

## THE AUDIENCES OF *BEHEMOTH* AND THE POLITICS OF CONVERSATION

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*Behemoth* presents its reader with a problem: What is this book? The title reminds one of *Leviathan* while the topic it covers, the civil war, was a central event in Hobbes's life, both personally and intellectually. And yet neither association seems to help. The problem with the book arises on two levels. First, as a dialogue rather than a treatise, *Behemoth* seems out of place in Hobbes's corpus of political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This leads us to the second and more pressing problem: is it even related to political philosophy? It is difficult to see how *Behemoth* adds to or even confirms what Hobbes argued in his treatises. Whereas *behemoth* was "the chief of the ways of God" (Job 40:19), where *Behemoth* fits into the ways of Hobbes is unclear. It is the contention of this paper that the problems of interpretation arise because we fail to apprehend the intended audience of the argument in *Behemoth*. What makes *Behemoth* so difficult to interpret and so unusual is the fact that there are two audiences. There is the audience of the narrative itself, the character 'B', and there is the audience of the metanarrative, the reader of the book. Once we realize that these two audiences are distinct, we shall be able to see that *Behemoth* both confirms and completes what Hobbes had maintained in his treatises regarding the transmission of political knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbes wrote several dialogues, and increasingly so during his later lifetime. Many were devoted to scientific topics, such as *Dialogus Physicus* (1661), *Problemata Physica* (1662), and *Decameron Physiologicum* (1678). Three others were on Church history and theology: "On the Nicene Creed" and "On Heresy" (as appendices to the 1668 Latin *Leviathan*), and *Historia Ecclesiastica Dialogus* (1688). The Latin *Leviathan* also included in the Appendix the dialogue "On Certain Objections against *Leviathan*." Finally, the only other dialogue to be published on its own and receive any scholarly attention is his *Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* (1666), ed. Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). I return to the significance of the dialogue form below.

As a dialogue, Thomas Hobbes's *Behemoth* has a different character from his philosophical treatises. This fact, obvious as it may be, has been little noticed by its interpreters. Failure to account for the dialogue form, or to understand it, has led to a series of misinterpretations, misinterpretations that leave one with the impression of a book not worth reading. I intend to correct the predominant contention that *Behemoth* is primarily an Hobbesian account of historical events by considering the role the dialogue form plays in the history it recounts. When compared to other Restoration histories of the war and even to the historiographical debates of the seventeenth century in which Hobbes was immersed, we shall see that *Behemoth* stands apart as a different kind of text. More important than this, we shall see that the presentation and use of history in *Behemoth* runs counter to Hobbes's own writings on the proper work of history, writings spanning a period from 1629 with the publication of his translation of Thucydides (and possibly as early as 1620<sup>2</sup>) to 1674 and his translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

### *The History of Behemoth*

Hobbes's *Behemoth* has received increased attention in recent years, despite the fact that the only available editions are problematic. The version found in Molesworth's nineteenth-century collection of the works of Hobbes contains a less than critical edition of *Behemoth*. At the end of that same cen-

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<sup>2</sup> This date refers to the publication of the anonymous *Horae Subsecivae*. Following upon a suggestion of their Hobbesian character by Leo Strauss, some of the essays in this collection have been attributed to Hobbes. See *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (1936; reprint Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), xii-xiii. Arlene W. Saxonhouse renewed interest in these essays with her "Hobbes & the *Horae subsecivae*," *Polity* 13 (1981): 541-67. Statistical analysis has led Noel B. Reynolds and John L. Hilton, "Thomas Hobbes and the Authorship of the *Horae subsecivae*," *History of Political Thought* 14 (1993): 361-80, to conclude that three of the essays were written by Hobbes. Saxonhouse and Reynolds have worked together to publish these three essays along with an interpretive essay and explanations of the statistics used in Thomas Hobbes, *Three Discourses: A Critical Edition of Newly Identified Work of the Young Hobbes*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds and Arlene W. Saxonhouse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Acceptance of the evidence is not universal, however. See especially John C. Fortier "Hobbes and 'A Discourse of Laws': The Perils of Wordprint Analysis," *Review of Politics*, 59 (1997): 861-87. Hilton, Reynolds, and Saxonhouse responded with "Hobbes and 'A Discourse of Laws': Response to Fortier," *Review of Politics* 59 (1997): 889-903. Fortier was given a "Last Word" in the same issue, 906-14. An earlier debate on the same topic without the statistical analysis can be found between F. O. Wolf, *Die neue Wissenschaft des Thomas Hobbes* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frohmann Holzboog, 1969) and Douglas Bush, "Hobbes, William Cavendish, and 'Essays,'" *Notes and Queries* 20 (May 1973): 162-64.

tury Ferdinand Tönnies published his transcription of a much more authoritative manuscript copy held by St. John's College, Oxford.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Tönnies modernized the spelling and punctuation, and committed some errors in transcription. His edition has been reprinted twice in this century with its faults left uncorrected.<sup>4</sup> Yet, whatever current revival of interest in *Behemoth* there may be, it is nothing like the interest sparked when the book was first published in 1679, in the middle of the Exclusion Crisis. Within just over a year it had gone through five editions and elicited one direct rebuttal: J. Whitehall, *Behemoth Arraigned or, a Vindication of Property Against a Fanatical Pamphlet Stiled Behemoth* (London, 1680).<sup>5</sup>

*Behemoth*, or to give it its full title, *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, has a frustratingly convoluted history which is not at all unusual for Hobbes's books. It was probably written between 1668 and 1670, although we do not find a printed edition until 1679. There are five manuscript versions other than the one at St. John's College, Oxford, but we do not know their dates. Given the cost of transcription and the multiple editions following 1679,

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<sup>3</sup> The St. John's College MS is apparently written in the hand of Hobbes's amanuensis with marginal corrections in Hobbes's own hand. The handwriting and the fact that *Behemoth* seems to have been published without Hobbes's permission (more below) make this a far more authoritative version of the book than the one Molesworth reproduced in the 1840s. According to the records of St. John's Library, the MS came to them from Revd. Charles Wheatly, who matriculated 28 March, 1705, and died 13 May, 1742. How it came into Wheatly's hands is still unknown. I would like to thank the Librarian and Fellows of St. John's College, Oxford, for the opportunity to examine the manuscript in their care.

<sup>4</sup> The editions from this century are Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, with an introduction by M. M. Goldsmith (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969) and Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, with an introduction by Stephen Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). All page references are to the Holmes edition, although pagination is consistent throughout both. Much more attention has gone into the French and Italian translations of the book. See *Béhémouth ou le long parlement*, ed. and trans. Luc Borot (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1990), and *Behemoth*, ed. and trans. Onofrio Nicastro (Rome: Editori Laterza, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> See Hugh Macdonald and Mary Hargreaves, *Thomas Hobbes: A Bibliography* (London: the Bibliographical Society, 1952), 64 ff. David Wootton makes the provocative suggestion that Locke and his associates sponsored the publication of some or all five of these editions in an attempt to expose the logic of absolutism (David Wootton, "Thomas Hobbes's Machiavellian Moments," in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 241). There is no evidence of this, but there is certainly evidence that Locke was alerted to the existence of *Behemoth* several years before it was published: "You may there see likewise his History of England from 1640 to 1660 about a quire of paper, which the King haz read and likes extremely, but tells him there is so much truth in it he dare not license for feare of displeasing the Bishops" (*The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. De Beer [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976], letter 268, Aubrey to Locke, 11 Feb., 1673).

however, it would be safe to assume that they predate the first printed edition.<sup>6</sup> We have three surviving letters from Hobbes in which he mentioned *Behemoth* (although there are no surviving letters in which he used that title), each of which expressed his intentions not to publish it. In a letter to his usual publisher, William Crooke, Hobbes wrote on 19/29 June, 1679, "I would fain have published my Dialogue of the Civil Wars of *England*, long ago; and to that end I presented it to his Majesty: and some days after, when I thought he had read it, I humbly besought him to let me print it; but his Majesty (though he heard me graciously, yet he) flatly refused to have it published... Therefore I pray you not to meddle in the business."<sup>7</sup> It is interesting that Hobbes would write Crooke in 1679 when we have evidence that Crooke possessed a copy of this work as early as February, 1673.<sup>8</sup> Yet almost exactly one month after the original letter Hobbes wrote again to Crooke, this time thanking him for not publishing this book: "I thank you for taking my advice in not stirring about the printing of my Book concerning the Civil Wars of *England*."<sup>9</sup> The reason he saw fit to thank his publisher was that a pirated edition of the book was being printed and sold against his will. We know this from his letter to John Aubrey of the same day: "I have been told that my booke of the Civill Warr is come abroad, and am sorry for it, especially because I could not get his majesty to license it, not because it is ill printed or has a foolish title set to it..."<sup>10</sup> Hobbes, it seems, wanted this book published but he did not want to defy the king's commands. Although such obedience is consistent with Hobbes's political philosophy, we might also consider that

<sup>6</sup> See Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, 1625-1700*, vol. 2 pt. 1 A-K, 577. There are five other MSS of *Behemoth* in existence, but none bear the hand of Hobbes or his amanuensis. See Peter Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, 1625-1700* (New York: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1987), vol. 2 pt. 1 A-K, 577. On the history of Hobbes's manuscript and printed texts and his authorized and pirated texts, see Joseph Cropsey's Introduction to Thomas Hobbes, *A Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*; Richard Tuck, "Warrender's *De Cive*," *Political Studies* 33 (1985): 308-15; M. M. Goldsmith, "Hobbes's Ambiguous Politics," *History of Political Thought* 11 (1990): 639-74; and Philip Milton, "Did Hobbes Translate *De Cive*?" *History of Political Thought* 11 (1990): 627-38.

<sup>7</sup> *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1997), vol. 2, 771, letter 206.

<sup>8</sup> Aubrey to Locke, see note 5 above.

<sup>9</sup> *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 2, 744, letter 209, 18-28 August, 1679.

<sup>10</sup> *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 2, 772, letter 208. The foolish title probably refers to the title of the first three pirated editions published in 1679, *The History of the Civil Wars of England From the Year 1640, to 1660*. See Macdonald and Hargreaves, *Thomas Hobbes*, 64-65. It should also be noted that none of these other manuscripts bear the full title found on the St. John's MS, *Behemoth or The Long Parliament*. See Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, 1625-1700*, vol. 2 pt. 1 A-K, 577.

in the period after 1675 Hobbes was petitioning Charles II for a renewal of his pension.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever might have been Hobbes's immediate reasons for not wishing to see his *Behemoth* in print in 1679, he had much earlier intended to print it and, had the king approved, would have been happy to see it when it finally did come out. The question remains, however, why did he want to publish *Behemoth*? Because this book was written near the end of his life, and because the title forces one to make a comparison with Hobbes's much more famous work, *Leviathan*, it is difficult to consider *Behemoth* as a freestanding work of history. Nevertheless, it is, with a few exceptions, an account of the causes and events of the civil war and, therefore, must be read within the context of seventeenth-century historiography. This is what most commentators have done, with varying success. But it is my contention that in reading *Behemoth* as a history alone, and not also as a dialogue, even the most successful interpretations have failed to give an adequate account of the book.

### Behemoth as History

Insofar as the content of *Behemoth* is the history of the English Civil War, it must be understood within the context of Restoration history. The most notable comparison to *Behemoth* is the account of the period written by Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, Lord Chancellor, and Hobbes's political adversary.<sup>12</sup> Clarendon's *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* was written intermittently from 1649 to 1672 and published posthumously in 1702–04. But Hobbes did not come so late to history as *Behemoth*. The first book he published under his own name was a translation of Thucydides in 1629. In his introduction he called the author "the most politic historiographer that ever wrote."<sup>13</sup> Hobbes's praise for Thucydides rested upon the his-

<sup>11</sup> See Hobbes to King Charles II, *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 2, 774–75, letter 210 and the editor's suggested dating of the letter.

<sup>12</sup> On the relationship between Hobbes and Clarendon, see Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 320–36.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hobbes, "To the Readers," *The History of the Grecian War written by Thucydides*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, vols. 8–9 (London, 1843), vol. 8, viii. One of the essays in the *Horae subsecivae* (1620) is entitled "Of Reading History". No one is willing to attribute this essay to Hobbes. Rather, the likely author was William Cavendish, his student. If Hobbes had an influence on the topic, perhaps even suggesting it, we might push Hobbes's interest in history back to 1620 or earlier, even if his direct authorship of the three essays in question in *Horae subsecivae* remains in doubt. On this essay and its place in contemporary historiographical debates, see Levy, "The Background of Hobbes's *Behemoth*," in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain*, 248–50.

torian's presentation of the facts of history without interposing his own interpretation between the events and the reader. Thucydides' procedure, he argued, allows the reader to uncover the causes for himself.<sup>14</sup> Hobbes returned to this praise for factual reporting without interpretation at the end of his career as an historian. In his 1673 translation of *The Iliads and Odysseys of Homer* he wrote: "For both the poet and the historian writeth only, or should do, matters of fact."<sup>15</sup> These two statements, although written fifty years apart, mark Hobbes's place in a long-standing debate among seventeenth-century English historians. Some, like Hobbes, argued that the historian's task was to relate the facts without partiality. These same historians accused anyone who might allow partisanship or even explanation to enter an account to be far more of a rhetorician than an historian.<sup>16</sup>

Hobbes's place in the historiographical debate, that is, his emphasis on facts over interpretation, is hard to square with what is presented in *Behemoth*. Far more causes are presented than facts, and even the facts are given an interpretation. Within the dialogue itself the character 'B' announces this clearly when responding to 'A': "for I suppose, your purpose was, to acquaint me with the history, not so much of those actions that passed in the time of the late troubles, as of their causes, and of the councils and artifice by which they were brought to pass."<sup>17</sup> We can find, however, the same admission being given by Hobbes in the dedicatory letter to Henry Bennet, Baron of Arlington. He explained that the first two dialogues uncover the "seed" of the war in "certain opinions in divinity and politics" and its "growth" "in declarations, remonstrances, and other writings between the King and Parliament published."<sup>18</sup> To further distance himself from the facts of the case alone, he

<sup>14</sup> Hobbes, "To the Readers," and "Of the Life and History of Thucydides," *The History of the Grecian War written by Thucydides*, *English Works*, vol. 8, viii, xxii.

<sup>15</sup> *English Works*, vol. 10, vi. Quoted in Springborg, "Mythic History and National Historiography," in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain*, 294.

<sup>16</sup> For the general terms of the debate and Hobbes place in it, see James Sutherland, *English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 280–88, and Springborg, "Mythic History," 267–79. For the debate over the differences between poetry and history among Hobbes's contemporaries see Levy, "The Background of Hobbes's *Behemoth*," 251–56. Any mention of Hobbes and rhetoric cannot overlook Quentin Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The first part of the book is an exhaustive an illuminating account of rhetoric in Renaissance England. The second part is a problematic account of Hobbes's fluctuating acceptance and rejection of rhetoric. See my objections to Skinner in "Quentin Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*," *The Journal of the History of European Ideas* 23 (1997): 35–43.

<sup>17</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> The letter is reproduced in the Tönnies editions of *Behemoth*. In the St. John's MS this

then revealed that the last two dialogues are brief accounts of the war “Drawn out of Mr. Heath’s chronicle.” Royce MacGillivray has pointed out that this chronicle is one of two books, either Heath’s *A Brief Chronicle of All the Chief Actions* (1662) or, more likely, his *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War in the Three Kingdoms* (1661).<sup>19</sup> Curiously, even here Hobbes is negligent of the facts. First of all, he used Heath’s book inconsistently.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, in the matter of the king traveling to Edinburgh after the First Bishop’s War to yield to the abolition of the Scottish episcopacy, Hobbes’s character ‘A’ gets the story wrong whereas Heath had it right.<sup>21</sup> If Hobbes was sincere in his praise of Thucydides and his description of the historian’s art, *Behemoth* is not a very good history. There is little evidence that Hobbes was insincere and a good deal that *Behemoth* is not a good history.

Further complicating an interpretation of *Behemoth* as history is the fact that it not only defies Hobbes’s own apparent criteria for a good history, it defied all established conventions. As David Wootton has remarked, it is difficult for the modern reader to appreciate how eccentric the content of Hobbes’s history was for the time. Instead of recounting events and telling the stories of great men, as historians from Livy and Tacitus to Guicciardini and Clarendon had done, Hobbes wrote about “causes and consequences, about long-term factors and short-term triggers.”<sup>22</sup> *Behemoth* was, therefore, a much more modern history than should be expected.<sup>23</sup> Hobbes’s contempo-

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letter is found on the back of the title page, facing the first page of the text, and is undated.

<sup>19</sup> MacGillivray, “Hobbes’s History of the English Civil War: A Study of *Behemoth*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31 (1970), 182.

<sup>20</sup> One possible reason Hobbes used Heath’s *Chronicle* is that Henry Bennet gave Heath his permission to print the book in 1663. See James Heath, *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War in the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland & Ireland with the Intervening Affairs of Treatises, and other Occurrences relating thereunto* (London: J. Best for William Lee, 1663), i.

<sup>21</sup> See Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 29 and 75, and Heath, *Chronicle*, 17–20. MacGillivray, “Hobbes’s History,” 182, points this out as a blunder on Hobbes’s part. The comments on this event in *Behemoth* come in the first two dialogues, not the last two which were supposed to come from Heath’s *Chronicle*. Perhaps Hobbes did not misread Heath, but why he would claim to use a source and use it only intermittently requires an explanation (see n. 20). In a later work on the same subject, however, MacGillivray points out that Charles did contemplate going to Edinburgh and that Hobbes might have misremembered. See MacGillivray, *Restoration Historians and the English Civil War* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 66. On other historical mistakes and Hobbes’s use of Heath’s *Chronicle*, see Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 354f.

<sup>22</sup> Wootton, “Hobbes’s Machiavellian Moments,” 220.

<sup>23</sup> For an account of the historiographical debates of the seventeenth century and the dominant model of history for the time, see Levy, “Background of Hobbes’s *Behemoth*.” However, Levy makes the claim that Francis Bacon had a strong influence on Hobbes’s

aries went to great lengths to show their readers that they could be trusted because they were present at the events. These were not interpretations, therefore, but factual accounts by eyewitnesses. One can see this from the titles alone. Consider as examples James Heath's *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War in the Three Kingdoms* (1661), *A Brief Chronicle of All the Chief Actions* (1662), and *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War* (1663), Gilbert Burnet's *Memoirs of the Dukes of Hamilton* (1676) and *History of My Own Time* (published posthumously in 1723), Edmund Ludlow's *Memoirs* (published posthumously in 1698–99), Clarendon's *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (published posthumously in 1702–1704), John Nalson's *An Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State* (1682), and Bulstrode Whitelocke's *Memorials of the English Affairs* (1682). Clarendon, of course, was Lord Chancellor and Ludlow one of the judges to condemn Charles I. As for the others, they insisted that they were chronicling, impartially collecting, and remembering what they saw. By contrast with these overt attempts to demonstrate credibility, Hobbes's *Behemoth* is an anachronism.

There is one other anachronistic characteristic of *Behemoth*. Royce MacGillivray has pointed out the fact that, unlike his contemporaries, Hobbes did not attribute divine intervention to any of the events of the war.<sup>24</sup> Although MacGillivray claims that references to divine intention were incidental to the histories written by Hobbes's contemporaries, there was often little other explanation for the course of events. The Royalists believed that God returned the world to its proper order once the sins of his people had been expiated by suffering, whereas the Republicans believed that God revoked his kingdom of righteousness and returned the king because of, again, his people's sinfulness.<sup>25</sup> In *Behemoth*, however, there are no attributions of divine intervention or a providential plan. The causes are much more mundane. Again, they are much more modern.

It is not only the book's place in the historiographical debate of the seventeenth century that marks it as peculiar. Beyond the content, the style of *Behemoth* stands out as unique when placed alongside other Restoration histories. Hobbes chose the unusual practice of writing a dialogue history of the war. Dialogues were not unknown at the time, of course, but they tended to

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understanding of the work of the historian, 248–50. For a useful survey of other histories of the same period from Hobbes's time see James Sutherland, *English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century*, 271–88.

<sup>24</sup> MacGillivray, "Hobbes's History," 180.

<sup>25</sup> See Earl Miner, "Milton and the Histories," in *Politics of Discourse: the Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Stephen N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).



be used only as a device to add drama to scenes of persecution. This was especially true of the Royalist hagiographies of the time. Two notable examples include James Heath's *New Book of Loyal English Martyrs and Confessors* (1663), and David Lloyd's *Memoires of the Lives, Actions, Sufferings, and Deaths of those noble, reverend and excellent personages that suffered by death, sequestration, decimation, or otherwise in our own late intestine Wars* (1668). Short dialogues appear in both but only as tropes, not as the format for an entire book.<sup>26</sup>

It is impossible not to approach *Behemoth* as a puzzle. It stands out against the background of the seventeenth century as a book out of place. And, as we shall see, it takes some work to explain how it fits into Hobbes's philosophical and political project.

### *Various Interpretations of Behemoth*

Between its initial publication in 1679 and the publication of Tönnies's edition in 1889, *Behemoth* was largely ignored. Between then and Goldsmith's reissue of the text in 1969, any mention of *Behemoth* was usually as an aside in a discussion of *Leviathan*. Royce MacGillivray discussed the book for its own merits in the early seventies and Robert Kraynak wrote an important article on the book in 1982. Most of the literature on *Behemoth*, however, dates to the 1990s. Despite the long time it has taken scholars to turn to this work with any great interest, the vast majority of commentators explain *Behemoth* as an application of Hobbes's theoretical principles to real, historical events. Indeed, there are only two exceptions: Robert Kraynak and David Wootton, both of whom make important advances in our understanding of this book.

The dominant interpretation of *Behemoth* as a theoretically inspired interpretation of recent political history reads the book on the model of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. According to this interpretation, Hobbes attempted to vindicate the political philosophy he presented in *Leviathan* with the empirical evidence he would present in *Behemoth*. In the words of A. P. Martinich, "To some extent then, *Behemoth* is an elaborate 'I-told-you-so'."<sup>27</sup> Less provocatively, perhaps, Finlayson writes that "*Behemoth* was a practical demonstration of the truth of Hobbism."<sup>28</sup> The first problem

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of these books see D. R. Woolf, "Narrative Historical Writing in Restoration England: A Preliminary Survey" in *The Restoration Mind*, ed. W. Gerald Marshall (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1997), 228–29.

<sup>27</sup> A. P. Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 115.

<sup>28</sup> Michael G. Finlayson, *Historians, Puritanism, and the English Revolution: The Religious Factor in English Politics before and after the Interregnum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,

with this interpretation is that it renders *Behemoth* a very uninteresting book. If it is merely the application of Hobbes's ideas to a particular event, the ideas are still far more interesting than the application. This is probably why it has received such little attention. The second, and far more interesting problem with this general line of interpretation is that the theoretical arguments so familiar to readers of *Leviathan*, *De Cive*, and *The Elements of Law*, are absent from *Behemoth*. Hobbes did not do in *Behemoth* what so many of its readers claim he did.

The state of nature, the laws of nature, and the move to civil society do not play a central, if any, role in *Behemoth*. Certainly the conclusions reached in the book are consistent with Hobbes's general political philosophy. For instance, the character 'A' asserts that "there can be no government where there is more than one sovereign."<sup>29</sup> Yet nowhere in the discussion preceding or following this assertion is there mention of the fundamental Hobbesian doctrine of authorship, that is, the principle that at the founding of any civil society is the reduction of all the various wills to one will, "which is as much as to say, to appoint one Man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person; and every one to owne, and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person, shall Act, or cause to be Acted, in those things which concerne the Common Peace and Safetie."<sup>30</sup> Instead, the only argument provided for the unity of the sovereign in *Behemoth*, if it can even be called an argument, is the history of the early German tribes, of Saxon and Angle history, and of the Norman practices of government. This is a very different argument from that presented so powerfully in his treatises.

It is true that the doctrine of undivided sovereignty as presented in *Behemoth* is consistent with the doctrine as presented in Hobbes's treatises. We should be amazed if it were not. But the doctrine is not reached in anything like the same manner as Hobbes's philosophical works. If *Behemoth* were truly an application of Hobbes's philosophical principles to this historical event,

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1983), 49. For other interpretations in line with this general view see Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 64; Goldsmith, "Introduction," in Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth*, xi; Royce MacGillivray, "Hobbes's History," 179–83; idem, *Restoration Historians and the English Civil War*, 67; R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977), 21; Stephen Holmes, "Introduction" in Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth*, vii–viii; William R. Lund, "Hobbes on Opinion, Private Judgment and Civil War," *History of Political Thought* 13 (1992), 72; and D. R. Woolf, "Narrative Historical Writing," 212.

<sup>29</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 77. For Hobbes's doctrine of undivided sovereignty, see especially *Leviathan*, chs. 18 and 29.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120, ch. 17.

we should be able to see those principles applied to the events in a way consistent with their derivation in the philosophical texts. We do not see this. Instead, we see the same conclusions, but we see them explained in terms of history, not philosophy.

Kraynak and Wootton take the historical content of *Behemoth* far more seriously as a central concern for Hobbes, and not merely as a convenient exemplar of his wisdom. As a result, they draw far more interesting conclusions from the book and reveal that it is a text worth reading. Neither one, unfortunately, pays sufficient attention to the dialogue form in which it is written and, therefore, they do not make the most of their insights.

Kraynak argues that Hobbes's primary access to political phenomena was through the study of history. Previous students of Hobbes's work have missed this fact, he argues, because *Behemoth* is temporally out of place in Hobbes's corpus. Accordingly, "Hobbes's histories are logically prior to his treatises because they present the problem of traditional politics and science, whereas the treatises present the solution."<sup>31</sup> When Kraynak turns his attention to *Behemoth*, he argues that its "purpose is to teach the reader lessons about the defect of contemporary political authority and to explain specifically why King Charles I was incapable of maintaining his power and preserving civil peace."<sup>32</sup> This is a very insightful suggestion, but it ignores the fact that Hobbes could have accomplished his educational purpose much more directly in a treatise. Perhaps Hobbes was reticent to put his ideas into print. This is a plausible suggestion, especially when we consider the uncertainties authors could face under the Restoration government. However, this argument would have to overcome a great deal of evidence to the contrary. Hobbes was rarely reticent. And although he was often careful to protect himself – burning all of his papers, for instance – he did not shy away from putting his bold ideas in print.

Rather than looking to the political climate in which Hobbes wrote *Behemoth*, it would be far better to search for a reason for using the dialogue form within the book itself. If we take Kraynak's suggestion that a lesson was being taught in *Behemoth* and look to the interaction between the two characters rather than the relationship between author and reader, we see a far more likely location for education. By taking Kraynak's insight and turning it back into the dialogue between the characters we will have to reject many of

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 32. See also Kraynak, "Hobbes's *Behemoth* and the Argument for Absolutism," *American Political Science Review* 76 (1982), 837.

<sup>32</sup> Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, 33.

his conclusions, but we shall find a way to read *Behemoth* that accounts for the dialogue form.

David Wootton also pays attention to the historical content of *Behemoth* and develops some worthwhile insights as a result. The main difference between their arguments is that where Kraynak thinks *Behemoth*, as a history, is logically prior to Hobbes's treatises, Wootton claims that it is a work of philosophical history in the tradition of Tacitus, Machiavelli, and Lipsius.<sup>33</sup> In his own words, Wootton substitutes "Kraynak's claim that Hobbes's theory of the state of nature derives from his study of history the more specific claim that it derives from a study of Machiavelli."<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Wootton makes an argument about the teaching role of *Behemoth* that is not too dissimilar from Kraynak's. According to Wootton, Hobbes wrote his history in order to influence the king's actions. "*Behemoth* was nothing less than an appeal to the king to reform the church, the universities, and the political principles of the nation by requiring that Hobbesian philosophy be taught throughout the land."<sup>35</sup> More specifically, the book itself was to provide the type of education needed. "In *Behemoth* Hobbes offers, above all, interpretation, so that those who experienced the war but failed to learn from it can be taught the right conclusions."<sup>36</sup> This is similar to Kraynak's conclusion that *Behemoth* had a teaching role. It is also similar in that the two authors overlook the dialogue form and move the activity of teaching, which is clearly present in the book, outside of the dialogue itself to a relationship where it is less clearly present.

Kraynak and Wootton go well beyond the standard interpretations of *Behemoth* and their failure to account for it being a dialogue does not detract significantly from the important insights each has made. However, if we are to come to grips with what this peculiar book is about we must understand it in the form Hobbes gave it to us, that is, as a dialogue.

Almost everyone who has commented on *Behemoth* has agreed with Martinich, that the characters, 'A' and 'B', are as nondescript as their names and both represent Hobbes.<sup>37</sup> The contempt for Hobbes's literary or dramatic abilities is remarkable, if a reduction of the dialogue form to some sort of cheap trick is any indication of the reaction to it. According to Fritz Levy, the

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<sup>33</sup> Wootton, "Hobbes's Machiavellian Moments," 211.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 220. The parallels Wootton draws between Hobbes's *Behemoth* and Machiavelli's *Prince* are particularly interesting. See *ibid.*, 225–28.

<sup>37</sup> Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes*, 117. See also S. A. Lloyd, *Ideas as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 190.

dialogue form diffuses the authorial voice, but serves no other purpose.<sup>38</sup> Even Kraynak and Wootton, in their otherwise excellent studies, give the drama very little consideration. According to Kraynak, Hobbes's use of dialogue allows him to attack his opponents rather than demonstrate his own arguments, while it also allows him to comment on their hidden motives.<sup>39</sup> Wootton, on the other hand, argues that the dialogue form of *Behemoth* arises out of the underlying uncertainty of knowing what power is.<sup>40</sup> Stephen Holmes, at least, has found some use in it: "Unlike a straightforward narrative, the dialogue format allowed Hobbes to dispel the naïveté of an inexperienced listener, while drawing useful lessons from events."<sup>41</sup> Thus most comments on the dialogue form follow those of Hobbes's rival, John Wallis, in his personal attack on Hobbes's dialogues on the physics of Robert Boyle. Wallis wrote his *Hobbius Heauton-timorumenos or A Consideration of Mr Hobbes his Dialogues* in 1662 and had this to say about Hobbes's use of the dialogue: "He found out a middle course, by way of Dialogue, between A and B (*Thomas and Hobs*;) Wherein *Thomas* commends *Hobs*, and *Hobs* commends *Thomas*, and both commend *Thomas Hobs* as a third Person; without being guilty of self-commendation."<sup>42</sup> Although Wallis wrote this in regards to a series of dialogues Hobbes wrote on scientific experiments, the general reaction has been the same. Hobbes's use of the dialogue form has not been considered important to understanding those works he has wished to present as dialogues.

Noam Flinker pointed out in an essay in 1989 that most discussions of *Behemoth* fail to distinguish between the characters when quoting from the text.<sup>43</sup> Since the publication of his essay this should no longer be possible. In a very close study of the dramatic tension in the dialogue, and admitting that it is not one of the great literary works of the seventeenth century, Flinker points out that the characters become more individuated as the dialogue

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<sup>38</sup> Fritz Levy, "The Background of Hobbes's *Behemoth*," 250.

<sup>39</sup> Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Wootton, "Hobbes's Machiavellian Moments," 225.

<sup>41</sup> Holmes, "Introduction," viii.

<sup>42</sup> John Wallis, *Hobbius Heauton-timorumenos Or A Consideration of Mr Hobbes his Dialogues*, Addressed to the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq. (London, 1662). The title of this work comes from the play by Menander, *Heauton-timorumenos* (*The Self-Punisher*).

<sup>43</sup> Noam Flinker, "The View from the 'Devil's Mountain': Dramatic Tension in Hobbes's *Behemoth*," *Hobbes Studies* 2 (1989), 10. Flinker points to Goldsmith, *Hobbes's Science of Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, Elsa M. Sinclair trans. (1936; reprint Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), and Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), but, had he waited a year, could have added Kraynak's *History and Modernity* to this list.

proceeds.<sup>44</sup> He also points out that the younger character, 'B', fails to become intellectually independent of 'A' by the end of the book.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Flinker is able to demonstrate that the drama of the dialogue reveals an educational project, not the kind suggested by Kraynak or Wootton, but a project within the dialogue itself. In other words, the educational project taking place within *Behemoth* is the education of 'B' by 'A', not the education of the reader by the author, that is, us by Hobbes. We must, therefore, make a distinction between the narrative and the metanarrative.<sup>46</sup>

### *Conversation and Audiences*

Why would Hobbes go to the trouble of writing a dialogue that shows one person being educated by another? What could this teach? It certainly does not confirm or add to any of the arguments he made in his treatises, at least, not obviously. What it does, however, is provide an example of how to educate people. Hobbes maintained in all three of his treatises that the opinions of the people had to be educated. The best statement comes from *Leviathan*: "And the grounds of these Rights, have the rather need to be diligently, and truly taught; because they cannot be maintained by any Civill Law, or terrour of legall punishment."<sup>47</sup> Although it is often overlooked, Hobbes concluded that the fear of punishment was not enough to maintain peace. People had to be educated to understand the rights of the sovereign and the duties of the subject. But how?<sup>48</sup>

Educating an entire population is a daunting task, even with the educational systems now in place throughout modern societies. Although the pop-

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<sup>44</sup> Flinker, "The View from the 'Devil's Mountain,'" 10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> For a good accounting of the interaction between narrative and metanarrative in eighteenth-century dialogues, a century after the period we are interested in here, admittedly, see Clare Brant, "What Does That Argue for Us?": The Politics of Teaching and Political Education in Late Eighteenth-Century Dialogues," in *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning*, ed. Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> *Leviathan*, 232. See also *Leviathan*, 127 and 133; *De Cive*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 80, 146; *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), 183.

<sup>48</sup> I provide a much more complete account of the questions involved and the answers to be found in Hobbes's philosophy regarding the educating of citizens in my *Behemoth Teaches Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Political Education* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002).

ulation of England was well-educated for the time, there was not nearly the same system then as is now in place. Even with the educational system of a twenty-first century nation state, using the schools to educate a population in its political duties and rights is no easy matter.<sup>49</sup> So how did Hobbes think this might be done in the seventeenth century? We find his best and most vivid explanation in his justification for why *Leviathan* should be taught in the universities of England:

For seeing the Universities are the Fountains of Civill, and Morall Doctrine, from whence the Preachers, and the Gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (both from the Pulpit, and in their Conversation) upon the People, there ought certainly to be great care taken, to have it pure, both from the Venime of Heathen Politicians, and from the Incantation of Deceiving Spirits.<sup>50</sup>

Some have argued that Hobbes wanted *Leviathan* to be taught in the universities.<sup>51</sup> And he certainly did. But this was only the beginning. The universities, and ultimately *Leviathan*, would be the source of the doctrines, but only the source. Not enough people went to universities (or go now to study *Leviathan*) to make a direct impact. The education of the people would have to be transmitted through those who have been educated in the universities.

The image Hobbes used in *Leviathan* was of the preachers and gentry spitting the waters of doctrinal heterodoxy—but maybe orthodoxy?—upon the people. While this might seem distasteful, it is a useful image. According to Hobbes, people absorb doctrines from their education. They might even

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<sup>49</sup> Among the many studies of this issue see Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Nicholas Zill, "Civics Lessons: Youth and the Future of Democracy," *Public Perspective* (January/February, 2002); Norman Nie et al., *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Norman Nie and D. Sunshine Hillygus, "Education and Democratic Citizenship," in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, ed. Diane Ravitch and Joseph Viteritti (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Judith Torney-Purta, "The School's Role in Developing Civic Engagement: A Study of Adolescents in Twenty-Eight Countries," *Applied Development Science* 6 (2002), 203–12; Richard Niemi and Jane Junn, *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and *Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Education*, ed. Lorraine M. McDonnell, P. Michael Timpane, and Roger Benjamin (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> *Leviathan*, 491. See also *De Cive*, 140; *Behemoth*, 23, 71.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, Tracy B. Strong, "How to Write Scripture: Words, Authority, and Politics in Thomas Hobbes," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1990), 128–59.

absorb sensibilities from what they read. He was certain, for instance, that reading Greek and Roman histories inspired rebellion against monarchs.<sup>52</sup> It was the education men received in the universities that most troubled him. In *Behemoth* his character 'A' states, "But out of the Universities, came all those preachers that taught the contrary. The Universities have been to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans."<sup>53</sup> The universities would have to be reformed. But in *Behemoth* we see what the consequences of a reformed university education would be. Instead of sprinkling tainted water on his interlocutor, 'A' sprinkles him with the pure water of obedience. And even though there is hardly a trace of Hobbes's philosophical arguments in the dialogue, 'B' holds all the right opinions by the end.<sup>54</sup> 'B' learned from his conversation with 'A'. So, too, can others learn. Hobbes made this point several times in his earlier treatises.<sup>55</sup> *Behemoth*, therefore, provides the reader with an example of how someone might learn political lessons through a conversation.

This brings us to the question of the intended *reader*, that is, the audience outside of the dialogue. We now know that 'B' was the intended audience of 'A's narrative. But who was supposed to read the dialogue between these two men? Given that the dialogue presents an example of educating through conversation, the intended audience must be those who might learn how to teach others through conversation. This would be the gentry, and perhaps even the preachers. The preachers have the opportunity of the pulpit, of course, but they might also be able to teach through conversations. The point is, however, that the book was intended to be read by those who might reproduce in their acquaintances what 'A' produced in 'B'. And so Hobbes's politics would be implemented through conversation.

### Conclusion

There are two audiences in *Behemoth*. 'B' is the first audience; he is the audience of the history, the audience of the narrative. The reader is the second audience; he or she is the audience of the dialogue, the audience of the

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<sup>52</sup> See *Leviathan*, 225.

<sup>53</sup> *Behemoth*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the only mention of Hobbes's philosophy in *Behemoth* is the reference 'A' makes to the rules of just and unjust that have become famous, "notwithstanding the obscurity of their author." *Behemoth*, 39.

<sup>55</sup> See *Leviathan*, 211, 236-37, 491; *De Cive*, 140, 146; *The Elements of Law*, 184. See also Wootton, "Hobbes's Machiavellian Moments," 238.



metanarrative. Understanding that there are two audiences reveals a great deal about the book. It helps explain why it was so different from contemporaneous histories. Simply put, it was not a history. This also helps us understand its place in Hobbes's philosophical and political project. *Behemoth* was not a mere confirmation of his theories, that is, a grand, historical I-told-you-so. *Behemoth* was an attempt to put some of those ideas into practice. At the end of Part II of *Leviathan*, Hobbes despaired in the following terms: "I am at the point of believing this my labour, as uselesse, as the Commonwealth of *Plato*."<sup>56</sup> He then recovered some hope, he wrote, in thinking that a sovereign might take-up his book, "and by the exercise of entire Sovereignty, in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice." If *Behemoth* is the project that I have argued it is, Hobbes again turned to despair.

Although Hobbes sought royal permission to print *Behemoth*, he did write it prior to any command of the sovereign to do so. True, he did not want it published without permission, as the several letters attest. But that he wrote it unprompted reveals that he lost patience and thought he might turn the truth of speculation into the utility of practice on his own initiative. This must have been an uncomfortable decision for Hobbes, the great proponent of obligation and deference to one's sovereign. Yet it was surely in keeping with his character. What we know of Hobbes is that he was pugnacious and impatient. It may be comforting to know that he retained these qualities to the end, and that they produced such a fascinating book.

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<sup>56</sup> *Leviathan*, 254.