Hobbes Overcontextualised?

There is still a large English-speaking audience for narrowly textual studies in the history of seventeenth-century philosophy. The canonical figures of this period – Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Locke continue to be represented in the literature by painstaking expositions of their greatest books. These studies may include biographical material, or a sketch of the historical period, but if such acknowledgements of time and place are present at all, they are often introduced early and briefly, in order to be got out of the way. It is different with Thomas Hobbes. To a far greater extent than his celebrated contemporaries, Hobbes is studied in historical context in English,[1] and he has increasingly been studied that way since the late 1960s.[2] The thesis of this paper is that the contextualisation of Hobbes has in certain cases gone too far, that it has begun to interfere with understanding. I have presented some evidence for this thesis before now. In some earlier papers,[3] I disputed an influential interpretation of Hobbes according to which his project in both metaphysics and politics is a post-sceptical one. Arguing mainly against Richard Tuck,[4] who classifies Hobbes as a post-sceptic in metaphysics on the basis of his contact with Mersenne's circle and his exposure to Descartes's writings, I stressed the fact that Hobbes's texts provide very little evidence of an interest in scepticism, even in places where there were golden opportunities for him to express it. Moreover, Hobbes's texts commit him to theses that would seem question-begging if attributed to a post-sceptic, and that are certainly question-begging if attributed to a Hobbes who, as Tuck supposes, tries to outdo Descartes in the refutation of hyperbolical doubt.[5]

In what follows I turn to other examples of context getting the better of text in Hobbes studies. A good many of the instances that might be cited come from a body of literature that considers Hobbes as rhetorician.[6] I shall first consider a line of thought from Victoria Kahn that I claim is defective in more than one way. Then I turn to a much more nuanced but still partly debatable reading from Quentin Skinner. I shall conclude with some studies of Hobbes's natural philosophy, focusing on Shapin and Schaffer's discussion

of Hobbes's controversy with Boyle in *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, but mentioning more recent contextualist work.[7] At the end there will be some general reflections on the balance that needs to be struck between text and context in the study of early modern philosophy.

I

The place of rhetoric in Hobbes's work is not easy to determine. There is evidence that he knew Aristotle's *Rhetoric* intimately and that he taught it to his pupils in the Devonshire family in the 1630s and probably earlier. A dictation book from one of these pupils produces some of the text of the *Rhetoric*, and a work known as a *Briefe of the Art of Rhetorick*, which translates and abridges Aristotle, is conventionally credited to Hobbes, and probably dates to the late 1630s. We also have it from John Aubrey, his friend and biographer, that he admired Aristotle's *Rhetoric* while taking a dim view of the books on ethics and politics that it was supposed to complement. There can be little doubt that he believed the subject matter of rhetoric was important, but it is not easy to say what his positive views were, or how far they are reflected in his writings. Passages in the *Elements of Law* (1640), *De cive* (1642) and *Leviathan* (1651) show that Hobbes was conscious of the difficulties of *demonstrating* conclusions in morals and politics, especially those that went against the perceived interests of the audience. Again, from about the time that he became a writer on morals and politics, he wondered about the propriety of using stylistic devices that would engage the feelings or imagination of readers rather than their capacities for clear conception and reasoning. On the other hand, his *practice* as a writer of political philosophy, especially in *Leviathan*, seems to be at variance with his official disapproval of metaphor and his avowed distrust of linguistic techniques for magnifying and belittling the good or evil in persons and events. Given these apparent clashes between precept and practice, it is unclear what rhetoric to ascribe to Hobbes in his political writings.

Similar questions arise outside his political writings. Passages in his introduction to the translation of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* show that, as early as 1628, Hobbes had formed considered views about the right way of getting over a timely political message through a work of history. From the 1640s on he seems to have preferred political philosophy to history as a medium of political persuasion; but toward the end of his life, particularly in *Behemoth*, history was revived as a genre that might reinforce the message of his political treatises. Not history in the form in which Hobbes had admired it in Thucydides, however. *Behemoth* substituted for straight historical narrative an unusual dialogue-form. A full account of his approach to rhetoric would connect his stylistic decisions in his political writings to his evolving views about the effective presentation of events in the past.[8]

Victoria Kahn takes rhetoric to matter to Hobbes because she takes him to be concerned with the question of how persuasion is possible at all, and she thinks Hobbes shares this concern with many other important writers of the Renaissance at a time when humanism was declining and a 'new scientific model of knowledge and cognition' was in the ascendant. At first sight Hobbes seems to side with the scientific model against humanism, with science against prudence and with logic against rhetoric. But, Kahn says, this is appearance only: there is a sense in which Hobbes remains a humanist, and there is less to the distinctions between logic and rhetoric and prudence and science than meets the eye. Kahn's study of Hobbes occupies only a chapter of *Rhetoric, Prudence and Scepticism*, a book given over mainly to different intellectuals and intellectual currents in Renaissance Europe. In the chapter on Hobbes, she concentrates on the structure of one book – *Leviathan* – and some passages she takes to be crucial to her thesis. How, if at all, is her approach contextualist? Her contextualism comes mainly in its use of the concept of humanism, and in the way this concept is applied to other writers, Montaigne above all, who need to be taken account of, according to Kahn, if Hobbes is to be understood.

Some of the essentials of her interpretation come out in the following passage, concerning Hobbes's unusual relation to the attitudes of humanism:

> On the one hand, like the early humanists, Hobbes had a strong sense of the realm of contingency and the impossibility of certain knowledge of the external world. One could argue that he would have sided with Salutati in the debate on the relative virtues of law and medicine, since his defence of political science, like Salutati's, presupposes that we can only know what we produce or make ourselves. The further implication is that for Hobbes knowledge is valuable only insofar as it allows us to produce the object of our knowledge, that is, insofar as it is a source of power …
>
> On the other hand, whereas for the early humanists the possibility of arguing on both sides of a question was an occasion for the exercise of prudential judgement and the development of civic consciousness, for Hobbes this possibility of contradiction is the source of civil war. Furthermore, Hobbes does not share the humanist's conviction of a God-given standard of practical reason. In fact, it is precisely because, like Montaigne, he doubts the accessibility or legibility of such a standard that he sees the necessity for the arbitrary authority of the sovereign. But if Hobbes shares with Montaigne an essentially Pyrrhonist epistemology, he differs in one crucial respect: for while Montaigne's skeptic needs to invent a new language of doubt, Hobbes wants to invent a new language of certainty, a sovereign logic that will effectively exclude all further rhetoric *in utramque partem*. (p. 154)

Kahn goes on to suggest that Hobbes's attempt to break from argument *in utramque partem* is not wholly successful, for he uses that form of argument in arguing against it. This makes him a kind of humanist *malgré lui* or perhaps an adapter or innovator in humanism. I want to suggest that the passage just quoted assembles a host of individually mistaken pieces of interpretation

and that what glues them together, and perhaps gives the illusion that they fit Hobbes, is the contextualist approach of seeing whether Hobbes agrees or disagrees with the characteristic ideas of humanism.

Let us consider, to begin with, Kahn's claim that 'Hobbes had a strong sense of the realm of contingency and of the impossibility of knowledge of the external world'. Surely Hobbes had a much *less* strong sense of contingency than his contemporaries had, since he was a very strong believer in, and an explicator of, the *necessity* of effects. This comes out not only in his famous controversy with Bramhall over free-will, but also in his working out of the concept of *entire cause* in *De corpore* (ch. 8, iii): the entire cause is the aggregate of all accidents such that, if present, the effect *cannot* but be understood as being produced in that instant. Or, in other words, the accidents being present, the effect *must* be produced. As for the supposed 'impossibility of knowledge of the external world', this is simply not Hobbes's doctrine. Chapter 9 of *Leviathan* not only admits the *possibility* of knowledge in the form of sense or memory – the knowledge of fact required in a witness – it seems to imply that human beings routinely have this knowledge. What Hobbes doubts people have is not knowledge of the external world but *science* – that is, insight into the causes or principles underlying facts that are observed. And the doubt that people *do* have science falls short of the doubt whether science is possible.

To go on with the passage from Kahn, she is conflating science and knowledge when she ascribes to Hobbes the view that 'we can only know what we produce or make ourselves'. When Hobbes writes in this vein, e.g. in the *Epistle Dedicatory* to *The Six Lessons to the Professors of Geometry* (*English Works*, VII, p. 187), it is science, not knowledge, he has in mind. He contrasts the certainty of the science of geometry on the one hand with the certainty of physics on the other. Geometry, he says, is more certain than physics, because it allows for a knowledge of causes of properties that physics does not allow for. He does not say, as a Pyrrhonist would, that a scientific physics is quite beyond us; physics is possible, all right, but it is less certain than geometry, because it involves hypotheses about the causes of natural effects. We could dispense with hypotheses in physics only if we were responsible for the natural effects we were studying. But the effects are due not to us but God, whose omnipotence enables him to produce effects in more than one way. For any hypothetical cause we proposed, it would always be possible that God had acted to produce a natural effect by a *different* means. In geometry we can do better than form hypotheses about the properties of figures, since the properties result from constructions performed by us as geometers.

Kahn is more faithful to the text when she turns from Hobbes on knowledge of the external world and Hobbes on knowledge of the properties of artifacts to Hobbes on the significance of arguments on both sides of a question. Contrasting Hobbes's view with the typical humanist one, Kahn says that Hobbes saw danger – incipient civil war, in fact – in the supposition that

everything could be debated *pro* and *con*. This is closer to the truth, but again misleading. What Hobbes saw danger in was *unregulated* controversy, especially controversy in which the participants staked too much of their self esteem on winning the argument. But he definitely did not think that the possibility of a different view always led to war. Once again it is important to keep the case of natural science in view. Hobbes was aware of, and indeed party to, disagreements between natural scientists. He participated in the orderly controversy with Descartes embodied in the *Objections* to the *Meditations*, and he lived cheerfully with other doctrinal differences. Thus, he was much more thoroughgoing in his materialism than his close friend Gassendi was. And he could disagree very sharply over religion, theology and metaphysics with intellectuals he was either very friendly with (Mersenne) or reasonably friendly with (Thomas White). The possibility of disagreement in physics was written into his conception of it as a hypothetico-deductive affair. Various and conflicting stories could be told about how an observed effect *might* have been caused, and though not all of these would fit experience equally well, it was unlikely that only one explanation would fit it uniquely. So disagreement was on the cards. It was not disagreement that Hobbes connected with war, however. Dispute was possible even in geometry. Did not Hobbes himself question the adequacy of Euclid's definitions of point, line and circle, and did he not engage in not-so-civilised controversies over the success or failure of his ventures in circle-squaring with John Wallis? Although the controversy with Wallis was not waged according to rules for challenging demonstrations foreseen in Hobbes's methodological writings, it does not seem that Hobbes thought that even its excesses amounted to a breach of the peace. So it seems that not even intemperate and unmethodical scientific controversy counted for him as a war in miniature.

Was he simply operating a double-standard, reviling controversy in extra-scientific circles but condoning it or refusing to acknowledge it in the scientific community? No doubt he idealised the civility of scientific exchanges such as he had known in Paris in the 1640s, but he did not pretend that science produced only agreement. Instead, he held that when it produced disagreement, the disagreement could be contained and settled impersonally. He believed that the subject-matter of science was usually too far removed from the immediate objects of fear or desire to occasion conflict. Lines and figures and what could be demonstrated of them were simply not important enough to most people to fight about, and, officially at least, his view was that the transparency of demonstration would usually pre-empt dispute, or at least keep it within narrow bounds. Faults in reasoning were detectable when reasoning followed the preferred rules. If there was no fault in the reasoning, then the starting points, the definitions themselves, might be faulty. But Hobbes believed that these defects could in principle be discussed without heat and admitted without loss of face, since he thought of demonstration in science as a co-operative affair in which someone willing to be taught grants

suppositions needed for a demonstrator to put over what he has learned (*De corpore*, ch. 6, p. xi). Hobbes's distrust of arguments on both sides of every question comes into its own where what is at issue is justice or right, and the conditions for disinterested teaching and learning are cancelled out by the passions, usually the self-regarding passions, of the disputants. If actions can only in the end be said to be arguably right or wrong or arguably just and unjust because the minds of the evaluators are clouded by the strength of self-interest, then anything goes.

In the face of the disputability of moral evaluations Hobbes seeks not to disarm the passions and neutralise self-interest, but, on the contrary, to engage them in an effort to identify a moral common ground. It is doubtful that for this purpose Hobbes goes so far in *Leviathan* as, in Kahn's phrase, to 'invent a new language of certainty, a sovereign logic that will effectively exclude all further rhetoric *in utramque partem*'. Hobbes constructs a novel argument, it is true, but not a new logic or language, and he does not expect the conclusion of the argument immediately to strike his readers as unanswerable. On the contrary, he anticipates that they will resist the conclusion and dislike the argument. To meet this resistance he keeps in reserve a means of confirmation of the conclusion of the argument that *bypasses* language and logic altogether – namely introspective examination of the passions.

One part of the novel argument I am referring to is the main argument of chapter 13 of *Leviathan*. This is the argument for the inevitability of war if men of different temperaments retain the natural right to be their own judges of what is best for them. Allied to a vainglorious temperament, the right of nature will license violence and damage to exact fear and respect. Allied to a diffident temperament, the right of nature will make general feelings of insecurity reasonable: each man will have reason to fear that each other man sees him as an obstacle to safety and well-being, and each will have reason to believe that he will need to strike out in self-defence against other people. Even allied to a moderate temperament, the right of nature can make violence seem reasonable, especially if moderate people know that they are up against a few vainglorious people but don't know which they are. In such circumstances, moderate people may think that the best means of self-defence is preemptive attack. So, although human beings do not have interchangeable temperaments, although they display a variety of 'manners' or settled patterns of behaviour, conditions for war are still present in most human beings, and war, according to Hobbes, means the loss of all the good things in life.

The foregoing gives the gist of what Hobbes calls in chapter 13 'the inference from the passions'. Far from taking for granted the conclusiveness of this inference in *Leviathan*, Hobbes actually anticipates a sceptical reaction from his readers. Hobbes writes,

> It may seem strange to some man, that has not well weighed these things; that Nature should thus dissociate, and render men apt to invade, and destroy one

> another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this Inference made from the Passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by Experience … . (1st ed, p. 63; Tuck (ed.), p. 89)

Hobbes would hardly expect his readers not to trust his inference if he believed he had devised a logic that would foreclose all further debate. And if he thought that *logic* was the sole medium of persuasion he would hardly have written as if the argument were clinched by one's *experience* of passions that make one ride armed, lock one's doors and so on.

In order to account for the departures in *Leviathan* from sobriety, from disinterestedness and from the orderly build-up of doctrine, Kahn has to take the 'logical' claims of *Leviathan* as no more than a façade put up by Hobbes to conceal what in fact is an exercise in rhetoric. Or, as Kahn puts it,

> … rhetoric can be used for the purposes of ideological closure as well as disclosure; that is, to support the claims of logic and theoretical reason as well to undermine these claims. Moreover, it can create the fiction of these claims, and this is what Hobbes does in *Leviathan*. Indeed, so effective is he in constructing his logical model of argument that most readers have accepted it at face-value. (p. 157)

What *Leviathan* in fact places before the reader when it is being 'logical', according to Kahn, is a rhetoric masquerading as demonstrative reasoning, specifically an argument arguing the obverse of positions being put forward by Hobbes's competitors in rhetoric – the anti-monarchists and the church.

> … the *Leviathan* both locally and as a whole is structured according to a rhetoric *in utramque partem*, but Hobbes's intention is to use this rhetoric *itself in utramque partem*, in order to purge the commonwealth of its most dangerous rivals for the subjects' obedience. (p. 158)

Kahn is probably right to say that many readers of *Leviathan* have taken its 'logical' character at face value; but this is more likely to be due to their paying attention only to Parts One and Two. No-one who takes seriously the subtitle of *Leviathan* or who tries to provide a reading of all four Parts can possibly think that a single rhetoric – logical or otherwise – is used throughout the book. Hobbes's treatment of religion and theology plainly does things that Parts One and Two do not do. It calls on methods of biblical exegesis and deploys church history to show that conclusions reached in Parts One and Two – conclusions presumably reached by 'logic' – are consistent with central articles of Christian faith. It is very difficult to believe that people who take seriously the pretensions of *Leviathan* to be logical are simply blind to the change of key in the last two Parts, or that they do not recognise these Parts, and so a good deal of *Leviathan,* to be serving rhetorical purposes. Readers may of course ignore Parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan*, and so never notice the change of gear, but their departure from the logical mode of presentation is unmistakable to anyone who does penetrate the last half of *Leviathan*.

In short, *Leviathan* is an unpromising site for the double conjuring trick that Kahn talks about: first the trick of distancing oneself from rhetoric by the use of logic, and then the quiet appropriation of logic for rhetorical purposes. For the case to be made plausible there has to be a much more homogeneously 'logical' surface text than one finds in *Leviathan*, perhaps a text of the sort one finds in *De cive* (1642), the political section of Hobbes's trilogy *The Elements of Philosophy*. I am not saying that Kahn's reading is unfaithful to *Leviathan* but faithful to *De cive*: I am saying that it is a non-starter as a reading of *Leviathan* as a whole, and that it is at least adaptable as a reading of *De cive*. But there are other, more straightforward readings of both books that proceed from querying in the first place the distinction between producing a science of politics and persuading readers to obey government. There is no tension in the very idea of a persuasive science of politics, that is, one that argues for certain precepts of citizenly and kingly duty. But there is very likely to be a pragmatic difficulty with persuasive civil science: the vocabulary and reasoning appropriate to science according to Hobbes's philosophy of science are likely to pass above the heads of readers or bore them rigid. And of course there are great pragmatic difficulties for a persuasive civil science whose chosen precepts add up to a requirement of absolute submission from subjects. Hobbes tries to get over these difficulties with a vivid argument about the state of nature, a deduction of the laws of nature from the cardinal precept requiring people to seek peace, and some rhetoric about the consonance of the laws of nature, understood in Hobbes's way, with Christianity. The strictly scientific part of his enterprise is probably confined to the deduction of the laws of nature, for this deduction makes the senses of evaluative terms stable, distinguishes moral precepts from others as those that prescribe means to peace, and therefore tells agents in what virtue and vice consist.[9] A persuasive civil science along these lines is not rhetoric masquerading as logic or logic pre-empting rhetoric, but rather a harnessing together of the two. Hobbes himself speaks in *De cive* of 'logical eloquence' (ch. 12, p. xii).[10]

II

A much more elabrorate, careful, and historically informed treatment of Hobbes's use of rhetoric in *Leviathan*, but one which agrees with Kahn in finding arguments *in utramque partem* of the greatest significance, is Quentin Skinner's in his important book, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. Skinner suggests that there was an earlier and a later Hobbesian view of the relation of civil science to rhetoric, that the later view is reflected in *Leviathan*, and that this view is far closer to the standard Renaissance view of the relation between civil science and rhetoric than the view developed in *De cive* or the even earlier *Elements of Law*. This later view is to the effect

that in the science of politics demonstrative reasoning can co-exist with and even require eloquence, however out of place eloquence or rhetoric may be in the natural sciences. Before *Leviathan*, according to Skinner, Hobbes tried to fight free of the standard Renaissance view.

Even in outline, this reading of Hobbes makes a clear advance on Kahn's, as it does not force any approval Hobbes may have felt for rhetoric in *Leviathan* to hide between the lines of the text. Other strengths emerge from the detail of Skinner's argument. It usefully corrects those interpretations – contextualist and non-contextualist alike – that use the term 'rhetoric' loosely, to mean not only any distinguishable literary technique for systematic persuasion in matters of politics, but anything at all to do with the transmission of Hobbes's ideas, or, more generally still, the character of political discourse in seventeenth-century England. In Skinner's hands, as he explains, 'rhetoric' means something much more specific, and more likely to have been understood by Hobbes: ' a distinctive set of linguistic techniques… derived from the rhetorical doctrines of *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*, the three principal *elementa* in classical and Renaissance theories of written eloquence'[11]

Skinner's central claim is that Hobbes constructed his civil science with a special awareness of two Humanist assumptions: that there were always two sides to any disputed question, and that arguments over what was just and unjust were never more than probable. In connection with the belief in two sides to every question, Hobbes was alive to the dangers of *paradiastole*, the rhetorical figure by which actions of an apparently vicious character are redescribed as instances of a neighbouring virtue, and actions of a noble character are redescribed unflatteringly. Skinner tells the story[12] of Hobbes's strong resistance to, followed by a sort of truce with, humanism. At first, in *The Elements of Law* and *De cive*, Hobbes railed against humanism by arguing that 'science', in a preferred sense, put certain conclusions *beyond* controversy. Questions within the scope of science would thus *not* have two sides. More, questions of justice lay squarely within the scope of science. That is, according to both *The Elements of Law* and *De cive*, they could be settled by syllogistic reasoning from the definition of justice as sticking to the covenants one enters into, in particular, sticking to the covenant that one will abide by the sovereigns laws or commands. Questions about whether actions were expressions of certain other virtues could also be settled definitively, by establishing whether those actions contributed to peace or the preservation of civil order. For all virtues were means to the establishment or preservation of peace, the maintenance of the covenant establishing the commonwealth pre-eminently so. With a science of the virtues – a science deducing precepts corresponding to the virtues from an overarching requirement of seeking peace, Hobbes had a basis for showing which uses of paradiastole led to erroneous moral evaluations.

So much for the early response to paradiastole, according to Skinner. The later response is distinguished by new background assumptions about the

human capacity of reason. *Leviathan* (chapter 5) stresses that human beings are not born with the ability to reason in a way that will produce science. Nor are they likely to acquire this ability easily or recognise it in others. Again, a standard human audience cannot be counted upon to be receptive to the sort of reasoning recommended in *The Elements of Law* and *De cive.* Not only does it strain attention, but when it is followed, it does not necessarily compel belief. People need to be *willing* to heed its message, and they are unwilling to do so where it goes against, or *seems* to go against, their interest. Eloquence or rhetoric is needed to catch the attention, keep it, and neutralise the resistance of interest to its conclusions. Or so Skinner interprets Hobbes.[13]

He makes a convincing case for Hobbes's not only dropping some of his earlier strictures on rhetoric by the time he wrote *Leviathan*, but actually practising the techniques of Cicero and Quintillian in works composed after 1650. Still, I am not sure that the response to paradiastole is as central to Hobbes's civil science as Skinner claims, and I wonder whether there is not more of a separation in Hobbes between the the task of a moral science and the production of conclusive-seeming moral and political conclusions for non-philosophers.

Turning first to paradiastole, let us consider the passage from chapter 15 of *Leviathan* that Skinner correctly claims is central to the understanding of the point of Hobbes's moral science:

> *Good*, and *Evill*, are names that signifie our Appetites and Aversions, which in different tempers, customes and doctrines of men, are different. And divers men differ not onely in their Judgement, on the senses of what is pleasant and unpleasant to the tast, smell, hearing, touch and sight; but also of what is conformable, or disagreeable, to Reason, in the actions of common life. Nay, the same man, in divers times, differs from himselfe; and one time praiseth, that is, calleth Good, what at another time he dispraiseth, and calleth Evil.

What is crucial here is the idea that evaluative terms in each man's mouth signify appetites or aversions – psychological dispositions to pursue or avoid things – and that these appetites and aversions can vary from person to person. Evaluative terms can accordingly also vary in signification, depending on whose mouth they come from, and what that person's circumstances and history are. Although a given pattern of appetite and aversion in one person need not be idiosyncratic – people can agree in appetites and aversions if their constitutions and experiences are similar – the things that naturally determine the pattern of appetite and aversion differ, and so, if evaluations are dictated by appetites and aversions, there need be no firm distinction between good and evil either, and no firm distinction between people's judgements of what they should and shouldn't do. So it is sheer luck if people do not disagree over good and evil, or if they do not disagree so heatedly that they come to blows. There is incipient war, in other words, in the facts of how individual appetites and aversions are naturally formed – quite independently of how language affects evaluations.

Now although the redescription of vicious actions as virtuous and virtuous actions as vicious is undoubtedly one source of inconstancy and possible disagreement in valuations leading to war, it is only one among others. So the question arises of why any linguistic device, let alone any so specific as paradiastolic redescription should have quite the central importance that Skinner claims for it. Why is not any source of inconstancy in evaluations – linguistic *or* psychological *or* physical – as much a concern of Hobbes's moral science as any other? And why is not ambiguity – the fact of a term's having more than one meaning – the politically dangerous linguistic phenomenon *par excellence* rather than paradiastolic redescription? This suggestion certainly agrees with Hobbes's identification after 1650 of the chief defect of moral philosophy before his own – that it told people to do right without setting out a 'certain rule and measure of right' (*De corpore,* ch. 1, vii). It certainly agrees with his repeated denunciations of the use of each person's judgement – private judgement – as the measure of right and wrong.

This question of why paradiastole should be uniquely central is not, as far as I can see, confronted by Skinner, because, after laying out the humanist rhetorical tradition of Renaissance England and those undoubtedly humanist works that Hobbes composed before 1640, Hobbes's moral writings from 1640 on are mainly taken as answers, albeit for a time unorthodox or dissenting answers, to traditional questions of rhetoric: questions about how to win agreement to definite moral and legal conclusions. Of course, those post-1640 writings are not supposed to be contributions to the *theory* of rhetoric purely or primarily – Skinner is the first to acknowledge that they contain arguments about first-order conclusions – notably about the injustice of regicide and tyrannicide, and about the relative worth of freedom and subjection and different constitutions. But the first-order conclusions are supposed to be reached (at least according to *The Elements of Law* and *De cive*) with a sort of conclusiveness that classical rhetoricians denied was possible. Conclusiveness is what Skinner emphasises.[14] He reads Hobbes's moral science as making conclusiveness possible within the limits of right reason. Conclusiveness is possible, Skinner thinks, because Hobbes redefines the virtues so as to give 'an empirical test' for an audience of when an action is definitely virtuous or not – thus pre-empting paradiastole.[15] But this idea of an empirical test gives the wrong idea. It makes moral science answer the question, 'How can one rationally prevent a particular evaluative question being re-opened?' or 'How can a moral debate be brought to a genuine conclusion?' instead of the more traditional moral philosophical question, 'What have the virtues got in common?' and 'Why must one be just?' On my interpretation, Hobbes's doctrine of the laws of nature counts as a moral *science* because it answers these traditional questions, and yet does so without assuming a transcendental Good or Evil as in Plato, or an uncontroversial list of agreed goods, as in Aristotle. What the virtues have in common is that they are all means to civil peace. Justice is the pre-eminent such virtue, since entering into and main-

taining the covenant that establishes a commonwealth is at the same time the condition for there being a public and enforceable measure of right, namely the civil law. The reason everyone has to be just is that not to be just is to revert to the natural measure of right – private judgement – and with that the supremely fearful condition of war.

Skinner says repeatedly and correctly that it is part of what Hobbes took to make his moral theory into a science that he connected all of the virtues to peace, but he does not, I think, make enough of the special sort of good that Hobbes's theory implies peace is. It is not just something that is a possible object of everyone's appetite, though that is interesting enough in a theory that concedes as much as Hobbes's does to relativism. Peace is also a means to the satisfaction of appetites that people do not share, since without peace nothing that is obtained is secure – there is no stable satisfaction of appetite at all. This means that, *whatever* else anyone wants, peace is desirable, just as everyone has a reason to avoid *war* whatever else they have an aversion to. This is a particularly strong sense in which peace is uncontroversially good – it is a sort of 'primary good' in something like Rawls's sense.

III

I have been complaining that by reading the text of *Leviathan* as a variation on humanist and pyrrhonist themes, Kahn makes some extraordinary, and mistaken, suggestions about Hobbes's views concerning knowledge, rhetoric, science, and logic. Skinner gets very much nearer to a satisfactory account of the relations between rhetoric, science, morals and politics, but with some emphases that are perhaps questionable because of the thoroughness of his immersion of the elements of Hobbes's theory in the background rhetorical tradition. In Skinner's hands an (in my view) very illuminating piece of contextualisation is taken a little, but only a little, too far.

In turning to an example of the overcontextualisation of Hobbes's natural philosophy, the claim I want to make is different. It is not that context is made too much of, but that context sometimes turns out to be idle in correcting intellectual history even in works of contextualist historiography. Just as it is possible for those who are ignorant of context to show that standard claims about the canonical writers do not square with what the books of the canonical writers say, so it is possible for those who know a lot about context to use the same technique and establish misreading quite apart from facts about the time, place or intellectual climate. This is part of what happens in Shapin and Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air-pump*. Some of the lore about Hobbes that they dispute results not from ignorance of seventeenth-century scientific practice or ignorance of the allegiances of specified intellectuals during the Civil War. It results from not reading at all, or not reading carefully, a seventeenth-century text. Yet in Shapin and Schaffer, results generated

by careful reading or by careful translation *appear* to be due to information about context, for the book is a kind of contextualist manifesto, and so all of its findings are naturally ascribed to its contextualist approach.

The main topic of *Leviathan and the Air-pump* is a series of experiments conducted by Boyle with a specially designed apparatus to establish the properties, in particular, the 'spring', of air. The bearing of the spring of air on the behaviour of a column of mercury in a famous experiment by Torricelli was a particular preoccupation of Boyle's. Shapin and Schaffer try to place this preoccupation in context. Taking as their starting point Boyle's *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, touching the Spring of the Air* (1660), his record of the effects produced with the Air-pump, they try to explain what the Torricellian experiment meant to different scientists in the seventeenth-century, and why it produced so much controversy, particularly among natural philosophers in France. One reason was that it seemed highly relevant to a controversy between plenists and vacuists about the nature of physical space. They then suggest that Boyle's approach to Torricelli in a certain sense bypassed these controversies, but that his results were readily interpreted as support for the vacuists. Thus, Hobbes's attack on Boyle in his *Dialogus physicus* makes sense partly as the reaction of someone who was already a committed plenist to findings apparently favourable to the vacuists. But, Shapin and Schaffer suggest, there is more to it than that: Hobbes's views about the connection between open controversy and war, and about religion, and about the difference between reason and experience need to be taken into account. And for many of these purposes the *Dialogicus physicus* has to be read alongside *Leviathan*. Here is where I part company with Shapin and Schaffer. For them it is not sufficient merely to detect the anticipations of an anti-Boyle, i.e. vacuist-looking, position in Hobbes's writings on physics and metaphysics before 1660. Nothing less than Hobbes's political philosophy has to be seen to be exercising its influence on the exchange between Hobbes and Boyle. I claim that this goes much too far, that their reading of *Leviathan* is simply imposed upon the book, and that its relevance to the Boyle/Hobbes controversy is doubtful. There is, admittedly, more to the dispute than comes out of Hobbes's writings in physics – Hobbes's wish to be admitted to the Royal Society, for example, and the fact that intellectual enemies of his who already belonged to the Royal Society opposed his admission, probably partly out of disapproval for his religious views. But acknowledging these factors does nothing to make the text of *Leviathan* legible between the lines of the *Dialogus physicus*.

One reason why Shapin and Schaffer think it is important to explore the bearing of Hobbes's political and other writings on the Hobbes/Boyle controversy is that they want to dispel the impression that in the dispute with Boyle there is nothing more than foolishness, ignorance or stubbornness to explain Hobbes's opposition to the experimental approach. They quote (pp. 8–12) a long list of commentators who dismiss the attack on Boyle as

obviously cranky or ill-advised, just as it was cranky and ill-advised for Hobbes to persist in the futile and protracted controversy with Wallis. It goes a long way toward making Hobbes's position in this controversy sophisticated and reasonable to locate that position against the background of the controversy between plenists and vacuists (Shapin and Schaffer, chapter 4). In going further than this, Shapin and Schaffer not only exceed the requirements of a proof that the commentators are wrong: they overembed the issue concerning the air-pump and distort the interpretation of Hobbes's general intellectual aims. The connections they suggest exist between the attack on Boyle and the rest of Hobbes's doctrine make the attack seem over-central to Hobbes's intellectual programme, and make the different elements of Hobbes's doctrine appear to be more interwoven than they actually are.

Chapter Three of *Leviathan and the Air-pump* is the locus of most of the difficulties. Shapin and Schaffer attempt there to explain why Hobbes reads Boyle as making a certain claim for his experiments with the air-pump. To give a sketch of the background for those experiments, Torricelli observed that a tube sealed at one end and filled with mercury could be placed, sealed end up, on a dish containing mercury. The column of mercury in the tube would appear to fall somewhat, creating a space between the seal and the top of the column of Mercury. One question raised by the experiment was whether the space above the mercury in the column was empty; another was whether the space above the mercury counted as a vacuum in some sense of 'vacuum', e.g. the sense in which Aristotle's natural philosophy denied there was a vacuum. Boyle was able to show that when the Toricellian experiment was performed within a glass globe from which air could be sucked out, the column of mercury could be made to fall even further, to a level close to the surface of the dish. What is more, the column could be made to rise when a valve designed to keep air out of the glass globe was opened. In some sense, the experiments told in favour of the answer 'yes' to the question of whether the space above the mercury was empty. And, as Shapin and Schaffer understand it, '[i]n Hobbes's reading, Boyle was asserting that his machine had produced a metaphysical vacuum' (p. 81).

Shapin and Schaffer go on to ask why Hobbes read Boyle in this way. In reply, they first deny that 'Hobbes "misunderstood" his adversary in any simplistic way' (p. 81). They then make a three-part counter-suggestion:

> First, Hobbes was concerned to defend his own standing as a major natural philosopher and to defend the natural philosophical schema he had constructed and refined through the 1640s and 1650s. Second, Hobbes had developed the system as uniquely suited to securing order and achieving the proper goals of philosophy. Any other project for natural philosophy endangered order. Third, there was the heightened sensibility to the problem of dissension that was displayed by all English intellectuals during the making of the Restoration settlement ... (p. 81)

I am in broad agreement with the first part of this suggestion; I disagree strongly with the second part; and I am not sure that that the third does not cover the same ground as the second: both attempt to project concerns with political dissension and controversy in general – concerns that were timely when Hobbes was composing his works of political philosophy – on to a so-called problem of 'securing order' in natural philosophy.

To begin with what is common ground, Hobbes had a long-standing intellectual investment in the postulate of a plenum by 1660. Successive optical treatises had worked on the assumption that light was action that displaced a medium with no spaces but microscopic ones. This conception made no room for a macroscopic void, which is what Hobbes took Boyle to be saying was created by the action of sucking air out of the glass globe. Hobbes could concede that the experiment created a space that *seemed* empty; but this did not rule out a filling for the space that was too subtle to be seen. So long as it filled space and had an existence without the mind it would be a body, a fluid, however invisible. And given the postulate of a plenum the theory of physical causation as some variation of local displacement immediately became available. In other words, and as Hobbes makes explicit in Part Two of *De corpore*, one could say that there was a single universal cause of all difference and change: namely, 'motion' in the sense of change of place of bodies or their parts. Or as it is put in the preface to the reader of the *Dialogus physicus,* 'Nature does all things by the conflict of bodies pressing each other mutually with their motions' (Schaffer, trans. in Shapin and Schaffer, p. 348; *Opera Latina*, IV, 238). In taking issue with Boyle, Hobbes tries to show precisely that the phenomena reportedly made by the experiments with the air-pump are readily explained on plenist assumptions, and in particular, on distinctively Hobbesian assumptions such as that of the 'simple circular motion'.

Chapter 4 of *Leviathan and the Air-pump* shows that Hobbes was familiar with the detail of Boyle's experiments and the workings of the air-pump apparatus, so that, for example, he was able to argue from the difficulties of making it air-tight to the improbability of its containing empty spaces. Shapin and Schaffer show in their exposition of the text that Hobbes needs to be taken seriously as a critic of Boyle and that commentators' claims to the contrary cannot be considered to be borne out by what Hobbes actually says. This is a valuable finding, but it might have been arrived at by someone who read the *Dialogicus physicus* against the background of both *The New Experiments* and *De corpore*. Shapin and Schaffer themselves suggest (p. 9) that many of the historians who are rude about Hobbes on Boyle give no evidence of having read the relevant text.

So far so good. What of Hobbes's 'system' and the supposed Hobbesian ambition of securing 'order' in natural philosophy by means of it? The three concluding sections of chapter 3 in Shapin and Schaffer bear on this question, and perhaps the last of these is the most pertinent. What is suggested there is that for Hobbes the purpose of philosophy is to achieve certainty and

produce assent. so that controversy is profoundly unphilosophical. This interpretation provides a neat contrast between Boyle and Hobbes:

> Boyle aimed to achieve peace and terminate scandal in natural philosophy by securing a space in which a specified kind of dissent was manageable and safe. In the experimental form of life it was legitimate for philosophers to disagree about the causes of natural effects: causal knowledge was removed from the domain of the certain or the morally certain. For Hobbes there was no philosophical space in which dissent was safe or permissible. Dissent over physical causes was a sign that one had not begun to do philosophy or that the enterprise in question was not philosophy. (p. 107)[16]

The main claim here is simply wrong. If dissent was possible anywhere in philosophy, it was possible in connection with physical causes, for many hypotheses were possible about the means by which an omnipotent, infinitely resourceful God might bring about effects in nature. The reason why physics was inferior as a science to geometry was precisely that it did *not* reach perfectly certain conclusions, as Hobbes makes clear in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Six Lessons*. His own exposition of the elements of physics in *De corpore*, the very book on which Shapin and Schaffer base their claims in the passage quoted above, closes with the admission that someone may come along and propose different, and presumably better, hypotheses (*English Works*, I, p. 531).

Not only *De corpore*, but also *Dialogicus physicus*, tells against the idea that for Hobbes the very idea of philosophy ruled out a philosophical space for pursuing controversy. When, at the beginning of *Dialogus physicus,* A, Hobbes's mouthpiece, is told by B, his interlocutor, that B belongs to a certain unnamed 'society' that meets weekly at Gresham College to discuss natural philosophy, A does not say that there is something wrong with the existence of such a society. On the contrary, he speaks approvingly of the French and Italian versions of such groups – 'academies' – and says that he attended the meetings of one in Paris where 'whoever might have demonstrated a problem would produce it for him to be examined by him and by others' (Shapin and Schaffer, p. 351; *Opera Latina*, IV, pp. 241–2). There is no suggestion that the process of 'examination' was uncritical or that it should be. On the contrary, there is every indication that A and B both approve of the existence of a 'space' for controlled scientific or mathematical dispute. A does not even object to a select membership for such an 'Academy': he simply asks on what legal basis B's Society is able to restrict admission to the discussions at Gresham College.

The propriety of critical 'examination' is even strongly implied by *Leviathan*, where Hobbes is alive to the way in which various kinds of dissent can lead to war. In chapter 5 he says explicitly that error is possible concerning whatever can be the subject of reasoning, and that this being so, in reasoning of all kinds

> he that take up conclusions on the trust of Authors, and does not fetch them up from the first Items in every Reckoning (which are the significations of names settled by definitions), loses his labour ; and does not know anything; but onely beleeveth. (First ed. p. 19; Tuck, (ed.), p. 33)

This advice does not just apply to traditional authors, but to all users of reasoning, even those who reason from definitions, as science requires. Checking that the conclusions follow from the definitions and that definitions are good does not necessarily involve a dispute with the Author, but it can, and presumably examination can take the form of dispute in the setting of an 'academy' as well. And since, according to the passage just quoted, 'examination' is a condition of really knowing a conclusion or having a scientific grasp of it, there cannot be a tension between dispute of *all* kinds and science. By the same token, not all kinds of controversy can be in tension with science. What chapter 5 of *Leviathan* suggests it is that it is controversy with no criteria for a settled outcome, or no authority for reaching an outcome, that needs to be avoided, in particular, controversy in which the parties behave as if they could not be in error.

Now it is true that Hobbes makes room for more kinds of defect in would-be pieces of science than error. He thinks that when certain Authors are 'examined' what will be revealed is not falsehood or faulty definition but nonsense: inadmissible combinations of names. It is true, too, that he thinks that when this nonsense has powerful sponsors, and when those sponsors have ambitions to increase their power, the necessity of critical 'examination' and exposure of the nonsense is not only epistemologically but politically urgent. Shapin and Schaffer are right to see this as the message of the fierce attack in chapter 46 of *Leviathan* on certain scholastic terminology and ontology (Shapin and Schaffer, pp. 92ff). But they go wrong in trying to suggest that for Hobbes a philosophy open to the regulated disputes of a 'Gresham College' was as much of a threat to order or as unfaithful to the goals of science, as a philosophy based on blind adherence to authorities sponsored by a power-hungry Church of Rome.

Even when Shapin and Schaffer try to describe the difference between Boyle and Hobbes using the concepts of epistemology in the narrow sense, and not the hastily dreamt-up categories of a supposed 'political ontology' and 'political epistemology', they say things that distort Hobbes's text. For example,

> For Hobbes in 1651 and later, only private judgement counted as a potentially fatal threat to good philosophy and good order. If the aim was certain knowledge and irrevocable assent, then the way towards it could not traverse anything as private and unreachable as individual states of belief. Knowledge, science and philosophy were set on one side; belief and opinion on the other. The former were certain, hard and indisputable; the latter were provisional, variable and inherently contentious, affected by man's shifting passions and special interests. (Shapin and Schaffer, pp. 102–3)

This misdraws the boundary one finds in *Leviathan*. It is not knowledge, science and philosophy that are all on the same side. Chapter 9 says that knowledge of fact and the record of it, history, is precarious because it consists of sense, which decays. So it is better to put philosophy and science on one side, and knowledge of fact, belief *and* opinion on the other. On the other hand, there is nothing 'unreachable' or 'private' about belief in any philosophically interesting sense of 'private'. One person's beliefs can be known by another; so they are not private in the sense of being inscrutable; nor does Hobbes think that people necessarily disagree very much in their beliefs, so that one person's beliefs are unlikely to be shared by anyone else. He does think that beliefs are often formed involuntarily in the believer's head, and he thinks that what goes on in the head is not behaviour that can be regulated: only overt action can be. But neither of these tenets of his philosophy of belief affect the question of whether beliefs are true or whether they are as valuable as knowledge. Again, although Shapin and Schaffer are undoubtedly right to say that Hobbes had some major worry or other in the area of private judgement (he worried about the consequences of the belief that each man was the best judge of his own well-being) it is not true in any sense that 'only private judgement counted as a potentially fatal threat to good philosophy and good order'. Unthinking acceptance of a ready-made set of beliefs – with all private judgement suppressed – might be equally bad for order and philosophy where it was derived from the scholastics or the priests or the sectaries.

A way of summarising my criticisms is by saying that Shapin and Schaffer make Hobbes's dispute with Boyle too much of a medium for central tenets of Hobbes's political thought. They simultaneously exaggerate the political character of the dispute and the extent to which Hobbes's philosophy of natural science was a sub-department of his politics. At the same time, and as they appear at times to acknowledge themselves (pp. 146ff), they exaggerate the difference between Boyle's philosophy of science and Hobbes's. In this latter connection it does not help that they insist on seeing the confrontation between Boyle and Hobbes as a collision between nothing less than different 'forms of life'. Even though they make it plausible that Hobbes and Boyle come at the air-pump experiments with ways of thinking that are not altogether intercommunicating, so that each way of thinking filters out meanings of terms important to the other, no less variety was discernible in the French scientific community with which Hobbes felt himself to be so much *less* at loggerheads. Shapin and Schaffer trace a good deal of what is at stake in the controversy between Hobbes and Boyle to Hobbes's attachment in the 1640s to a French intellectual milieu, but the potential for intellectual differences that this setting would itself have offered to a refugee from the civil war and someone who was not all that experienced as a natural philosopher in 1640, is never considered, still less approached with the concept of 'forms of life'. If it had been, difference of forms of life would have had to be adapted to the

description of intellectual *agreement* or to Hobbes's sense of *belonging* to a scientific community.

IV

Leviathan and the Air-pump, though influential, is not the latest work of contextualist history of science, but its spirit is alive, notably in later work by Shapin himself,[17] and by Shapin and others on the aspiration to disembodied knowledge in seventeenth-century and later scientific work.[18] This kind of contextualism – with its implicit criticism of what it takes to be a myth of scientific objectivity and scientific truth – is not necessarily representative of contextualism in the history of seventeenth-century philosophy as a whole. In that wider frame of reference, at least in English, there is still a great deal of work being done to get beyond the central texts of the canonical writers. Contextualism can mean everything from locating a canonical text of a canonical writer in the entire corpus of that writer's work, to mapping whole traditions of problem-solving in which the canonical writers and canonical books appear embedded rather than on their own.[19] Contextualism can even mean locating the corpus of a canonical writer's writing within a tradition to which it is supposed to be opposed – as in recent work on Cartesian metaphysics and natural science that emphasises its affinities with contemporary scholasticism.[20]

I am not arguing for an end to every kind of contextualism in the history of seventeenth-century philosophy. I am not even arguing for an end to contextualism à la *Leviathan and the Air-pump* in the study of Hobbes's natural philosophy. As the last section in particular should have revealed, I believe that important aspects of the Boyle/Hobbes controversy are bound to be obscure without knowledge of e.g. Hobbes's warm relations with members of the Parisian scientific community, or his position in the disagreements between plenists and vacuists. Nor am I saying that the excesses of Shapin and Schaffer disfigure all or most studies that insist on locating Hobbes within a definite intellectual mileu. Works of contextualist history of natural philosophy that have come before and after Shapin and Schaffer are much more measured,[21] if not always definite enough, about Hobbes's intellectual debts to his near predecessors and contemporaries. For example, Leijenhorst's *Hobbes and the Aristotelians: The Aristotelian Setting of Thomas Hobbes's Natural Philosophy*[22] convincingly discredits Hobbes's own claims to have struck out on his own in first philosophy and in the theory of sense: even some of Hobbes's more radical and polemically anti-Aristotelian claims do not appear all that outspoken against the background of the writings of Fracastoro and Telesio. Establishing this sort of thesis is important, because the rhetoric of fresh starts and fearless dissent from the tradition is so familiar from some of the canonical seventeenth-century moderns.[23]

I *am* arguing against three tendencies of contextualism which I think the

previous sections give examples of. First, there is the tendency in many contextualist studies, and in Kahn and Shapin and Schaffer in particular, to write at a very high level of generality. This is more than a matter of heavy use of 'isms'; it is the tendency to make large and vague claims about relations between big sectors of learning or thought: rhetoric and logic, say; science and knowledge; ontology and epistemology. A second tendency is that of allowing a conception of a particular intellectual movement and a period, or perhaps a small set of movements, to dictate the questions one asks, and the answers one expects, about individual writers. This is the tendency that I think is apparent in Kahn on Hobbes. It may also operate in other writers: Popkin on Descartes, for example. The third tendency, illustrated by Shapin and Schaffer, consists not only of referring ideas to context but of doing so while self-consciously revising the methods and assumptions of a hitherto dominant, and perhaps staid or pro-establishment, type of history of science. Shapin and Schaffer do not take up the case of Hobbes simply because they have evidence that the received interpretation of his work on Boyle is wrong; Hobbes interests them because he is conventionally judged the loser in the controversy with Boyle, and they want to give a hearing to the 'loser's' point of view. More, they want to subvert the thinking that makes Hobbes the 'loser' by arguing that Hobbes is not so much wrong as misunderstood, and misunderstood because he is writing from within a scheme of belief that Boyle's experimentalism made partly inaccessible to Boyle, and that the subsequent success of experimentalism in science and popular science makes inaccessible to us. I believe that Shapin and Schaffer exaggerate this inaccessibility, and also the degree to which the appearance of error reduces to missed meaning. I believe, too, that one does not have to be a revisionist with respect to historiography or even Hobbes studies to reach many of the conclusions that Schaffer and Shapin reach. So their wish to break not only from the received story about Hobbes but from the received methods of history of science seems insufficiently motivated.

None of the tendencies that I have been arguing against is entirely harmful; and when they are used to counteract the excesses of a narrowly textualist and historically uninformed writing, they may even be welcome. But they also carry risk, and not only the risk of distorting the thought of a Hobbes or Descartes. The risk is pedagogical. Students, many of whom are drawn to the scene of large intellectual conflicts or put-downs of whole traditions, are encouraged in the illusion of familiarity with great trends of thought and relations between large disciplines by adopting the lofty perspective and the traffic in isms. The change of focus that is required for sitting down and reading closely can seem overtaxing once one acquires a taste for the synoptic view and the tags, including 'modern' and 'post-modern', which go with it. The books by Kahn and by Shapin and Schaffer are certainly not going to be withheld from students who have never read a whole sentence of Salutati, a whole page of Montaigne, or a whole book of Hobbes. But the students who are

likely to benefit most are those who *have* read the text very carefully and know as yet little about the writer or the period. These products of text-based study are often being trained for sophisticated evaluations of writers for clarity, consistency, and for redemptions of promises to establish theses: they are being trained for philosophy (via the canonical texts) rather than for intellectual history. Intellectual history helps such students to treat the producers of the texts more as ends and less as means; to engage with their aims and not just with disembodied texts passing before them as sitting ducks in a logical shooting gallery. On the other hand, text-based study seems to me to be the most minimal of pre-requisites for engagement with intellectual context or movement of the past, and engagement with the texts of particular intellectuals of the past seems to me to be a pre-requisite for anyone who thinks they understand an intellectual movement, let alone the relations between such a movement and our own age. How many students (sometimes following the example of their teachers, or their teachers' favourite authors) refer condescendingly to the benighted moderns without ever having made the acquaintance of any? In this connection both the canon and the traditional historiography questioned by Shapin and Schaffer come into their own, if only as a ladder which is ultimately kicked away. The danger of revisionist historiography is that it will give students an excuse to reject traditional historiography sight unseen, without having discovered its limitations for themselves. Similarly with the canon. The division of the producers of the intellectual past into greats and lesser figures may introduce a kind of distortion; but so do many other devices which have enormous pedagogical value. No-one who wants to abolish the division and clear up the distortion wants students to read fewer figures in the history of thought. But revisionist historiography may have this effect if it gives students the material for a knowing dismissal.

The excesses of the contextualists are likely to be neutralised in readers who have worked through the great books, who have learned how to pay attention at the level of words and sentences and know how to identify an argument in a text. Nevertheless, there continue to be barriers between the close readers, at least the philosophically trained ones, and the contextualists in Hobbes studies in the English-speaking world. One barrier, due partly to Hobbes himself, is the fact that the so-called System of Hobbes has a life apart from the context and the particular texts of Hobbes, even the texts of the trilogy of *De corpore, De homine,* and *De cive*. It is a measure of Hobbes's considerable success in projecting himself as a practitioner of the deductive philosophy he so admired, that his work is often seen (mistakenly, in my view) as a continuous derivation of politics and morals from psychology, of psychology from physics, and of physics from mechanics and geometry. That there is no book or sequence of books by Hobbes in which anything like a *derivation* takes him from the beginning of natural philosophy to the end of civil philosophy; that there is no book or sequence of books in which

connections between these branches of sciences are presented as connections between *Hobbes's* science, are facts that are regularly ignored. To the extent that Hobbes's writings contain an overarching system, it is a system of science full-stop, not a system of *his* science. The 'elements' of the system are openly drawn from a lot of different scientists, including Euclid, Galileo, Kepler and Harvey. On the other hand, to the extent that any elements of the systematised science are *Hobbesian* – its optics, perhaps or the doctrine in *De cive* – they do not form a system. It is true that Hobbes is a systematic philosopher: one sees how the parts of most of his books hang together, and one knows from Aubrey's report of his working practices that he gave a lot of thought to organising and digesting his material; the actual system, however, is a little elusive. Yet books continue to dwell on the system and its architecture. The system can be studied in context, as it has famously been studied by Watkins, but it more often attracts the interest of ahistorical analysts.[24]

There are two other obstacles in the way of text-based students who want to lean about context. First, there is the great complexity of the civil war period, whose intellectual, economic, political, and military aspects are plainly relevant to Hobbes but not easy for a philosopher to make a start on. Another obstacle, blameable on philosophers, is the shrinking of interest in Hobbes's philosophy to interest in Hobbes's political philosophy, and the shrinking of Hobbes's political philosophy to very abstract arguments about the institution of the social contract and the rationality of sticking to it. The way in which these things are obstacles to a rapprochement of text and context is easy to understand, but understanding the obstacles is not the same as overcoming them. *Is* there a way of overcoming them? *Is* there a way of harmonising the requirements of textualism and contextualism? It is hard to answer this question without offering a manifesto or a set of methodological precepts. Skinner's modest proposals in this area[25] have met resistance,[26] perhaps because explicitly articulated method in this area is suspect, and because one author's making such proposals smacks of laying down the law. As I am sure Skinner never doubted, it is not essential, if progress in Hobbes studies is to be made, that everyone agree to follow an explicit set of rules for writing historically, or that everyone agree that certain attempts to strike the balance are examples for everyone to follow. Perhaps the right way of striking the compromise between text and context is not by producing rules, or agreement about specimens of a new genre that balances the demands of text and context. Perhaps the right way of striking a compromise is by keeping up the flow of criticism of textualist and contextualist approaches that go too far. Here as elsewhere, wisdom may consist in knowing the limitations of imperfect productions rather than in the attempt to produce something with no limitations at all.

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Notes

1 He is, of course, routinely studied in historical context in other languages, notably French, Italian and German.

2 The pioneer of this approach in Hobbes studies was Quentin Skinner. Skinner himself thinks he was preceded in this approach by John Dunn and John Pocock. Skinner's earliest relevant paper is probably 'History and Ideology in the English Revolution', *Historical Journal*, 8 (1965), 151–78. Other relevant work includes, S. Mintz, *The Hunting of* Leviathan (Cambridge: Cambidge University Press, 1969); J. G. A. Pocock, 'Time, History and Eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes' in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Politics, Language, and Time* (New York, 1971); and, more recently, N. Malcolm, 'Hobbes. Sandys and the Virginia Company', *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), 297–321 and 'Hobbes and the Royal Society' in G. A. J. Rogers and A. Ryan, *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988); R. Tuck, 'The "Modern" Theory of Natural Law' in A. Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987); D. Baumgold, *Hobbes's Political Theory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988); S. A. State, *Thomas Hobbes and the Debate over Natural Law and Religion* (New York, Garland, 1991); A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of* Leviathan: *Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992); Johann Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (London, Macmillan, 1992).

3 'Hobbes without Doubt', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 10 (1993), 121–35; 'Hobbes's Objections and Hobbes's System' in R. Ariew and M. Grene (eds.), *Descartes and Objectors* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995).

4 See e.g. his *Hobbes* in the 'Past Masters' series (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989).

5 See Tuck's 'Hobbes and Descartes' in G. A. J. Rogers and A. Ryan (eds), *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*.

6 See Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence and Scepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1985); David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of* Leviathan (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1986); C. Condren, 'On the Rhetorical foundations of Hobbes's *Leviathan*', *History of Political Thought*, 11 (1990), 703–20; R. Prokhovnik, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Hobbes's* Leviathan (New York, Garland, 1991); and most recently and notably, Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

8 Some of this work is carried out in a collection of papers edited by John Rogers and myself. See *Hobbes and History* (London, Routledge, 2000).

9 See my 'Hobbes's Persuasive Civil Science', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 40 (1990), 342–51.

10 Although 'logical eloquence' (the eloquence whose art is logic) in *De cive* is pretty narrowly the accumulation of conclusions from definitions, the *concept* of a kind of eloquence guided by logic looks forward to a reconciliation of rhetoric and demonstration, rather than a simple *substitution* of logic for rhetoric.

11 Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, p. 6.

12 *Ibid.*, chapter 8.

13 *Ibid.*, chapter 9.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 351ff.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 324.
16 In the same vein, there is the following passage from chapter 4 (p. 152): 'For Hobbes civil war flowed from any programme which failed to ensure absolute compulsion. What was a judicious and liberal bracketing strategy to the Greshamites was, to Hobbes, a wedge opening the door which looked out on the war of each against each'.
17 See *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), in which it is argued, roughly, that the class position of certain spokesmen for scientific theories in the seventeenth-century had as much or more to do with their acceptance than the genesis of theories in any authoritative scientific method.
18 See Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin, *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998).
19 Dan Garber and Michael Ayers, *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2 vols.
20 See Dan Garber, *Descartes's Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also the latest in a long line of interesting publications by Roger Ariew: *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca, N.Y, Cornell University Press, 1999).
21 The work of Karl Schuhmann is particularly illuminating. See his 'Hobbes and Telesio', *Hobbes Studies*, 1 (1988), 109–33; 'Hobbes and Renaissance Philosophy' in A. Napoli (ed.), *Hobbes Oggi* (Milan, 1990); 'Hobbes und Gassendi' in R. W. Puster (ed.), *Veritas Filia Temporis? Philosophiehistorie zwischen Warheit und Geschichte. Festschrift R Specht* (Berlin, 1995).
22 (Utrecht, The Zeno Institute, 1998).
23 On the other hand, Leijenhorst is not always clear about the extent to which the Aristotelianism of his contemporaries rubs off on Hobbes. The fact that he disagrees with Aristotle in ways that professed Aristotelians do does not make Hobbes an Aristotelian.
24 Including me. See my *Hobbes* (London, Routledge, 1986).
25 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), 3–53. Reprinted in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Cambridge, Polity, 1988).
26 See esp. in Tully, *op. cit.*, Kenneth Minogue's 'Method in Intellectual History; Quentin Skinner's Foundations'. For a full discussion and response by Skinner to this and other criticisms, see Part IV of *Meaning and Context*.

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