
HOBBS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF PUBLICITY

BY

JEREMY WALDRON

Abstract: A common view is that Hobbesian authoritarianism is quite indifferent to whether people know or understand the truth about politics and political arrangements: obedience is all that counts. I try to show that this view is mistaken. Hobbes believes it is important for people to understand the true basis of the sovereign's claims. This is partly because the shape of Hobbesian political obligation is so counter-intuitive, that only a true understanding will produce the right results. But it is also due in part to an inherent respect for individual reason in Hobbes's writings. In this regard, Hobbes's political theory anticipates the Enlightenment commitment to rationality and transparency in social and political arrangements.

1.

"It is," says Thomas Hobbes, "unreasonable . . . to require of a man endowed with Reason of his own, to follow the Reason of any other man."¹ Now, in context, this is an observation about the responsibilities of priests and teachers —

for there is none should know better than they that power is preserved by the same Vertues by which it is acquired; that is to say, by Wisdome, Humility, Clearnesse of Doctrine, and sincerity of Conversation; and not by suppression of the Naturall Sciences, and of the Morality of Naturall Reason; nor by obscure Language; nor by Arrogating to themselves more Knowledge than they make appear; nor by Pious Frauds; nor by such other faults as in the pastors of God's Church are not only Faults, but also scandalls, apt to make men stumble one time or other upon the suppression of their Authority.²

But it embodies a doctrine that is supposed to apply equally to popular understanding of the prerogatives of sovereignty. It may have been true

of the inhabitants of Hobbes's England that "not one perhaps of ten thousand knew what right any man had to command him."³ But the answer was to *teach* them the basis of that right by guiding them, as active intellects, through reasoning supportive of political obligation that might as well have been *their* reasoning, rather than requiring them simply to submit passively to conclusions reached as a result of the reasoning of another.

In the present essay, I would like to pursue this theme of respect for individual intellect in Hobbes's political thought. And I would like to do so in a way that connects with some themes in modern political philosophy. One of the most interesting positions constitutive of contemporary philosophical liberalism is a view about the relation between political order and truth. Liberals, particularly in the Enlightenment tradition, believe that political order can be sustained without myths and lies, without false consciousness, and without ideology (in the pejorative sense of that term).⁴ Enlightenment liberals are committed to what John Rawls has called the principle of publicity:⁵ a condition of a society's being well-ordered is that "[t]he political order does not . . . depend on historically accidental or established delusions, or other mistaken beliefs resting on the deceptive appearances of institutions that mislead us as to how they work."⁶ I believe that Thomas Hobbes accepted a version of this principle, and that philosophically it is a fact of the first importance about his theory of politics that he did so.

The principle of publicity can be applied wholesale or retail. Its retail application amounts to a requirement that particular laws always be accompanied by reasons which show why exactly the law is justified—that is, reasons which show what its purpose is, and what are the assumptions, factual and moral, that underlie it. Laws should be persuasive, not merely coercive.⁷ Hobbes certainly accepted that: "It belongeth to the Office of a Legislator, . . . to make the reason Perspicuous, why the Law was made."⁸ I want to concentrate, however, on the principle of publicity in its wholesale application, that is, as it applies not just to particular laws but to the whole apparatus of state authority. For it is undeniable that Hobbes also accepted the principle in its wholesale application. He thought it essential for subjects to understand the true grounds of sovereignty, authority, and political obligation, and to submit themselves to sovereign authority for the right reasons, not just for any old reason and not just as the upshot of any old propaganda that the sovereign and his counselors concocted. He accepted this, and he regarded his own mission *qua* philosopher as a contribution to this particular aspect or incident of authority. But it is less clear *why* Hobbes accepted the principle of publicity. Why did he think it important in a well-ordered society for people to be undeceived about the nature and justification of their political arrangements?

2.

The starting point of our exploration is Hobbes's insistence in Chapter 30 of *Leviathan* that it is "against [the sovereign's] Duty to let the people be ignorant, or mis-informed of the grounds, and reasons of . . . his essential rights."⁹ This insistence is found throughout Hobbes's political writings: it is in *The Elements of Law*¹⁰ and also in *De Cive*.¹¹ In *Leviathan*, it is phrased as a responsibility not to let the people be ignorant. This seems to comprise an active duty on the sovereign to inform his people of the truth, as well as a duty not to mislead them and a duty not to permit them to be misled by others.

In the earlier works, it is the third of these that is emphasized most heavily. There are, says Hobbes in *De Cive*, "certaine perverse doctrines" which "dispose the mindes of men to sedition," and which the sovereign must "root . . . out of the mindes of men."¹² (Later, in section 6, I shall consider the Hobbesian position that the sovereign must prohibit the teaching of such views.) It is remarkable, however, that in all three of these works, Hobbes was adamant that extirpating such errors from the minds of men could be accomplished only by the sovereign's positively shouldering the burden of seeing that his subjects are taught the truth. A ban on the dissemination of false subversive views is not enough. "[O]pinions which are gotten by education . . . cannot be taken away by force,"¹³ said Hobbes. "It is therefore the duty of those who have the chief Authority; to root those out of the mindes of men, not by commanding, but by teaching; not by the terrour of penalties, but by the perspicuity of reasons."¹⁴ Without such teaching, public order is always in danger. What is invoked here of course is Hobbes's conviction that social and political order cannot be maintained by force: "[T]he power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people. . . . [I]f men know not their duty, what is there that can force them to obey the laws? An army, you will say. But what shall force the army?"¹⁵ The grounds of the subjects' duties have, as Hobbes puts it, "the rather need to be diligently, and truly taught; because they cannot be maintained by . . . terrour of legal punishment."¹⁶

Of course an authoritarian may recognize the need to supplement coercion with indoctrination without committing himself to the liberal principle of publicity. One can believe in the necessity of indoctrination without believing in the importance of teaching the truth. And there would appear to be room, too, in Hobbes's philosophy for a distinction of this kind. Hobbes believed that most people are inclined to accept, at least as a starting point, whatever they hear from their social superiors, and he believed that the latter would accept, again at least as a starting point, whatever they are taught in the universities by *their* superiors.¹⁷ He uses a sort of 'trickle-down' metaphor. The universities "are the Fountains of

Civill, and Moral 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."¹⁸ Places like Oxford and Cambridge are the fountains of political theory; the clergy and the gentry, who in their youth attend the universities, draw water from these fountains and sprinkle it abroad in their sermons, in their little homilies from the magistrates' bench, and in their general conversation; and if social hydraulics works as it ought, this holy water eventually trickles down all over the common people, drenching them in civic doctrine. The division of labor in this process depends on a degree of deference between persons (or classes) that seems to have no necessary connection with verisimilitude:

They whom necessity . . . keepeth attent on their trades, and labour; and they, on the other side, whom superfluity, or sloth carrieth after their sensual pleasures (which two sorts of men take up the greatest part of Mankind,) being diverted from deep meditation, which the learning of truth, not onely in the matter of Naturall Justice, but also of all other Sciences necessarily requireth, receive the Notions of their duty, chiefly from Divines in the Pulpit, and partly from such of their Neighbours, of familiar acquaintance, as having the Faculty of discoursing readily, and plausibly, seem wiser and better learned in cases of Law, and Conscience, than themselves. And the Divines, and such others as make shew of Learning, derive their knowledge from the Universities, and from the Schooles of Law, or from the Books, which by men eminent in those Schooles, and Universities, have been published.¹⁹

That Hobbes did not believe this process necessarily depended on the truth of what was taught, or (sticking with the aquatic metaphor) that he did not think the hydraulics depended on the purity of the waters, is shown by his concern about the effect of the falsehoods currently being taught by academics.²⁰ The time of his writing was only a hundred years or so after the English Reformation, and the universities were still drenched, if not in Roman Catholicism, then in the spirit or ghost of Roman Catholicism, which preached quite severe limits on the authority of the temporal state. It is no wonder, said Hobbes, if the current generation of scholars "yet retain a relish of that subtile liquor, wherever they were first seasoned, against the Civill Authority."²¹ Moreover, the university teaching of philosophy was overwhelmingly dominated by the false and pernicious writings of Aristotle, so much so as to be almost unworthy of the name 'philosophy'—"the nature whereof," said Hobbes, "depends not upon Authors." What's presently taught, he said, should be called 'Aristotelity,' not philosophy!²² Still, false or not, the beliefs that were taught at Oxford and Cambridge were effective (their effect being to destabilize the social order). Now one might infer from this that if *true* doctrine were taught, it would be equally effective (this time in stabilizing the social order, if indeed that is what true doctrine does).²³ But why not as well infer that *any* doctrine taught in this way would be effective

according to its lights, so that the sovereign should choose as a basis for political indoctrination whatever view would most enhance his authority or whatever view would best ensure the stability of the body politic, irrespective of its truth or falsity?

Suppose, for example, that the people are more likely to refrain from rebellion if they believe that kings are ordained by God by a sort of hereditary divine right. That view is false, according to Hobbes, at least so far as heredity is concerned.²⁴ But is it not possible that it might still be effective as a public ideology, i.e., as material for indoctrination in the pulpit and the universities? After all, the history of ideas seems to show people accepting as self-evident truths—indeed, in Hobbes's view, people in England were *currently* accepting as self-evident truth—lies that were much more ludicrous and implausible than this. Or suppose the sovereign's power would be enhanced by a spirit of sacrificial patriotism—a spirit similar to that which sent millions of young men willingly to their deaths in Europe in 1914–18. On Hobbes's own view, there is no justification whatever for such patriotism.²⁵ But if university teachers could be persuaded that it was a well-founded demand of morality (and, again, professors have believed and taught much sillier things than this), and if they taught it to their pupils, who would then sprinkle it abroad among the general population from the pulpit and the bench and at their dinner tables, then surely the sovereign would have available to him a citizen army that was more powerful (because better motivated) than the armies available to sovereigns who were more fastidious about teaching only the truth about the reasonableness of patriotic sacrifice.

Why, in the face of these possibilities, does Hobbes insist that the sovereign has a duty to ensure that the people know the *truth* about their duties, as opposed to some plausible and politically more effective lies, along the lines that I have just considered?

There are passages where he comes close to this. The section of *The Elements of Law* from which I have been quoting begins thus: "Another thing necessary, is the rooting out from the consciences of men all those opinions which seem to justify, and give pretence of right to rebellious actions."²⁶ Now, he follows this by offering as examples a whole list of opinions which we know he thinks are false—such as "that a man can do nothing lawfully against his private conscience; that they who have the sovereignty are subject to the civil laws."²⁷ But there are other opinions which we know Hobbes thinks are true that might also "seem to justify, and give pretence of right to rebellious actions"—for example, the view that a man is at liberty to disobey a sovereign who commands him not to resist those that assault him.²⁸ And it is possible that the currency of (true) opinions like this has the effect of undermining the power of the sovereign.²⁹ So—again—if this is the sort of thing that truth amounts to, why would anyone interested in augmenting the power of the sovereign

be committed to teaching only the truth? Hobbes *says* he wants to root out from the consciences of men all those opinions which legitimize rebellion. But to the extent that some of his own theorems might be regarded as a “Rebells catechism,”³⁰ he does not seem to be really committed to extirpating those opinions; quite the contrary.

Later, in section 7, we will examine the implications of Hobbes’s considered position on this, summed up in the proposition that “Doctrine repugnant to Peace, can no more be True, than Peace and Concord can be against the Law of Nature.”³¹ But even if we take him at his word on this—that ultimately the truth does promote peace—what is striking, still, is his insistence that truth not be exaggerated for the sake of peace and stability. Though Hobbes is certainly committed to securing a belief in sovereign authority, he commits himself at the very beginning of *Leviathan* to argue also against “those that contend . . . for *too much* authority.”³² Consider his view that monarchy is the best political system. There is no doubt that Hobbes believed a society would be better off if most people in it thought (as he did) that this view was true.³³ And no doubt more of them could be persuaded to think this if well-known experts in logic were to go around saying that it was *demonstrably* true. But Hobbes is unwilling to put this spin on a desirable truth: he does not think that the proposition about monarchy *can* be demonstrated, and he does not try to conceal this from his readers.³⁴ Not only in his own mind but also publicly, Hobbes goes to fastidious lengths to distinguish between a proposition conducive to peace that he thinks he can support with demonstrative argument and a true proposition conducive to peace which he thinks is “but put with probability.”³⁵ That’s the mark of the Hobbesian commitment that interests me.

One further point. In addition to this refusal falsely to exaggerate the basis of the sovereign’s authority, Hobbes also believes the sovereign must “eschew various comforting but in his view delusive evasions of the true character of rule.”³⁶ In the modern world, absolute rulers go to great lengths to drape themselves in the costumes of democracy, representation, and the rule of law. They believe it is to their advantage to do so and they believe it enhances the security of their regime. They figure they are more likely to gain support from squeamish subjects (as well as intermeddling foreigners) if they understate their absolutism, falsely (even incoherently, on Hobbes’s view) representing their sovereign power as divided, devolved, and limited by the laws they pass. On Hobbes’s view, this too is a mistake: he thinks it would be a mistake for the sovereign not only to weaken his authority in fact, but even to try to persuade his subjects or the world that it is weaker than it is (or ought to be). People must be taught *the truth* about absolutism, and that means the truth about its extent as well as the truth about its limits and its desirability. The sovereign should not, on Hobbes’s account, let his state slip into the

hands of spin-doctors who will “let the people be . . . mis-informed of the grounds, and reasons of those his essential Rights.”³⁷

3.

Some say that Hobbes’s commitment is not to *the truth* as such, but simply to *his own theory*: it is the conceited regard of an opinionated writer for the dissemination of his own convictions. For example, on a couple of occasions, Richard Flathman comes close to this view by adopting the following phraseology to describe Hobbes’s position:

. . . the Sovereign must take control of “the universities” and see to it that they teach the truth and nothing but the truth (that is Hobbes’s own doctrines!) on these subjects. . . . As with the natural philosopher, the Sovereign translates ‘his’ (i.e., Hobbes’s!) science into power by teaching it to others. . . .³⁸

I think these interpolations are unhelpful. Like any other serious thinker, Hobbes *thinks* that what he is writing is true; otherwise he would write something else. “I am a man that love my own opinions, and think all true I say.”³⁹ But that does not mean he *equates* the predicates ‘true’ and ‘held by me’ or ‘held by Hobbes.’⁴⁰

Moreover, Hobbes by no means thought it obvious that *his view*—whether characterized as ‘the truth’ or not—should be taught in the universities and publicized abroad. Admittedly, he does say in the ‘Review, and Conclusion’ to *Leviathan*:

there is nothing in this whole Discourse, . . . as far as I can perceive, contrary either to the Word of God, or to good Manners, or tending to the disturbance of the Publique Tranquility. Therefore I think it may be profitably printed, and more profitably taught in the Universities.⁴¹

And one is hardly overwhelmed by his ‘modesty’ in Chapter 30 of that book when he imagines an interlocutor asking, “is it *you* will undertake to teach the Universities?” Hard question, responds Hobbes, and then he adds coyly, “it is not fit, not needful, for me to say either I [*sic*], or No; for any man that sees what I am doing may easily perceive what I think.”⁴² Still, Hobbes was familiar enough with the ancient doctrine of *arcana imperii* to understand the theoretical option that the truth about politics should not be widely disseminated, that its circulation should be restricted “to insinuate itself with those whom the matter it containeth most nearly concerneth.”⁴³ In the Preface to *De Cive*, he mentions that:

The wise men of remotest antiquity believed that this kind of teaching . . . should be given to posterity only in the pretty forms of poetry or in the shadowy outlines of Allegory, as if

to prevent what one might call the high and holy mystery of government from being contaminated by the debates of private men.⁴⁴

And the rest of the Preface shows that he thought this belief at least worthy of an answer. Later, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes returned to the issue. He explicitly addressed—and, as he thought, answered—the objection that the truth about politics was too difficult for the common people to grasp.⁴⁵ All this is a way of emphasizing that Hobbes's commitment to the principle of publicity was not a simple a fortiori consequence of his dogmatism, his vanity, or his own affection for positions he had staked out. It was an affirmative answer to an open question, and one that he was willing to support with argument.

(We know also—and we may suspect that he knew⁴⁶—that nothing would have filled his contemporaries with greater horror than Hobbism being taught in the universities as the basis of civic education.⁴⁷ He did not tailor his views to appeal to his patrons—on the contrary, his stubborn pursuit of the truth about politics tended to alienate them—and there is no indication that he thought the sovereign *qua* teacher should tailor his views to the predilections of his audience either.)

4.

What, then is the ground of this commitment in Hobbes? Why did he insist that it is against the sovereign's duty "to let the people be ignorant or mis-informed of the grounds, and reasons of those his essential Rights"? Why did he put no faith in pure indoctrination, by which I mean indoctrination carried out without regard to truth, especially given the view (which we have already noted) that men tend to accept at least as a starting point whatever they hear from their social superiors? Why insist so stridently on something like the liberal principle of publicity in the face of the possibilities furnished by that sort of credulity?

The answer is that Hobbes appears to have believed, with some quite refreshing proto-Enlightenment optimism, that in the kind of politics he envisages, civil doctrine will be so much at the mercy of individual reason that any attempt to base sovereign authority on something other than "the perspicuity of reasons"⁴⁸—any attempt to base it on falsehood or myth or mystery—will leave political allegiance terribly vulnerable to the ability of actual individuals to figure things out for themselves and to spot a lie when they hear one. The detail of Hobbes's argument for this belief is worth spelling out, for two reasons. First, although the belief is important for the whole enterprise, the argument for it is implicit rather than enunciated in Hobbes's account of reason in politics. The second reason for spelling the argument out in detail is that it appears to contradict

the premise of Hobbes's concern about false teaching in the universities: how can he profess concern about men's credulity and about the effectiveness of 'Aristotelity'⁴⁹ if at the same time he believes people have the capacity to figure out when they are being lied to? I want to show that this contradiction is more apparent than real.

The Hobbesian argument has three phases to it. There is, first, the assertion of a general philosophical connection between human reason and truth. Secondly, there is a special and compelling quality to that connection in areas like politics where survival is at stake. And thirdly—perhaps most important—it matters that the Hobbesian sovereign is going to have to make quite unusual, unfamiliar, even extravagant claims for himself, claims which are bound to be treated skeptically in the first instance by those who hear them and which have no hope at all of long-term acceptance except on the basis of whatever rational survival-oriented arguments may be produced to support them.

The natural desire of men is for truth (if they can possibly get it) rather than falsity, even falsity that has been (to use a phrase from the furniture trade) 'antiqued' or 'distressed' for effect. "[M]en are not generally so much inclined to the reverence of Antiquity, as to preferre Ancient Errors, before New and well proved Truth."⁵⁰ Sure, people harbor all sorts of illusions about all sorts of things, and often they seem "obstinately bent to maintain them"⁵¹ in a way that resists any demonstration of their falsity. And they do tend to take things on faith from those they regard as their betters. Actually, Hobbes is pulled in several different directions on this point. He actually has some faith in naive untutored reason: "[T]hey that have no Science, are in better, and nobler condition with their natural Prudence; than men, that by mis-reasoning, or by trusting them that reason wrong, fall upon false and absurd generall rules. . . ."⁵² Bookish men are often of a 'fluttering' demeanor, "as birds that entring by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glasse window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in."⁵³ On the other hand, we know that Hobbes thinks it inevitable that most men will take their lead in civic doctrine from their social superiors. And he insists, too—as we shall see in the third phase of this argument—that natural reason cannot reach appropriate conclusions in politics unaided by experience organized expertly and transparently as a science. In general, although Hobbes is well aware of men's readiness to accept what others tell them, he insists that even here we are not talking about simple credulity. "The propositions which we receive for truth, we alwaies grant for some reasons of our owne."⁵⁴ We are not always gullible in our trust in others; we trust them rather because we cannot see any reason why the other should want to deceive us.⁵⁵ Those, on the other hand, who can see such a reason do tend to fall back on their own prudential resources. So much is a matter of basic rationality.

Beyond that, politics engages certain special concerns. As Hobbes continually emphasizes, politics concerns matters of life and death. It is because the stakes are so high in this area of life, or, as he puts it, “because the damage is so great, that a properly expounded doctrine of Duties is so useful.”⁵⁶ Reasoning about politics is reasoning about the avoidance of war and death: it is a domain of reasoning in which individual men have the strongest possible incentive to be as careful as they can. So even if the connection between reason and truth is tenuous in certain areas of speculation, there is intense survival-related pressure to make it as tight as possible in politics.⁵⁷ However much men may relish mystery, foolishness and flattery, if they become aware that others are trying to fool them, flatter them, or mystify them about the prospect of some threat to their lives, they have an incentive—the strongest possible incentive, on Hobbes’s account—to resist that foolishness and to pierce through to the truth if they can. Moreover, such resistance would be not only predictable, but utterly respectable, according to Hobbes, because “every man by right of nature is judge himself of the necessity of the means, and of the greatness of the danger” so far as self-preservation is concerned,⁵⁸ and “every man, if he be in his wits”⁵⁹ will properly resist anything that tends to destroy him.

I should emphasize that none of this changes for Hobbes when the source of the falsehood or mystification is a person in political authority. Hobbes insisted, notoriously, that “[t]he Obligation of Subjects to the Sovereign, is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them.”⁶⁰ Readers often ask, “Well, who is to be the judge of this, the subject or the sovereign?”⁶¹ The answer is obvious and dictated irresistibly by the logic of Hobbes’s theory. Ultimately only the subject can be judge, for the judgment is about his own survival.⁶² To allocate such a judgment to the sovereign would be, at best, to beg the very question that was at stake—namely, is this man really entitled to be treated by me as a sovereign on the ground (and for Hobbes there is no other ground for political obligation) that submission to him would promote my survival in the long term?⁶³

I have been arguing that people have greater reason to be diligent in seeking the truth where their survival interests are at stake, and that this is why Hobbes’s sovereign should not be in the business of misleading them about the grounds of his authority. In this matter—related intimately to the survival prospects of his subjects—there is too much of a risk that the sovereign’s lies be exposed or his ‘spin’ rejected. Because of what is at stake—because individuals have the power to reason, and because of what individual reason is for—it is foolish for the sovereign to risk telling lies to people about issues relevant to peace and survival. Against this, someone may cite Hobbes’s well-known observation that a connection with self-interest tends to distort rather than enhance the search for truth.

Hobbes observed that men dispute endlessly and often irrationally about shared standards of right and wrong, where their interests are at stake, but not about geometry—

because men care not, in that subject, what be truth, as a thing that crosses no man's ambition, profit, or lust. For I doubt not, but if it had been a thing contrary to any man's right of dominion, or to the interest of men that have dominion, that the three Angles of a Triangle should be equal to two Angles of a Square, that doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of Geometry suppressed, as far as he whom it concerned was able.⁶⁴

But the contrast here is between a case where interest pits men against one another and a case where their interests are not in competition, rather than between a case where interests are involved and a case where they are not. If you and I have a competing interest in a matter, then our dialogue about it will tend to be distorted by the cross-cutting effects of our opposed interest. Self-interest will certainly upset public reason (which, as we will see, is one of the reasons Hobbes did not make the move from a principle of publicity to a principle of free speech).⁶⁵ But it doesn't follow that self-interest itself distorts a man's reasoning about his own security or survival. I think Quentin Skinner misses this distinction in his recent book when he attributes to Hobbes the view that there is an opposition between reason and interest that surfaces for example in representative assemblies.⁶⁶ In the passage that Skinner cites, Hobbes is certainly saying that individual interests distort the public orientation of reasoning in such assemblies; but it by no means follows that individual interest necessarily distorts individual reasoning. Indeed one has to think quite the contrary, if there is to be any connection at all between Hobbesian reason and Hobbesian psychology.

The third phase of Hobbes's argument concerns the peculiar nature of the arguments (about life and death) that are involved in connecting survival and sovereign authority. In his argument for sovereign authority, Hobbes does not take himself to be reminding people of something they know implicitly already. Nor does he think his political theory is straightforwardly susceptible to natural reason or intuition.⁶⁷ He is well aware that the positions for which he is arguing will appear uncongenial—"To most men this sovereignty and absolute power seems so harsh that they hate the very name of it"⁶⁸—and that his arguments for those positions may be (as we would say) 'counter-intuitive.' Rebuttals based on the unfamiliarity or uncongeniality of the reasoning are going to have to be firmly resisted:

an argument from the Practise of men that have not sifted to the bottom, and with exact reason weighed the causes, and nature of Common-wealths, and suffer daily those miseries, that proceed from the ignorance thereof, is invalid. For though in all places of the world

men should lay the foundation of their houses on the sand, it could not thence be inferred, that so it ought to be. The skill of making and maintaining Commonwealths consisteth in certain Rules, as doth Arithmetique and Geometry; not (as Tennis-play) on Practise only: which Rules, neither poor men have the leisure, nor men that have had the leisure, have hitherto had the curiosity, or the method to find out.⁶⁹

Thus if Hobbes's arguments do not work *as arguments*, then the positions will be lost: there is nothing else to support them.⁷⁰ Hobbes knew then that his task was difficult, and that if the reasoning the sovereign deployed were to be exposed as a sham, there would be nowhere else to turn to for support for his positions.⁷¹

When I say that Hobbes acknowledges that his conclusions are uncongenial to most people, I do not mean that he thinks they go against people's self-interest. Hobbes is not (as Skinner seems to think) contrasting reason with interest here.⁷² Instead, the argument is about short-term interests versus interests that are so long-term that nothing but good political science will enable men to grasp them:

For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses (that is their Passions and Selfe-love) through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance, but are destitute of those prospective glasses, (namely Morall and Civill Science,) to see a farre off the miseries that hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoided.⁷³

Since the issue is between immediately apparent interest, on the one hand, and difficult and counter-intuitive propositions about long-term interest, on the other, nothing but impeccable argumentation (set out in a way that is proof against assaults mounted in the name of short-term reasoning) will do, so far as the intellectual basis of Hobbesian sovereignty is concerned. Hobbes has no choice then but to present the argument for his position as science; and since the certain sign of science is for him the ability to "demonstrate the truth thereof perspicuously to another,"⁷⁴ he has no choice but to present his theory in a way that respects the intellects of the members of his audience. The motto from St. Paul that ends *De Cive*—"Let every man be fully persuaded in his owne mind"⁷⁵—sums up the inescapable spirit of Hobbesian civil doctrine.

How, finally, do we reconcile all this with Hobbes's own concerns about men's credulity and irrationality? Two points are important. First, the fact that Hobbes believes (and rightly) that there is nothing except reason for him to rely on does not mean that he is particularly confident that reason will work. On the contrary, as Quentin Skinner has pointed out, Hobbes was constantly exercised by concern about how much reason could achieve unassisted by anything except the laying out of a demonstrative argument; and *Leviathan*, in contrast to some of his earlier work, "embodies a new and far more pessimistic sense of what the powers of

unaided reason can hope to achieve.”⁷⁶ The great merit of Skinner’s new book is that it presents Hobbes’s torment about the use of rhetoric to supplement argument in aid of truth in circumstances where he had become convinced there was nowhere else to turn.

For, secondly, although Hobbes thought that the teaching of false political theories had an effect, it was not the sort of effect he was looking for. He acknowledged that the writings of Aristotle and of the radical Catholic natural lawyers were very effective in destabilizing existing institutions. But they were incapable of producing the sort of long-term settled support for sovereign authority that Hobbes indicated was required. Their effectiveness was in the production of wild, unstable beliefs and the sort of ‘fluttering’ mentality that I mentioned earlier.⁷⁷ Hobbes knew that political arrangements of the type he thought were needed could not possibly be supported in this way. They required settled and resolute support, not the kind of intellectual support that would be vulnerable to every whim of philosophical fashion. Men are constantly in danger of being driven away from the burdens and sacrifices of citizenship and of losing sight of the real but long-term interests that such burdens and sacrifices serve. If the sacrifices are supported by nothing better than lies or mythology, then there is no guarantee whatsoever that they will not be subverted by the first piece of plausible nonsense that comes along arguing in the other direction. This point is connected to Hobbes’s general picture of mental life unguided by any standards of intellectual discipline: “The secret thoughts of a man run over all things holy, prophane, clean, obscene, grave, and light, without shame, or blame”⁷⁸ Without the discipline of reason, political ideology is tremendously insecure; and the discipline of reason is incapable of mitigating this insecurity except as logic, i.e. except in a way that is firmly oriented to the pursuit and preservation of truth. Again, I don’t want to exaggerate the point.⁷⁹ There was no guarantee in Hobbes’s system that truth and sound argument *could* in fact secure the sort of stable support that was needed. But Hobbes thought it certain that lies (of the sort that were currently being taught) would not conduce to stability. And so, he maintained, the prudent sovereign had no choice but to experiment with the teaching of the truth.

5.

Our conclusion so far is that Hobbes thought telling people the truth about the basis of authority and obligation would be in the sovereign’s best interest—i.e., “not onely his Duty, but his Benefit also, and Security.”⁸⁰ Now I want to ask: is this purely a matter of strategy for Hobbes, or is there also an element of respect? Is there a sense in his philosophy that persons as rational agents are entitled to be told the truth about

matters like these? Certainly Hobbes never puts it quite like that. But it is worth noticing a number of ways in which his mainly strategic argument approaches the character of an argument based on respect.

Consider first the sovereign who does decide to risk a lie to his subjects—about the basis of his legitimacy, for example, or about the sacrifices he is entitled to ask of them. There is no guarantee that such a sovereign will be found out.⁸¹ But he is taking a chance. By lying to the people, the sovereign is putting himself in a position akin to that of ‘the Foole’ in Chapter Fifteen of *Leviathan*: he would have to rely on people’s gullibility, on their error, “which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security.”⁸² In other words, he relies as much as ‘the Foole’ does on insulting his subjects’ intelligence on a matter where it is important that they know the truth (because there is no other reliable basis on which they can figure out what they owe to the sovereign).

Moreover, the foolish sovereign is not entitled to defend his lies by saying that they are being put about in a good cause. If they are accepted at face value by the subject (and that presumably is the acceptance he seeks), their tendency will be to promote more (or perhaps less)⁸³ obedience than is in fact required. To the extent of that excess (or shortfall) they are lies in a bad cause, not a good cause. Any appearance to the contrary stems from the careless assumption that Hobbes is anxious to secure any old submission, rather than the exact type or degree of submission that it is in fact safe and appropriate for the subject to provide.

A second point is that even if the argument is strategic—the sovereign is better off if his people are taught the truth—it is strategic in relation to the interests of the entire political community not just the individual or individuals who happen to occupy the office of sovereign. As Hobbes puts it, the “grounds upon which one person has a right to govern, and the rest an obligation to obey . . . are necessary to be taught the people, who without them cannot live in peace among themselves.”⁸⁴ The sovereign after all is constituted among the people, and each of his acts is imputable to the people. The lies that we imagine (in the formulation I have been using) him telling the people are really lies that they tell themselves. Such lies would therefore be wrong or inappropriate, as ways in which people might systematically mislead themselves and each other about issues of life and death that are extraordinarily complex and that in fact require—for safety’s sake—the most careful and fastidious reasoning.

Thirdly, we should not neglect the importance for Hobbes of respect for science as such and for scientific standards, and thus indirectly for the intellects to which scientific standards pay tribute. In *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, David Johnston has observed Hobbes’s enthusiasm for the idea of a society enlightened by science and permeated by the practical and technological achievements that science would make possible.⁸⁵

Certainly Hobbes did not think this possible without the establishment of peace and sovereign authority, and it is worth remembering that in the famous passage about life in the state of nature—"nasty, brutish, and short"—he listed navigation, engineering, and geography as prominent casualties of war.⁸⁶ But he also did not think it possible except among a people more deeply imbued with the ideas and values of science and intellectual rigor.⁸⁷ An enlightened society would have to be a society freed from mythology, fantasy, and superstitious religion. Before what Hobbes referred to as "the Night of our naturall Ignorance"⁸⁸ could be enlightened with science, it would have to be freed from the kingdom of darkness that populated it with ghosts and goblins and phantoms. And that emancipation could not take place if the very political power that guaranteed the peace (in which alone science and enlightenment could flourish) was itself supported by myths and lies of various sorts.

The same point can be put another way. One can imagine an intellectually respectable argument yielding the conclusion that the sovereign must be prepared to support his state with lies; that is, one could imagine a rationally compelling argument for a noble lie or for *arcana imperii*. There is nothing in such an argument inherently insulting to reason: it would be a sort of 'Government House' intellectualism, along the lines of the passage in the *De Cive* cited earlier.⁸⁹ However, such an argument could hardly be sustained if one of its premises was the need to establish sovereign authority in order to secure peace as a condition of general open-ended enlightenment in society; for then the overall aim of the enterprise would be at war with the means employed to pursue it. One would be seeking peace in order to foster the growth of the very intellectual inquisitiveness that would undermine the lies that supported the sovereign, as guarantor of peace.

One last point in this connection. I have said almost nothing about the importance of Hobbes's contractarianism for his subscription to the principle of publicity. Hobbes we must remember is at bottom a theorist of government by consent, and even if he has some curious ideas about the relation between consent and duress—"Covenants entred into by fear . . . are obligatory"⁹⁰—he certainly cannot give up the connection between consent and understanding, without serious damage to the overall structure of his theory.⁹¹ In Hobbes's politics as much as Rawls's, everyone is deemed to know about the system of government and the principles underlying it "all that he would know if their acceptance were the result of an agreement."⁹² It would be wrong, however, to regard this as an independent Hobbesian argument for the commitment to publicity. The contractarian structure, with this implication, is appropriate for modeling a politics already committed to the principle of publicity; if there is no such commitment we should choose a different model-theoretic structure, such as 'the impartial spectator' of classical utilitarianism.⁹³ Still, the

importance of Hobbes's contractarianism is that it makes clear how many strands of his political theory come together in his version of the principle of publicity, how much he would have to give up if he abandoned it, and how far it is to be understood as a principle in terms of which we deal with one another, rather than as a mere stratagem for a distinct political class.

6.

For us today, it is quite difficult to separate a commitment to truth from a principle of free speech or, at the very least, what Immanuel Kant referred to as "freedom of the pen."⁹⁴ So we are naturally inclined to see Hobbes's rejection of the latter principle as tantamount to his rejection of the former.⁹⁵ Though (as we have seen) Hobbes doubted that self-serving lies put about by the sovereign would survive the scrutiny of his subjects' prudential reasoning, that does not mean he believed that the mass of individual subjects would eventually arrive at the truth about politics, if left to their own and each other's devices in a free marketplace of ideas. For one thing, the processes by which 'the marketplace of ideas' would work, so far as political truth was concerned, might well involve civil war as the best approximation to a winnowing process. And for another thing, there was no reason, Hobbes thought, to suppose that truth would win out even eventually if people had no guidance but their own gullibility limited by their own experience. Richard Flathman is right to notice in Hobbes a "consuming fear of the disruptive and destructive power of ideas and doctrines, beliefs and opinions,"⁹⁶ and to observe that even if Hobbes thought it counterproductive for the sovereign to probe a man's "inward thought, and beleaf,"⁹⁷ he nevertheless regarded the teaching, publishing and dissemination of doctrines as outward actions whose supervision was crucial to the well-being of the commonwealth. Anyone who purports to teach in effect purports to govern,⁹⁸ so he is (if not licensed by the sovereign) a potential competitor; and the reason for governing him, Hobbes adds, is not that he (the would-be teacher) is the sovereign's subject, but that the people he purports to teach are.⁹⁹

So there is no question for Hobbes of any entitlement to academic freedom or freedom of the press. The government has a right to regulate and restrict what is taught in the universities, to eradicate all beliefs that lead subjects to disobedience, replacing them with beliefs that are supportive of their civil duties.¹⁰⁰ "[A]ppointing Teachers, and examining what Doctrines are conformable, or contrary to the Defence, Peace, and Good of the people" is one of the essential rights—indeed one of the essential duties—associated with the office of sovereign.¹⁰¹ If he fails to do so, the commonwealth is weakened and insecure. Equally debilitating

would be a licence for people to publish what they like in political philosophy. So far as the contemporary canon was concerned, Hobbes was adamant: "I cannot imagine, how any thing can be more prejudicial to a Monarchy, than the allowing of such books to be publikly read, without present applying such correctives of discreet Masters, as are fit to take away their Venime."¹⁰²

In section 4, I mentioned that the subject always retains the right to judge for himself whether a putative sovereign is in fact furnishing the protection he purports to furnish.¹⁰³ It is worth noticing the uneasy relation in which this stands to Hobbes's views about freedom of opinion. Summing up his position on freedom of opinion, Hobbes says the following:

[T]he Right of Judging what Doctrines are fit for Peace, and to be taught the Subjects, is in all Common-wealths inseparably annexed . . . to the Sovereign Power. . . . For it is evident . . . that men's actions are derived from the opinions they have of the Good, or Evil, which from those actions redound unto themselves; and consequently, men that are once possessed of an opinion, that their obedience to the Sovereign Power will be more hurtfull to them, than their disobedience, will disobey the Laws, and thereby overthrow the Common-wealth, and introduce confusion and Civill war; for the avoiding whereof, all Civill Government was ordained.¹⁰⁴

This looks as though Hobbes is saying that it is important for the sovereign rather than the subject to be the judge of whether obedience to the sovereign power is hurtful to the subject. In fact that is not quite what he is saying. According to this passage, if there is to be any purveying of opinion on a matter so crucial to political obligation it is to be done only by the sovereign or those authorized by him. Still, in the last analysis it is up to the subject to judge whether submission is hurtful to him or not. Indeed it is precisely because this is something for the subject to judge, that Hobbes is so insistent that the sovereign cannot afford to be nonchalant about the dissemination of political opinions.

So—as I said at the start of this section—it is hard *for us* to drive a wedge between an entitlement to act on one's own judgement (concerning the sovereign's authority) and an entitlement to voice and disseminate one's judgment. We are accustomed to think that if an individual is entitled to act on an opinion, he must surely be entitled to express it to others. But Hobbes's denial of that is not inconsistent—no more than his suggestions that my allegiance may be at an end before your allegiance is, or that a subject may have the right to resist a sovereign who is rightfully using force against him.¹⁰⁵ In all these cases, the rights and duties in question are based, in an intensely individualistic way, on the self-interest of the person concerned, and the apparent disparity between them is due simply to Hobbes's refusal to engage in any spurious reconciliation of conflicts of such individual interests under the heading of something like the general good.

If publicity does not entail freedom of speech, still less does it entail any principle of political participation. As Hobbes denies that there is any more liberty in a democracy than in a monarchy,¹⁰⁶ so he would presumably also deny that there is any more transparency. Another way of putting this, using some ideas from the end of the previous section, is that one can model the principle of publicity in a Hobbesian monarchy or oligarchy using the underlying contractarian structure.¹⁰⁷ It is certainly important for people to know what system of government they are under, and Hobbes is constantly at pains to ensure that people are under no illusions that what pretends to be a democracy may actually be an aristocracy of orators, etc. So although publicity does not require day-to-day participation, it may still be relevant to the understanding in society of such participation as there is.

7.

To finish, I want to consider two or three passages in Hobbes's writings which might be read in a way that refutes the argument I have been developing in this essay. I have presented Hobbes as committed to a version of the liberal principle of publicity; I have presented him as an opponent of the strategy of supporting authority with myths and lies; I have presented him as a principled supporter of the idea of truth in politics. But the passages I want to consider offer some support for alternative readings. They suggest (i) that Hobbes is a Machiavellian about truth, or (ii) that Hobbes is a pragmatist about truth, or (iii) that Hobbes is a conventionalist about truth. There is some merit to each of these interpretations, but I will show that none of them undermines the central contention of my analysis.

(i) To say that Hobbes is a Machiavellian about truth is to imply that he thinks and recommends that the sovereign should regard truth as subordinate to some other more basic goal, like peace or stability, and as something to be manipulated if need be in pursuit of that more basic goal.¹⁰⁸ A Machiavellian sovereign might be prepared to lie to other sovereigns, or he might be prepared to lie to his own subjects. I know of nothing in Hobbes's work to exclude the former possibility, but it is the latter that I want to focus on. In an otherwise compelling essay entitled 'Truth and Politics,' Hannah Arendt groups Hobbes among the thinkers who believe that lies told to the people about the basis of political authority might actually serve the needs of authority. She says, for example, that Hobbes thought "lying can very well serve to establish or safeguard the conditions for the search after truth,"¹⁰⁹ explaining in a note that she has in mind a passage from one of the later chapters of *Leviathan*:

Hobbes explains that “disobedience may lawfully be punished in them, that against the laws teach even true philosophy.” For is not “leisure the mother of philosophy; and Commonwealth the mother of peace and leisure”? And does it not follow that the Commonwealth will act in the interest of philosophy when it suppresses a truth which undermines peace?¹¹⁰

Indeed the passage she refers to is even worse than that, for Hobbes talks explicitly about “the suppression of True Philosophy” as something that might be necessary.¹¹¹ It is not easy to reconcile the deliberate suppression of truth with the principle of publicity. Still, we have to be more careful than Arendt was with such passages. The deliberate suppression of truth is not the same as the deliberate dissemination of a falsehood—particularly when the only reason given for the legitimate suppression of ‘True Philosophy’ is the possibility of its being taught “by such men, as neither by lawfull authority, nor sufficient study, are competent Judges of the truth.”¹¹² An analogy may help. In our society, the prescription and dispensing of controlled drugs for medical purposes is permitted only to licensed physicians and pharmacists, because amateurs are capable of doing great harm without specialist pharmaceutical knowledge. Suppose the authorities come across an unlicensed individual dispensing morphine to a patient for whom (as things turn out) such a prescription is actually indicated. We might still favor the prosecution of the dispenser even though he got lucky on this occasion and dispensed the right drug (in the right dosage, etc.), because our overall aim is to secure not just appropriate but reliably appropriate prescription of dangerous drugs. Similarly, if we think (as Hobbes did) that the dissemination of political doctrines is at least as much in need of control as the dissemination of dangerous drugs, we might countenance the prosecution of an unlicensed purveyor of ideas even if the ideas he was purveying on a given occasion happened to be true.

There are other passages which might excite some alarm. In an annotation to Chapter VI of *De Cive*, Hobbes suggests that certain principles, dogmas and doctrines are capable of generating “dissensions, discords, reproaches, and by degrees war it self” quite independently of their truth or falsehood:

[N]either doth this happen by reason of the falsehood of the Principle, but of the disposition of men, who seeming wise to themselves, will needs appear such to all others: But though such dissensions cannot be hindered from arising, yet may they be restrained by the exercise of the supreme power, that they prove no hindrance to the public peace.¹¹³

Once again, though this is hardly congenial to our ideals of free speech, it is not a license for the sovereign or anyone else to lie for the public good. It is simply a recognition that the truth of what someone says is no warrant of his political responsibility. Although there is a truth about

what conduces to peace and although it is important that that truth be taught, it does not follow that the teaching of truth as such—any truth, in any circumstances, by any teacher—is always a prophylactic against discord or civil war.

(ii) The objection we have just considered has Hobbes subordinating truth to some other value. But what if he were to identify them? The general conclusion for which I have been arguing—Hobbes's commitment to something like a principle of publicity—would certainly be undermined (or at least it would lose most of its interest) if Hobbes turned out to be a crude pragmatist about truth in politics. Consider this passage, for example:

And though in matter of Doctrine, nothing ought to be regarded but the Truth; yet this is not repugnant to the regulating of the same by Peace [that is, by the sovereign who keeps the peace]. For Doctrine repugnant to Peace, can no more be True, than Peace and Concord can be against the Law of Nature.¹¹⁴

It is tempting to read “Doctrine repugnant to peace cannot be true” as if it meant that ‘true’ in politics just is whatever conduces to peace, while ‘false’ is whatever disturbs the peace or is likely to result in war.

The temptation should be resisted. On a close reading of the passage just quoted, Hobbes is comparing the connection between truth and peace with the connection between peace and the law of nature. The latter connection is certainly basic in Hobbes's system—he talks about “the first, and Fundamentall Law of Nature; which is, to seek Peace, and follow it.”¹¹⁵ Nevertheless he understands that as a theorem, not a definition or an axiom. Here is Hobbes's definition of law of nature—

A law of nature, (*Lex Naturalis*.) is a Precept, or general Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.¹¹⁶

—and clearly the connection between that and peace, though close, is synthetic and contingent. (Following peace is conducive to a person's individual survival only on account of the fact of our rough equality and only on condition that others seek it too.)¹¹⁷ So, since Hobbes compares the peace-truth connection with another connection that he takes to be synthetic, we should resist any inference that he thinks peace and truth are linked definitionally.

(iii) I guess the appearance that Thomas Hobbes was prepared to play fast and loose with truth is made a little more plausible by his insistence

that certain types of proposition which we (modern liberals) take very seriously—for example, propositions about justice—have only conventional truth-values. Moreover he believed that anyone who denied this—anyone who sought to make political capital out of the allegedly intrinsic truth or falsity of certain propositions about justice—was politically as well as philosophically a menace. That can easily sound like a decision to suppress the truth about justice or to eliminate all debate about what the true meaning of justice actually is, for political reasons.

Now I certainly do not mean to deny that Hobbes was a conventionalist about justice (and right, good and evil, property, honesty, and honor). He did maintain that these terms have the meaning, and only the meaning, that the sovereign assigns to them in a well ordered society. But that is not an alternative to truth, on his account: that is the truth about these terms. Hobbes believed that dispassionate enlightened inquiry into what we would call meta-ethics establishes that almost all moral and ethical vocabulary is relative either to the appetites and aversions of individuals in the state of nature, or to the stipulations and conventions of the sovereign in civil society. That is the truth in meta-ethics, not because we want or need it to be the case, but because of what philosophical inquiry reveals to be the case.

Moreover—and this is very important—I take it Hobbes is saying that that is what the people are to be taught. Once the sovereign has stipulated a meaning for justice, the people are not to be taught (the falsehood) that that stipulation is the intrinsic meaning of the term. Instead they are to be taught that it is a purely conventional meaning and that, on account of the truth in meta-ethics, that is the best one can expect. I think Robert Kraynack gets this exactly right when he attributes to Hobbes the view not only that people should accept certain propositions about justice which the sovereign stipulates, but that people should accept those propositions about justice on the ground that the sovereign stipulates them: “Although this sounds like an . . . absurd claim, it is in reality a denial of pretense and accords perfectly with the views of an enlightened people. For a fully enlightened people would insist that the sovereign be recognized as nothing more than an arbiter.”¹¹⁸ It may not be altogether accurate to go on to say (as Kraynack does) that “Hobbes’s sovereign seeks the end of doctrinal warfare by disavowing all interest in the rightness or truth of doctrines . . . and by imposing arbitrary settlements for the sake of civil peace.”¹¹⁹ As I have emphasized, Hobbes’s subjects are to be told that ‘just’ has no inherent meaning apart from the sovereign’s stipulations not only because that is convenient and peace-promoting, but also because it is true. And they are to be taught that it is true.

I think Quentin Skinner disputes this. He says, in a footnote to his new book, “it would seem that, within a Hobbesian polity, subjects would be merely informed rather than taught about the character of moral

discourse.”¹²⁰ That has to be a mistake. Subjects will not be able to understand the wrongness of disputing with the sovereign about the definition of justice unless they understand that the word has nothing but conventional content. They will not be able to understand why bickering about its ‘true meaning’ is a threat to peace unless they grasp that the term has no true meaning except by virtue of a sovereign stipulation.

Admittedly the fact that the sovereign stipulates that action X is unjust might make X evil for the subject in a sense that is not just an echo of the sovereign’s stipulation. For suppose the subject knows that the stipulation means the sovereign will punish X as a capital offense. Then that makes X evil for the subject, in the natural sense of repugnant to the subject’s desires and appetites.¹²¹ As Alan Ryan puts it, “[t]he Sovereign’s ability to punish us for transgressing his rules makes situations good and bad in ways they were not before, but not in any sense in which they were not before.”¹²² Even so, the subject’s apprehension of this complex situation will be distorted unless he understands the role of sovereign stipulation in determining what now counts as injustice (and what, consequently, it is dangerous to do). If the content of his belief is “Doing X is evil because of the danger of angering the sovereign even though X is or may well be intrinsically just,” then his sense of political obligation will be nuanced in a way that is not only inaccurate but in certain circumstances dangerous to himself or others. It is better, surely, for him to hold the correct belief—which is that it is wrong to do X, first because the sovereign has stipulated that X is unjust (and there is no question of X’s being intrinsically just or unjust apart from such stipulation), and secondly because it is dangerous to anger the sovereign.

Only if the stipulation is understood in this way by the subject can it plausibly be represented as an action of the sovereign in the fullest Hobbesian sense—i.e., as a stipulation performed by the subjects themselves through the sovereign’s action as representative. The representation idea¹²³—crucial to the model-theoretic structure of Hobbes’s contractarianism—cannot work here if the sovereign’s stipulation of a meaning for justice is opaque to the subject’s understanding. If the sovereign is the people’s representative set up by agreement, then ideally they own his actions, which means they take responsibility for them and understand them just as if they were their own. Now, as I said earlier,¹²⁴ that is not itself an argument for publicity concerning stipulations, for there is no independent reason for saying that the contract/representation model must be able to work. Nevertheless its application here shows once again how central the publicity principle is to the heart of Hobbes’s philosophy.

So: people are not only to be taught the sovereign’s conventions; they are to be taught that they are conventions. Hobbes’s skepticism about intrinsic moral meanings is itself to be taught as orthodoxy, along with the problems that it gives rise to, and the conventional stipulations that

follow in its wake. To the extent that the people are under a misapprehension about any of this, the sovereign will be failing in his duty and exposing himself foolishly to various forms of subversion that might be predicated on these misunderstandings. Beyond that, and in the spirit of the remarks with which we ended section 5, the subjects' being under any misapprehension about meta-ethics is also a threat to their overall enlightenment and an obstacle to any attempt to unify their understanding of morals and politics with their understanding of science and logic generally.

All this makes Hobbes a rather more modern thinker than he is often presented as being, and in my view a liberal thinker, if not in his political conclusions, then certainly in his respect for individuals as reasoning beings. It surely makes him modern in the sense that his own determination to analyze politics and get to the bottom of human affairs is intended to resonate, all the way down, with the reasoning capacities of the ordinary individuals who are the subject-matter of his inquiry: "For the Civill Authority being more visible, and standing in the clearer light of naturall reason, cannot choose but draw to it in all times a very considerable part of the people."¹²⁵ I have tried, in this essay, not to exaggerate Hobbes's optimism about all this. He did take a rather chastened view, one that veered in his later years towards melancholy if not despair. Still, I must say I find something enormously heartening in the eagerness with which Hobbes sought to reflect his own intellectual enterprise in *De Cive* and *Leviathan* in the understanding and enlightenment that he thought any good society should encourage in its members, and in his dogged refusal to abandon that enterprise when the truths that he discovered ceased to be familiar, safe, and respectable.

NOTES

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Ch. 47, p. 480. (This work is referred to hereinafter as "*Lev.*")

² *Idem.*

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, ed. Stephen Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 4. (This work is referred to hereinafter as '*Beh.*')

⁴ See Jeremy Waldron, 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism,' in my *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers 1981-91* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 43 ff.

⁵ See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 133, 454, 547-8, and 582.

⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 68. In a footnote, Rawls glosses this as follows: "[I]n a free society that all correctly recognize as just there is no need for the illusions and delusions of ideology for society to work properly and for citizens to accept it willingly. In this sense a well-ordered society may lack ideological, or false, consciousness" (*idem.*)

⁷ For the idea that this is a distinct mode of legislating, see Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 178 ff. (Book Four, 718 ff.).

⁸ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 240.

⁹ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, pp. 231–2.

¹⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law: Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 176–7 (Part II, Chapter xxviii, sect. 8). (This work is referred to hereinafter as ‘*Ele.*’)

¹¹ Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 146 ff. (Chapter xiii, sect. 9). (This work is referred to hereinafter as ‘*Cit.*’)

¹² Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive: The English Version*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1983), Ch. 13, p. 160. (This is a contemporary translation from the Latin of the work whose modern translation is cited in note 13, above. This translation is referred to hereinafter as ‘*Civ.*’)

¹³ *Ele.*, Ch. 28, p. 176.

¹⁴ *Civ.*, Ch. 13, p. 160.

¹⁵ *Beh.*, pp. 16 and 58.

¹⁶ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 232.

¹⁷ What follows is drawn in part from Jeremy Waldron, ‘Hobbes on Truth and Civil Doctrine,’ in Amelie Rorty (ed.) *Philosophers on Education* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁸ *Lev.*, p. 491 (Review and Conclusion).

¹⁹ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 236–7. See also *Beh.*, pp. 39 and 54.

²⁰ See *Beh.*, pp. 56–7. At *Beh.*, p. 58, Hobbes observes that “[t]he core of rebellion, as you have seen by this, and read of other rebellions, are the Universities . . .”

²¹ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 237.

²² *Lev.*, Ch. 46, p. 462. (Hobbes is an early critic of the idea of a philosophical canon.)

²³ Cf. *Ele.*, Ch. 28, pp. 176–7.

²⁴ See *Lev.*, p. 486 (‘A Review, and Conclusion’). See also *Cit.*, Ch. 10, pp. 117–8.

²⁵ *Lev.*, Ch. 21, pp. 151–2. (See also Richard E. Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1993), pp. 131 and 143, where Hobbes is described as “[c]onvinced that an “enchanted” allegiance had long since ceased to be a possibility, and totally opposed to an “enthusiastic” or “patriotic” one. . . .”)

²⁶ *Ele.*, Ch. 28, 176.

²⁷ *Idem.*

²⁸ *Lev.*, Ch. 21, p. 151.

²⁹ For the argument, see Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 197–207.

³⁰ Bishop Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan, or the Great Whale* (London, John Crooke, 1658), p. 515, cited by Hampton, op. cit., p. 199.

³¹ *Lev.*, Ch. 18, p. 124–5.

³² Cf. Flathman, op. cit., p. 3 (my emphasis). See also Quentin Skinner, ‘Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State,’ *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7 (1999), p. 24.

³³ *Cit.*, Ch. 10, p. 117.

³⁴ *Cit.*, p. 14 (Preface to the Readers).

³⁵ *Idem.*

³⁶ This wording is from Flathman, op. cit., p. 99.

³⁷ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 232.

³⁸ Flathman, op. cit, pp. 144, 145 (interpolations in the original).

³⁹ *Lev.*, p. 3 (Dedication to Francis Godolphin).

⁴⁰ When he is trying to find out whether some proposition is true or not, his method is not to ascertain—e.g. by introspection—whether it is held by Hobbes!

⁴¹ *Lev.*, pp. 490–1 (‘A Review, and Conclusion’).

⁴² *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 237. See also the rather disarming (disingenuous?) modesty at *Lev.*, Ch. 30, pp. 232–3.

⁴³ *Cit.*, p. 7 (Preface to the Readers). For the tradition of *arcana imperii*, see Peter S. Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). See also Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 426 ff., for some observations on the significance of the fact that *De Cive* was published originally in Latin.

⁴⁴ *Cit.*, p. 7 (Preface to the Reader).

⁴⁵ See *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 233, for a remarkable discussion.

⁴⁶ See *Lev.*, p. 491 ('A Review, and Conclusion') for an acknowledgment that "in the Revolution of States, there can be no very good Constellation for Truths of this nature to be born under. . . ." Hobbes certainly must have known that Oxford University had Leviathan burned in the Bodleian quadrangle: see Ryan, op. cit., pp. 204–5.

⁴⁷ See Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

⁴⁸ *Civ.*, Ch. XIII, s. ix, p. 160.

⁴⁹ See note 24, above, and accompanying text.

⁵⁰ *Lev.*, p. 490 ('A Review, and Conclusion').

⁵¹ *Lev.*, Ch. 7, p. 48.

⁵² *Lev.*, Ch. 5, p. 36.

⁵³ *Lev.*, Ch. 4, p. 28. Hobbes goes on to insist that ignorance is not the opposite of knowledge, but a sort of middle "between true Science, and erroneous doctrine" (idem).

⁵⁴ *Civ.*, Ch. 18, p. 253.

⁵⁵ *Civ.*, Ch. 18, p. 254.

⁵⁶ *Cit.*, p. 8 (Preface to the Reader)

⁵⁷ One might give this a naturalistic gloss: my individual reason is a capacity that exists naturally—a later age would say that it has evolved—in order to enable me to assess propositions about the exigencies of my survival as accurately as possible.

⁵⁸ *Ele.*, Ch. 14, p. 79. See also *Cit.*, Ch. 1, p. 27, and *Lev.*, Ch. 14, p. 91.

⁵⁹ *Civ.*, Ch. 18, p. 264.

⁶⁰ *Lev.*, Ch. 21, p. 153.

⁶¹ See Bishop Bramhall's question, quoted in Hampton, op. cit., p. 202.

⁶² Hobbes is adamant that this right is inalienable (*Lev.*, Ch. 21, p. 153) and, indeed, that the determination of what conduces to a person's survival cannot be asymmetrically distributed at all (Hobbes, *Civ.*, Ch. 1, pp. 27–8).

⁶³ I do not think this contradicts Hobbes's often-expressed doctrine that it is not for subjects to debate and dispute the sovereign's commands. (See e.g. *Lev.*, Ch. 29, p. 223.) That doctrine has to do with attempts by the subject to second-guess the sovereign's judgment of the common good *qua* judgment of the common good. If subjects start doing that, then there can be no authority at all. Still it is only on the basis of the subject's judgment about (his own) survival that any one can be regarded (by the subject) as a Hobbesian authority on the common good or anything else. Without that judgment or if such judgment is based on grounds that are patently incredible, there is nothing reliable for the authority to appeal to, and no way it can get a grip on the subject's submission. Jean Hampton may be right that the idea of subjects' making their own judgments about the connection between authority and survival wreaks havoc with Hobbes's absolutism in just the way absolutism would be undermined by subjects' making their own judgments about the common good. She may be right that an individual's entitlement to dispute the basis of the sovereign's

authority (so far as the individual's own self-interest is concerned) is politically and pragmatically indistinguishable from his disputing the merits (so far as the commonwealth is concerned) of the sovereign's actions and edicts. (See Hampton, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–207.) Or she may be wrong about this. Either way, the position is fundamental in Hobbes's theory, and Hobbes must accept whatever follows from it so far as his absolutism is concerned.

⁶⁴ *Lev.*, Ch. 11, p. 74. See also Hobbes's announced intention (at the end of *Leviathan*) to return to the less controversial speculations about "Bodies Naturall": *Lev.*, p. 491 ('A Review, and Conclusion').

⁶⁵ See below, section 7.

⁶⁶ See Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, *op. cit.*, p. 349, and *Lev.*, Ch. 25, p. 181.

⁶⁷ Says Hobbes in *Beh.*, pp. 158–9: "You may perhaps think that a man has need of nothing else to know the duty he owes to his governor, and what right he has to order him, but a good natural wit; but it is otherwise. For it is a science, and built upon sure and clear principles, and to be learned by deep and careful study, or from masters that have deeply studied it." (See also *Beh.*, p. 144: "Common people know nothing by their own meditation; they must therefore be taught the grounds of their duty, and the reasons why calamities ever follow disobedience to their lawful sovereigns.")

⁶⁸ *Cit.*, Ch. 6, sect. 17, p. 87. See also *Lev.*, Ch. 18, pp. 128–9.

⁶⁹ *Lev.*, Ch. 20, p. 145.

⁷⁰ Actually that's not quite true: Hobbes observes disarmingly that even if his positions are not supported by reason, "yet I am sure they are Principles from Authority of Scripture; as I shall make it appear, when I shall come to speak of the Kingdome of God." *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 233. (The reference forward is to *Lev.*, Ch. 40, pp. 322 ff.) But since his theology is at least as controversial as his political theory, this doesn't add much.

⁷¹ Tom Sorell, in *Hobbes* (London: Routledge, 1986), Ch. 10, has made a lot of Hobbes's conviction that a good political philosophy can appeal to the unaided reason of the ordinary person. If by "unaided reason," Sorell means reason before the teachers of Aristotelity get to it, then that is worth emphasizing. But I think it is a mistake to place too much reliance on an early passage in Hobbes to the effect that the task of political philosophy is to "put men in mind of what they know already, or may know by their own experience." (*Ibid.*, p. 143. The quotation is from *Ele.*, p. 21.)

⁷² See note 69, above, and accompanying text.

⁷³ *Lev.*, Ch. 18, p. 129.

⁷⁴ *Lev.*, Ch. 5, p. 37; see also Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

⁷⁵ *Civ.*, Ch. 18, p. 265, quoting Romans 14: 5.

⁷⁶ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, *op. cit.*, p. 347. See especially *Lev.*, pp. 483–4 ('A Review, and Conclusion').

⁷⁷ See note 56, above, and accompanying text.

⁷⁸ *Lev.*, Ch. 8, p. 52.

⁷⁹ But Hobbes himself sometimes did, as in the following passage from *Beh.*, p. 56: "I despair of any lasting peace amongst ourselves, till the Universities here shall bend and direct their studies to the teaching of it. . . . For I make no doubt, but that solid reason, backed with the authority of so many learned men, will more prevail for the keeping of us in peace among ourselves, than any victory can do over the rebels."

⁸⁰ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, p. 233.

⁸¹ "For such is the ignorance and aptitude to error generally of all men, but especially of them that have not much knowledge of natural causes, and of the nature and interests of men, as by innumerable and easy tricks to be abused." (*Lev.*, Ch. 37, p. 304.)

⁸² *Lev.*, Ch. 15, p. 102.

⁸³ See note 34, above, and accompanying text.

⁸⁴ *Beh.*, p. 160 (my emphasis).

⁸⁵ David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 122 ff.

⁸⁶ *Lev.*, Ch. 13, p. 89.

⁸⁷ See Johnston, op. cit., pp. 126 ff.

⁸⁸ *Lev.*, Ch. 44, p. 418.

⁸⁹ See *Cit.*, p. 7 (Preface to the Readers). See also note 45 above, and accompanying text. For ‘Government House’ theorizing, see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 108–10.

⁹⁰ *Lev.*, Ch. 14, p. 97.

⁹¹ I am grateful to Jeff Gordon for this point.

⁹² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, op. cit., p. 133.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 177–92.

⁹⁴ Immanuel Kant, ‘On the Common Saying: “This Maybe True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice”’ in Hans Reiss (ed.) *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 84–5.

⁹⁵ Indeed, Kant subtitled this part of his essay ‘Against Hobbes’ (*ibid.*, 73).

⁹⁶ Flathman, op. cit., p. 144. See also Flathman, *Reflections Of a Would-Be Anarchist: Ideals and Institutions of Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 35, for Hobbes’s apprehensions about pluralism.

⁹⁷ *Lev.*, Ch. 40, p. 323. See also *Lev.*, Ch. 8, p. 52, as well as Ch. 42, p. 360: “[I]nternal faith is in its own nature invisible, and consequently exempted from all human jurisdiction,” and the section on “the secret thoughts of a man.”

⁹⁸ *Lev.*, Ch. 36, p. 297.

⁹⁹ *Lev.*, Ch. 42, p. 373: “And the reason hereof, is not because they that Teach, but because they that are to learn, are his Subjects.”

¹⁰⁰ Flathman, op. cit., p. 147.

¹⁰¹ *Lev.*, Ch. 30, pp. 231 ff. See also *Lev.*, Ch. 18, pp. 124–5.

¹⁰² *Lev.*, Ch. 29, p. 226.

¹⁰³ See notes 63–66, above, and accompanying text.

¹⁰⁴ *Lev.*, Ch. 42, p. 372.

¹⁰⁵ See *Lev.*, Ch. 21, p. 152.

¹⁰⁶ *Lev.*, Ch. 21, pp. 149–50.

¹⁰⁷ But see also the very subtle discussion in *Ele.*, pp. 118–9 (Part II, Ch. 21, sect. 1): “The first in order of time of these three sorts [of government] is democracy, and it must be so of necessity, because an aristocracy and a monarchy, require nomination of persons agreed upon; which agreement in a great multitude of men must consist in the consent of the major part; and where the votes of the major part involve the votes of the rest, there is actually a democracy.”

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Chs. 15 and 18. (It is a separate question, which I shall not discuss here, what Hobbes—or any other Machiavellian—might think about the truth-value of the proposition that a value such as peace is more important than truth. See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: its Basis and its Genesis*, translated by Else M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), Ch. 8.)

¹⁰⁹ Hannah Arendt, ‘Truth in Politics’ in her collection *Between Past and Future* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 229.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 297–8. For the Hobbes citation, see *Lev.*, Ch. 46, p. 474.

¹¹¹ *Lev.*, Ch. 46, p. 473.

¹¹² *Idem.*

¹¹³ *Civ.*, Ch. 6, p. 96.

¹¹⁴ *Lev.*, Ch. 18, pp. 124–5.

¹¹⁵ *Lev.*, Ch. 14, p. 92.

¹¹⁶ *Lev.*, Ch. 14, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ *Lev.*, Ch. 13, p. 87, Ch. 14, p. 92, and Ch. 15, p. 110.

¹¹⁸ Robert P. Kraynack, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 171.

¹¹⁹ *Idem.*

¹²⁰ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, *op. cit.*, p. 320n.

¹²¹ *Lev.*, Ch. 6, p. 39.

¹²² Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 212. Hence Ryan is unsure about how what the sovereign ought to teach the subjects concerning his stipulations: “It is not difficult to see how we [the subjects] have to admit that what the sovereign declares for justice and injustice are justice and injustice. What is less obvious is how we are to take the claim that we are to take for good and evil what the sovereign declares for such” (*ibid.*, p. 211).

¹²³ *Lev.*, Ch. 16. See also Skinner, ‘Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State,’ *op. cit.*

¹²⁴ See notes 95–96, above, and accompanying text.

¹²⁵ *Lev.*, Ch. 29, p. 227.