

## *Book Reviews*



**Deborah Baumgold (ed.)**

*Three-Text Edition of Thomas Hobbes's Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-107-15523-7. \$130.

As most readers of this journal no doubt know, Hobbes produced three attempts at a comprehensive political theory. The first was *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, a work that he completed in 1640 and circulated to a small number of friends and acquaintances. Two years later, in 1642, Hobbes finished *Elementorum Philosophiae Sectio Tertia: De Cive*, in Paris. A very small number of copies of that work were printed and, again, circulated among friends and acquaintances. There is evidence that despite its limited circulation the work occasioned considerable interest, followed by entreaties to have it published and circulated broadly. Hobbes obliged, and in 1647 *De Cive* was published as *Elementa Philosophica De Cive* by Elzevir. In that edition, which was the first political treatise of his to be made available for sale, Hobbes added a preface to the readers and lengthy notes in various places in the text. These are sources of important information. The preface, for instance, explains why the last part of Hobbes's proposed system—which was to consist of *De Corpore*, *De Homine*, and *De Cive*, in that order—came to be published first. Therein, Hobbes tells us that while he had set out to compose his tripartite system on the assumption that proper inquiry requires the right foundations, the tumult that preceded the civil war forced him to abandon his initial plan and hurry to the third part. While the small audience of the first edition would no doubt have known of and been interested in the broader system and, hence, understood the significance of the original title, evidence from Hobbes's correspondence tells us that Elzevir thought that no one would want to buy the third part of a system whose first two parts had yet to be written. Thus, the title of the book that was to be sold was changed to *Elementa Philosophica De Cive*. Despite the fact that Hobbes was given the opportunity to make further changes to the text, he declined, noting that he had nothing to add or subtract. Nevertheless, a mere four years later, he published *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power*

of a *Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, a work much longer and broader than the previous two, but one clearly based on them.

In a series of valuable commentaries over many years, Deborah Baumgold has argued for the importance of paying attention to the process of “serial composition,” in order to better understand the evolution of Hobbes’s arguments from one treatise to another. As even the cursory sketch of their publication history above suggests, there is no doubt that this method should form a part of any serious effort to understand a thinker as comprehensive, sophisticated, and persistent as Hobbes. It might thus seem surprising that, as Baumgold notes in the introduction to her three-text edition, the three treatises have never been presented in parallel before, “side by side, paragraph by paragraph” (ix). No one, however, who has tried to edit a text, let alone align it with another, will find this state of affairs surprising. Consider, for instance, that the main body of the text of *The Elements of Law* numbers some 62 thousand words, that of *De Cive* some 105 thousand, and *Leviathan* some 212 thousand. These rough numbers signal at least two sets of problems. First, and most obviously, come those associated with the sheer size of the text to be handled. Bringing those together into a single volume and attempting to present them side-by-side is a task made daunting by the limits of physical space, both in terms of what can be laid out on a single page and how, as well as in terms of how many pages can be printed.

The second, and far more challenging, set of problems stems from the fact that the treatises get progressively larger and are, ultimately, disproportionate. Word counts alone need not betray different proportions, since the increase in size could reflect the expansion of existing sections in their original locations. An examination of the structure and content of the works, however, quickly reveals that things are not so simple. As Baumgold puts it, “[i]n composing *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, Hobbes drew on the earlier text(s), reusing, expanding, reorganizing and adding to material that had appeared previously” (ix). Baumgold’s conclusion is thus that “[a]lthough *Leviathan* has the appearance of a unified treatise, it is, in actuality, a pastiche of arguments, many of which had been framed over the period of more than a decade” (ix). This statement raises certain very important issues that point to the magnitude of Baumgold’s undertaking and the significance of her achievement.

In chronological terms, *Leviathan* is the final version of Hobbes’s political theory, but it is far from clear that the chronological sequence should lead us to consider the earlier works more or less drafts. While largely consistent, the three political treatises also contain differences, some apparently occasioned by changing political circumstances on the ground, others no doubt brought on by long reflection, conversation, and feedback. Hobbes’s autobiographical

and prefatory material, as well as other evidence from correspondence and reminiscences, point to an author who was very interested in feedback, who sought it consistently, and took it very seriously. The epistle dedicatory to his edition of Thucydides and the addition of notes to *De Cive* should suffice here, but there is plenty of other evidence to support this conclusion. In at least one sense, therefore, Hobbes's successive treatises represented attempts to render his political theory more widely persuasive. This possibility, however, does not preclude another, which is that the published treatises were also intended for different audiences.

Method and substance are inextricably intertwined in textual alignment, and one of the first questions an editor has to face is which text to use as the "pivot" text, or, the point of reference to which the other text(s) will be aligned. The more one thinks about the complications and consequences of this choice, the more they multiply. For instance, choosing the earliest work as the pivot text increases the likelihood that the reader will see later subtractions as evidence of rejection, repetitions as evidence of continued endorsement, and additions as evidence of adoption. Yet, these conclusions could be misleading.

Let us examine the case of *Elements* 1.13, whose title is "How by Language Men Work upon Each Other's Minds." Judging by the title, there is no equivalent section in either *De Cive* or *Leviathan*. Indeed, in Baumgold's edition it appears without any equivalent passages from *De Cive* or *Leviathan*. It might be tempting to dismiss it, therefore, as a premature product that was eventually discarded. Its title, however, promises Hobbes's insight into the very process he is engaged in, making it both intriguing and, perhaps, more fit for a manuscript circulated to a few people than for a published book. As a matter of fact, its contents reveal something about the techniques that Hobbes used in later works, to persuade his readers. In this case, then, the omission of a section dealing with this subject matter in the later works is less likely to signify a change of mind and more likely the result of an adjustment based on the intended audience of the work.

An editor who wishes to align texts faces a further, perhaps more daunting, choice: to decide the level at which alignment is to take place. In the case of a simple translation of the same text from one language to another, for instance, alignment could take place on the level of sentences. In the case of Hobbes's three political treatises, however, we have works in two languages, and with differing structures and parts. Unfortunately, any choice in such a situation will involve compromise. Baumgold has laid out her edition around what she calls "omnibus chapters that are organized to show the parallels between and within them" (xxiii). Her choice to concentrate mainly on the level of chapters followed by paragraphs or sections is perhaps the best, but even

this arrangement breaks down, as Hobbes's rearrangement of material often broke up chapters or yielded entirely new ones. Thus, to take but one example, Baumgold's Chapter 19 consists of Chapters 22 and 23 of the *Elements*,<sup>1</sup> Chapters 8, 9, and 11 of *De Cive*, and Chapter 20 as well as parts of Chapters 19 and 21 of *Leviathan*.

If, however, going below the chapter level is inevitable, then where does one stop? How much of the same language, image, or argument is enough to warrant a cross-reference? Let me offer two examples that illustrate the challenge. The first comes, once again, from *Elements* 1.13. Because Hobbes's chapter titles and paragraph summaries were not conceived of as aids in alignment, they often serve as poor guides in that process. Thus, despite the fact that Hobbes's chapter classification in the *Elements* tells us that his discussion of the state of nature occurs in the following Chapter (1.14), there is a considerable amount of material in 1.13 that is clearly relevant, such as the contrast of civilized nations with the "wildest of the Indians" as an instance of the difference between large and lasting societies and the state of nature. Hobbes's example here is the equivalent of the references to the Indians of America in *De Cive* 1.13 and *Leviathan* XIII, yet neither Baumgold's Chapter 11 (containing *Elements* 1.13) nor her Chapter 12 (containing the chapters devoted to the state of nature in all three works) contain a cross-reference to those passages.

The second example comes from *De Cive* xvii. In Silverthorne's translation, which in this case is closer to the original than the 1651 translation that Baumgold used, there is a passage towards the end of Section 27, which reads:

For those who have not grown together into unity of person are, [...] in a state of enmity with each other. Never mind that they are not always fighting (for enemies too make truces); hostility is adequately shown by distrust, and by the fact that the borders of their commonwealths, Kingdoms and empires, armed and garrisoned, with the posture and appearance of gladiators, look across at each other like enemies, even when they are not striking each other.

This image, which would eventually inspire the famous frontispiece of *Leviathan*, is of course the precursor to Hobbes's notorious description of international relations in Chapter XIII of that work:

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1 Baumgold follows Warrender's suggestion and uses consecutive numbering for *The Elements of Law*.

But though there had never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of warre one against another; yet in all times, Kings, and persons of Sovereigne authority, because of their Independency, are in continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their Forts, Garrisons, and Guns upon the Frontiers of their Kingdomes; and continuall Spyes upon their neighbours; which is a posture of War.

Based on the fact that *De Cive* XVII is located in the section of that work devoted to religion and its title is “On the Kingdom of God by the New Agreement,” one would not expect to find therein passages or arguments relevant to other subjects, such as the state of nature, and yet it is clear that this is one of the many cases in which, as Baumgold argues rightly, Hobbes recycled material. It is also clear, however, that this is another case in which Hobbes’s placement and title may mislead. Thus, even though Baumgold’s edition includes XVII.27 in her Chapter 25 (pp. 509–12 of her edition)—and perhaps because the 1651 translation that Baumgold uses leaves out the telltale term “gladiators”—there is no cross-reference to *Leviathan* XIII. This omission also reveals a broader problem stemming from the choice to make *The Elements of Law* the pivot text and place *Leviathan* last in the sequence. As Baumgold explains, “In the case of *Leviathan*, this edition’s text is limited to portions that have a parallel in one or both earlier works” (xxiii). Not having drawn the connection to a previous text (in this case, *De Cive* XVII.27), Baumgold had no reason to include the passage on gladiators from *Leviathan* XIII.

There are some interpreters who see *Leviathan* as the finished product of a single process, and there are reasons why Hobbes might have wanted to give that impression. At certain points in her introduction, Baumgold sounds as though she agreed with this view, pointing to the fact that what sometimes appears as novelty in *Leviathan* is in fact reorganized material from the earlier works. While this is certainly true to an extent, it is also liable to lead one to place more emphasis on similarity among the works, than on difference.

For the epigraph to her introduction, Baumgold chose a crucial passage from *Leviathan* XLIII, in which Hobbes urges interpreters to focus not on this or that word, but on the scope and “main Designe” of an author. Although Hobbes’s target there was the polemical scriptural interpretation that sought to blind people with “atomes of Scripture,” I concur with her in considering this passage crucial for understanding Hobbes himself. Structured as it is, Baumgold’s three-text edition marks many steps in the evolution of Hobbes’s argument as it developed from the *Elements* to *Leviathan*. In one sense, her

strategy of aligning thematic passages from the three works makes it possible to see Hobbes's scope better.

Yet, in another sense the thematic organization also makes it harder to see Hobbes's scope. Alongside passages judged new to *Leviathan*, Baumgold also left out the epistles dedicatory to the *Elements* and *De Cive*, as well as the Preface to the latter and the Introduction to *Leviathan*. Baumgold's goal was not to provide definitive versions of any of the three texts, and the volume of the material she had to deal with makes it likely that opportunities to cut were welcome; as it stands, this is a large volume of over 625 pages measuring about 8.5 x 11 inches. Nevertheless, Hobbes's prefatory and introductory material provides important clues about his project and its evolution.

Baumgold no doubt faced many challenges and obstacles in putting this edition together, and I have only touched on a few. One that I have not mentioned yet is the choice of base texts. Once available, Sommerville's edition of *The Elements of Law* will replace Tönnies', just as Malcolm's edition of *Leviathan* has replaced all others. Neither of those, however, nor Silverthorne's translation of *De Cive* are in the public domain, whereas the ones that Baumgold used are, and whatever its shortcomings the 1651 translation of *De Cive* is quite good in many places and, for the most part, satisfactory. It bears repeating Baumgold's reminder, therefore, that the main point of her exercise was not to attempt to replace existing editions, but to facilitate the comparative study of Hobbes's works, in an effort to understand the evolution of his political theory. Those seeking to grasp Hobbes's scope will find Baumgold's help welcome.

*Ioannis D. Evrigenis*

Tufts University

*ioannis.evrigenis@tufts.edu*