth and the interest of men, oppose not each other' (xv/EW IV.xiii; cf. Zagorin, 'Two Books on Hobbes', 367 and Schuhmann, 'Skinner's Hobbes', 124–5).

⁷⁰ *Leviathan*, ch. 3 (23/EW III.16).

⁷¹ I.v.13 (22/EW IV.13).

⁷² *Leviathan*, ch. 5 (35/EW III.35).

There is therefore no difference between the two accounts of reason as a natural attribute shared by all men (in *The Elements*) and as acquired skill (in *Leviathan*). Neither is there much textual evidence for the contention that the account of human nature in *Leviathan* ‘is essentially different from the one he had given in *The Elements*’⁷³ in the sense that the later account would put far more emphasis on the various ways in which human nature can be deceived or deceive itself – error, absurdity, dreams, apparitions, illusions, madness, ‘insignificant speech’ and so forth. True, *Leviathan* includes a long discussion of the absurdity of speech, which has no equivalent in *The Elements*, but *The Elements* too contains several remarks on absurdity of speech, equivocation, universals, danger of rhetoric and so forth. And in the earlier work he already deals with the illusions to which sense perception can give rise, sneering at the traditional theory of visible and intelligible species as ‘worse than any paradox’;⁷⁴ with all sorts of errors and ignorance (in which we sometimes exceed beasts); with spirits, with superstition, and with madness. It is obvious of course that in several cases, the discussion in *Leviathan* is far more extensive⁷⁵ and its tone more polemical, explicitly gibing at the superstitious, magical and scholastic beliefs of men. This, however, is clearly a continuation of the argument rather than a new direction. In *De Cive* (1642) too, Hobbes had already claimed that

[w]ithout special assistance from God, it proved almost impossible to avoid the twin rocks of *Atheism* and *superstition*; for the latter proceeds from fear without right reason, the former from an *opinion of reason* without fear. So the greater part of mankind has readily succumbed to *Idolatry*; and almost every Nation has worshipped God by way of *images* and in the *shapes* of finite things, and has worshipped spectres or Phantoms, and called them demons.⁷⁶

Hobbes was to develop this point *in extenso* in *Leviathan*, where his sharp tone was certainly motivated by a keener awareness of the political consequences of these false beliefs. However, there is no reason to think that Hobbes’s lack of confidence in the rational character of most men was new. The ostensibly optimistic note of *The Elements* was already highly qualified by his remarks on the weakness of men’s reasoning powers and their superstitious inclinations, and, on the other hand, the pessimistic note of *Leviathan* apparently did not affect his account of man’s reason to help him out of the state of nature. It continued to be a postulate of his political philosophy that men can let the dictates of reason shape their decisions to curb their passions and live under the rule of an absolute sovereign.

⁷³ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 101.

⁷⁴ *The Elements* I.ii.4 (4/EW IV.4).

⁷⁵ E.g. the passage on apparitions in the chapter on imagination, but cf. *The Elements* I.xi.6 (56/EW IV.62–3) where Hobbes alludes to the same point. Another example is the passage on demoniacs in *Leviathan* ch. 8, though the section on madness in *The Elements* I.x.9 (51–2/EW IV.57–8) mentions people preaching they are Christ (‘spiritual madness’).

⁷⁶ XVI.1 (ed. by Warrender, 234, trans. by Tuck and Silverthorne, 187–8).

CONCLUSION

The pessimistic argument has been used as an explanation of Hobbes's rapprochement with rhetoric; and if it is not convincing, then how should we explain the difference in style between the earlier works and *Leviathan*? Is there anything to explain at all?

First, a distinction must be made between the rapprochement with the theory of rhetoric and with its application. Johnston argues only for a rapprochement with the latter. Skinner argues for both: 'Hobbes became more and more interested in the formal study of rhetoric' and made a conscious effort to 'to put its precepts into practice'.⁷⁷ The 'evidence' for Hobbes's renewed interest in the formal study of rhetoric consists in his more favoured treatment of eloquence and fancy and such pronouncements as 'Reason and Eloquence may stand very well together' in the 'Review and Conclusions' of *Leviathan*. I have argued above that the interpretation of these and related passages is highly problematic. Another piece of evidence is offered by Skinner in his extremely valuable analysis of the style of *Leviathan*. Skinner is able to detect countless instances of rhetorical tropes and figures (both *figurae verborum* and *figurae sententiarum*) such as aestismus, diasymus (to which 'Hobbes is much addicted'),⁷⁸ antithesis, anaphora, dubitatio, percontatio, meiosis, synchorexis, aposiopesis, tapinosis, litotes and apodioxis. This panoply of technical names seems to indicate that Hobbes had carefully studied the rhetorical literature in order to apply all these figures and tropes, and indeed Skinner's formulations suggest that Hobbes recognized these rhetorical devices as such: he is said to use, manipulate, and exploit them, and is addicted to particular devices, as if the *study* of rhetorical figures had helped him to employ them. But practice need not presuppose a knowledge of the theory. Hobbes may have used humorous understatement without knowing that he made use of 'meiosis', or he may have pretended to yield to an argument only to disparage it without realizing that he was employing the mocking figure 'synchorexis', or he may have used deliberately inappropriate and undignified language to deface high matters without realizing that the technical term for that is 'tapinosis'. Of course, knowledge of rhetoric was widespread among the learned in Hobbes's time, and Hobbes himself had made a thorough study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. But knowledge of all these terms was by no means necessary for actually using irony, mockery and studied naiveté, for deriding one's enemies, for pretending not to know or pretending to be surprised, and so forth.

This brings me to the rapprochement with the application of rhetorical precepts. It is true of course that *Leviathan* is a much more rhetorical text than the earlier works and, as Skinner has superbly shown, much of it is

⁷⁷ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 23 n. 35: Hobbes grew less and less interested 'in the formal study of rhetoric'; Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 12.

⁷⁸ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 390–425, esp. 406 (and cf. 12).

found in Parts III and IV where Hobbes used it to deride and mock his opponents (school divines, Enthusiasts, clerics, lawyers and 'democratically gentlemen').⁷⁹ Hobbes's contemporaries, such as Alexander Rosse, George Lawson, Thomas Tenison, Clarendon and John Dowel, were upset by Hobbes's scoffing style and complained that Hobbes refused to argue with his opponents, dismissing them 'with scorn and contempt'.⁸⁰ But then this use of rhetoric, which indeed constitutes a great part of the difference in style between the less polemical early works and *Leviathan*, is difficult to reconcile with the primary objective that Hobbes is said to have sought, namely the union of reason and rhetoric (or *ratio* and *oratio*), in order to persuade his audience of the rightness of his ideas. If his demonstrations proved too difficult for man's feeble reason and thus needed to be supplemented by the moving force of rhetoric in order to carry conviction, then contempt and scorn apparently were not the right instruments, as Hobbes himself realized when he suppressed a number of his most scornful remarks from his Latin translation of *Leviathan* from 1668. Skinner might answer this objection by saying that rhetoric served different purposes for Hobbes: roughly speaking, the metaphors, images and analogies, especially in Books I and II (on man and the commonwealth), and the mocking tropes in Parts III and IV, but he does not argue this point, and indeed, it is difficult to see how it would fit in with the overall picture he sketches of Hobbes's attempt to ally rhetoric with science in order to persuade his contemporaries. In other words, it is *prima facie* not clear how the scoffing and satirizing style of Hobbes, which, according to Skinner, places him in a tradition of Renaissance satirists running from Erasmus and More to Rabelais and Montaigne,⁸¹ could be instrumental in founding Hobbes's civil science, which is said to be the principal motive for Hobbes to endorse and appropriate rhetoric again.

Leviathan is of course not the only work in which Hobbes employed a polemical style. The same is true for two mathematical pamphlets written in English, the *Six Lessons to the Professors of the Mathematics* (1656) and *Stigmai, or Marks of the Absurd Geometry . . . of John Wallis* (1657), which in general 'outdo the serene mathematics of Part III of the Latin *De Corpore*'.⁸² What this suggests is that the use of rhetorical devices, particularly those of the mocking sort, came naturally to Hobbes, great stylist that

⁷⁹ Of course *Leviathan* contains also a number of metaphors and analogies, especially to present features of his theory in a more vivid way, but some of them are already present in *The Elements* and in *De Cive*, as Skinner sometimes does not fail to notice without drawing any consequence from it (see Schuhmann, 'Skinner's Hobbes', 122 n. 20). Apart from that, this greater employment of rhetorical traits does not result in any new, antithetical theory *vis-à-vis* the one developed in *The Elements* and *De Cive*.

⁸⁰ Rosse, *Leviathan drawn out with a Hook* (London, 1653) 81–2, quoted by Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 394. Cf. J. Bowle, *Hobbes and his Critics* (London, 1969²).

⁸¹ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 13; cf. 437 where as later examples are mentioned Adam Smith, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell.

⁸² Schuhmann, 'Skinner's Hobbes', 122.

he was, whenever he was provoked by the political events of the day or by persons of whatever standing. There is nothing particularly profound here. Differences in style need not always reflect fundamental changes in one's intellectual position or in one's confidence in man and the world. Indeed, it seems to me quite clear that the combination of Hobbes's harsh words on rhetoric, eloquence and orators (spoken out in *The Elements* no less than in *Leviathan* and other works), and his marvellous style replete with rhetorical fireworks, is not 'explained' by a growing sense of pessimism on Hobbes's part, but shows a very simple fact: for Hobbes, rhetoric was a matter of style and presentation, but could never be part of the production of true knowledge and the construction of science.⁸³

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