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THOMAS HOBBES

The story of the fortunes of Hobbes and his writings is not
remarkable. He was attacked by his contemporaries with
a ferocity which reflects not only their sense of outrage but
also their sense of danger; his writings were rejected, not because
they were bad philosophy, but because they were thought to have
dangerous tendencies; his doctrines, or many of them, were then
appropriated by other writers, their authorship first unacknowledged
and then forgotten; his name began to appear in the works which
passed for histories of philosophy, but only his name; towards the
end of the nineteenth century there was a revival of interest in
the man and his philosophy, a scholar's revival and part of a
general revival of interest in the past of English philosophy,
bringing with it, not only some of the best studies of Hobbes's
writings (e.g., those of Tönnies and Robertson), discoveries of
unpublished MSS., and a collected edition of his works, but also
the beginning of what is called 'Hobbes research'; and then,
quite recently, there was the discovery that Hobbes had a message
for to-day, and with this discovery came a flood of fresh literature
and the foundation, in 1929 after an international congress in
Oxford, of a Hobbes Society. It is a common, if slightly sordid,
history; and perhaps it is difficult to determine which part of it
is the more sordid, the death or the exhumation. Side by side
with this story, however, must be put another, not so long, but
less inglorious: the story of his actual influence upon philosophical
speculation, for it would be safe to say that he was never without
readers. Leibnitz admired his profundity; in spite of the
dominating figure of Locke, Diderot, at least among the
Encyclopediaists, recognized his master, and Rousseau his creditor;
Hegel, in a few brilliant pages in his Geschichte der Philosophie,
appreciated his genius; he was the acknowledged father, in modern
times, of English and German materialism; and his place in the
saints' Calendar of Rationalism was never disputed, though there
is little or no evidence to support the view that Hobbes was a
sorcerer of Natural Religion and Rational Theology. As is so often
the case, Hobbes was more profoundly appreciated by those who
were content to read his writings than by those whose attention
was directed to raising a public memorial to him.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to review the
fortunes of Hobbes's philosophy, but to consider this contemporary
interest in Hobbes and to consider the quality and effect of some
of the more recent studies of his work. And in what I have to
say I shall confine myself to the publications of the last ten years.

The questions I want to ask are, What have we learnt? and, What
have we still to learn?

There are certain elements in the contemporary interest in
Hobbes's writings which, since Hobbes is a philosopher, I should
regard as unhealthy. In the first place, we are met with the
suggestion that Hobbes is a writer whose work is peculiarly
appropriate to the post-war world. 'Hobbes's philosophy,' we are
told, 'possessed precisely that character of balance and common
sense that made him foresee the Great War, and, furthermore, the
subsequent striving for peace resulting from a comprehension of
the disastrous consequences of hate and murder. A number of
scholars emphasized the fact that the present pacifist movement
fulfills the dreams of this great enemy of war.' Now this attitude
towards the writings of such a man as Hobbes is, to say the least,
both dangerous and unprofitable, because it directs its attention
towards all that is most superficial and least significant in those
writings. Every man, I suppose, has his political opinions, and
sometimes they are opinions which will interest and inspire ages
other than his own. But a political philosopher has something
more, and more significant, than political opinions: he has an
analysis of political activity, a comprehensive view of the nature
of political life, and it is this, and not his political opinions, which
it is profitable for a later and different age to study. And if it is
contended that these political opinions belong themselves to that
analysis, it must, nevertheless, remain a mistake to lift a few of
them out of the system of his thought and give them an independent
existence just because when regarded in this way they seem to
meet present needs. And were we content to go back to Hobbes's
writings and enquire what he means by 'war' (for example), we
would scarcely avoid the conclusion that from this (in any case super-
ficial) standpoint his views are no more significant at the present
time than at any other moment in the history of mankind. I mean,
briefly, that, in general, the only healthy attitude towards the
writings of a philosopher is a philosophical attitude. Of course it
is possible to take snippets from the writings of any man and use
them as texts for a sermon; but do not let us confuse this with a
study of his works or even with a genuine attempt to discover the
present significance of those works.

But this attitude towards philosophical writing is to be found
in a more radical form in some of the recent treatments of Hobbes's
philosophy. There is no mere suggestion that the significant
meaning of his work lies in a few of his less impressive remarks, but
the suggestion that, in the ordinary sense, his writing has no meaning
at all. 'Metaphysical utterances which appear to be statements
of "fact" are disguised imperatives, or at least disguised optatives;
our studies of the philosophers would be more remunerative if we
went to them, not for 'truth,' but in order to discern what
particular fiat or utinam their teaching implies,' writes Mr. Basil
Willey. And he follows it up with the remark that 'very nearly
every statement of Hobbes can be reduced either to hatred and
contempt or schoolmen and clerics, or to fear of civil war and
love of ordered living in a stable commonwealth.' Now, that
words have an emotive as well as a referential use has, of course,
been known long enough; it was recognized by Hobbes himself,

I have selected the following books, pamphlets and articles:
F. Tönnies, Thomas Hobbes, Leben und Lehre, 3rd edition (1925);
F. Brandt, Thomas Hobbes' Mechanical Conception of Nature
(1928); A. Levi, La Filosofia di Tommaso Hobbes (1929);
Z. Lubieniński, Die Grundlagen des ethisch-politischen Systems von
Hobbes (1932); H. Schreihager, Thomas Hobbes' Sozialtheorie
(1933); J. Laird, Hobbes (1934); Karl Schmitt, Politische
Theologie (1934); Gierke, Natural Law and the Theory of Society,
tr. Barker (1934); B. Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background
(1934); E. F. Carritt, Morals and Politics (1935); P. Doyle, The
Contemporary Background of Hobbes' State of Nature, in
Economica, Dec., 1927; Z. Lubieniński, Hobbes' Philosophy and
its Historical Background, in Journal of Philosophical Studies.
April, 1930; L. Strauss, Quelques Remarques sur la Science
for example (Leviathan, p. 525). But it appears to have been reserved for more modern times to resolve all language into emotive symbols; and this resolution, involving a self-contradiction and carrying with it a philosophy of misogy (if the phrase may pass), makes, I think, an unsatisfactory foundation upon which to base our study of a philosophic writer. And when we pass from the general view to the particular illustration, the unprofitableness of this view no longer remains in any doubt: it is difficult to understand how anyone who had considered Hobbes’s writings could consent to (much less suggest) this absurd ‘reduction’; it is not even plausible. All the complexity of Hobbes’s thought is swept aside as irrelevant; what cannot be reduced to hate or fear is not Hobbes. I suppose it is impossible to prevent a misological critic from exercising his wits upon the writings of Hobbes, and something interesting may come of it in the end; but what comes of it will never be a satisfactory interpretation of Hobbes’s meaning. And from anyone who undertakes a tour de force of this kind we may perhaps ask for something more brilliant. Certainly ‘it is salutary to remind ourselves that in the Leviathan Hobbes has a “suasive” purpose,’ but to find nothing but this in the Leviathan, and to conclude from our reading that ‘almost in Chinese fashion, he is bringing doctrines to a pragmatic test. Do they or do they not make for the maintenance of lawful authority? he is asking,’ suggests that a closer attention might be given to the text. That philosophers often entertain ambitions extraneous to philosophy is known well enough, and that some of them appear to be unable to prevent these ambitions from contaminating their writings is a sad fact; but to select one of these extraneous purposes—that of the preacher—as the significant characteristic of a piece of philosophic writing appears to me to indicate a misconceived approach to the study of philosophy, and the result is likely to be anything but remunerative.

Now, if the philosophical study of a philosophy excludes this kind of attitude, it does not exclude what may be called a genuinely historical attitude. The detailed consideration of the actual meaning of a philosophical text, regardless of its present significance or of any view we may hold about the truth or error it contains, is certainly valuable; and, as we shall see, some of the best recent work on Hobbes is of this character. Hobbes, in the past, has suffered from a deficiency rather than an excess of this kind of study. There are now plenty of excellent biographies, not a few good expositions of the general outline of his system and some interesting studies of his connexion with earlier and later thought; what we need is more of those detailed, and at least partly historical, studies and interpretations of his work. But the philosophical study of philosophy does, I think, exclude what may be called a merely historical study. There is, probably, less place for a merely antiquarian interest in philosophy than elsewhere; for what elsewhere is merely harmless and at worst an eccentricity, in philosophy becomes dangerous and positively misleading. There will always be new philosophy, and what is new may be valuable even if it is inferior to what we have already. It is the business of philosophy continuously to renew itself. And such new philosophy may arise from the study of what belongs to an earlier time; and the study of what belongs to an earlier time is profitable, in the end, only when it is related to a genuine renaissance. But the study, if it is to result in anything valuable, must be close: it is only by this detailed study of a philosophical text that it can become, not merely an inheritance, but an inspiration for fresh thought. Whether Hobbes’s writings, when studied in this way, can ever yield the philosophical inspiration which has come from (for example) either Plato or Spinoza, is a question which admits of considerable doubt; but, in any case, it cannot be answered in advance, and the attempt (if it attracts us) is worth making.

Setting on one side, then, these wilder and more wilful treatments of the philosophy of Hobbes, let us consider what we have got from our less speculative investments. Perhaps the most remarkable of our acquisitions—remarkable because it now appears odd

1In at least one respect Professor Laird appears to incline to the opinion that Hobbes can never be a source of philosophical inspiration of this kind. He writes, ‘we should probably be wiser if we regarded him, not as a living influence, but as voice from the past whose clarity and incisiveness in a host of particular questions is a perpetual refreshment and a persistent incitement to the rethinking of many prejudices and to the rethinking of moral theory.’ (op. cit. p. 289.)
that we should have had to wait so long for it—is a surer grasp of the connexion between Hobbes and the philosophy, particularly the political philosophy, of the Middle Ages. And perhaps this may be regarded as just one more detail in the mass of evidence that has now been accumulated to support the view that the revolution in politics, religion and philosophy which was believed to have taken place during the seventeenth century has (at any rate as regards its speed and comprehensiveness) been grossly exaggerated. It is surprising now to turn back to those older studies of Hobbes and find him coupled with Bacon; and to have got rid of this misunderstanding puts us on the high road to a truer interpretation of his system as a whole. Perhaps we were misled by Hobbes’s polemics against the schoolmen and by his personal connexion with Bacon into this belief that he was a writer who owed little or nothing to the Middle Ages and that he might be placed among the forerunners of modern science. But, whatever the cause of the error, it may now be said to have perished finally. And Professor Laird’s recent book does more than record the death of this misconception; it has the great merit of providing an interpretation of Hobbes’s work which recognizes the implications of this change of view. In an age when philosophy was giving way at every point to science, Hobbes stood firm; he had probably less patience or sympathy for experimental science than for anything else in the world—not excluding the Pope. In detail he rejected the whole of the scholastic view, and he was among the first to subject that view to a thorough-going criticism. And of all his contemporaries Galileo seems to have had greatest influence upon him. But his conception of the nature of philosophy and of philosophical argument was much more nearly related to that of Scholasticism than to the view of Bacon and his successors. Indeed, Hobbes was much too shrewd a thinker to reject as completely as he pretended to reject, without discrimination or consideration, the whole legacy of the scholastic philosophy. He was acutely aware of its weakness, but he knew it to be, in part at least, a genuine philosophy; and the expressions of hostility towards it which he allows himself to arise, mainly, from an extraneous, non-philosophical interest and, if anything is to be neglected, must be neglected by a true interpretation of his work. Writing of Hobbes’s immediate predecessors, Professor Laird remarks that ‘every one of these authors would have admitted that Hobbes had played his hand without revoking. And the game that they all played had also been played by Hildebrand, Aquinas, Gerson, Occam and Calvin—old-fashioned players, no doubt, but players who always knew how many trumps were out.’ And he concludes that however startling Hobbian novelties may be, they are nevertheless the moves of a master player who knew and kept to the medieval rules. And how great a revolution this view constitutes in an interpretation of Hobbes’s philosophy is known to those who have been brought up on earlier expositions.

Something of the same kind of revolution has taken place, also, in our ideas about the relation of Hobbes and Aristotle. Like Bacon, Hobbes regarded Aristotle as a dead hand in philosophy, paralysing thought and inhibiting further advance; and nobody was more fierce than Hobbes in his belief that, wherever else authority had place, mere authority had no place at all in philosophy. But here, again, we may easily be misled by Hobbes’s truculence; the ‘Vain Philosophy of Aristotle’ taught him more than he ever admitted. The doctrines of the Metaphysics, the Ethics and the Politics, it is true, influenced him little; but I think a closer study would show that he took more than he ever cared to acknowledge from the Rhetoric. Of all the writings of Aristotle, the Rhetoric was the one which Hobbes had studied most profoundly, and many of its doctrines entered deeply into his philosophy.

The recent studies of Hobbes’s writings, then, return a more discriminating answer than hitherto to the question, What is new in Hobbes? Our knowledge is greater, and our prejudice is less than that which earlier writers enjoyed and suffered from. We are no longer pledged to find in these writings nothing but the gospel of modern materialism; and we know that even if that is still to be found, the philosophy of Hobbes is in the nature of a palimpsest. And, if there is danger ahead, it lies in the exaggeration of the, at least, semi-medieval portrait with which this recent work presents us. For there can be no doubt that Hobbes’s writings do represent a profound revolution in European thought, there can be no doubt that he was one of the most original of philosophers; and our task now is to determine the relevance of the new setting into which his writings have been put.
When we turn to consider, not merely what we have learnt during the last ten years from these general treatments of Hobbes's philosophy, but whether these years have produced any significant addition to our detailed knowledge of his writings, we have to record Professor Brandt's *Thomas Hobbes' Mechanical Conception of Nature*, perhaps the most important study of these writings which has yet appeared. Originally published in Danish in 1921, and translated into English in 1928, this volume is one of those detailed examinations of philosophical texts which are more valuable than all the handbooks and general expositions of Hobbes's philosophy that have ever been written. The programme of the work is set in its preface: 'This book proposes to show how the mechanical view of nature shaped itself to Thomas Hobbes. Strange as it may appear, this problem has never been treated in detail. As soon as we leave the province of more general considerations and seek detailed information, we are as a rule left in the dark by the Hobbes literature which, as it is, is not very abundant. It is not only that a really critical account of Hobbes's natural philosophical main work *De Corpore* is still lacking, though some few points have been elucidated, but Hobbes's natural philosophical process of development is as yet nebulous. Enquirers have chiefly studied the main work which Hobbes published in his sixty-seventh year, but have almost entirely ignored the long process of development that must have preceded it.' We have here, then, an elaborate and detailed study of the development of a man's ideas. The questions asked are, 'What did Hobbes actually mean when he said that everything must be explained mechanically? Why did he think so? And, How did he arrive at this mechanical point of view?' And in answering them many subsidiary questions have to be decided. The chronology of Hobbes's early writings presents difficulties; and in a writer apparently so independent as Hobbes, his relation to, and obligation to, Descartes, Mersenne and Galileo is not easy to determine. Having settled these and other preliminary questions, Professor Brandt goes on to distinguish two periods in the development of Hobbes's natural philosophy: the earlier, 1630 to 1641, in which doctrines (many of them recognizably Aristotelian) were propounded which were later to be rejected; and the later, 1642 to 1655, in which the view of the *De Corpore* (published in 1655) was matured. And the work concludes with an elaborate examination of the *De Corpore* itself.

It will be thought, perhaps, that an enquiry of this sort into the minutiae of a dead philosophy is a profitless undertaking, or that it must compare unfavourably with more imaginative and less meticulous experiments in philosophical interpretation. Indeed, this may be expected to be the view of those intent upon the construction of a philosophy for themselves. But even they, if such were their view, would be wrong. If we are to read philosophy at all, we must read it with care and take the pains necessary for its understanding; and the exceptional value of Professor Brandt's work lies in the thoroughness with which it covers his subject. It may be remarked also that his formulation of the questions to be answered, and his whole conception of the business in hand, give a very fair guarantee of the usefulness of his conclusions. For what we must know about a philosopher, if we are to understand his philosophy, is not merely what he thought, but also why he thought it. Indeed, in philosophy, this *what* and this *why* are inseparable; taken apart each loses its meaning. In politics, in religion, in practical life it is not always necessary to enquire into a man's reasons for thinking as he does; but in philosophy these reasons are what give meaning to his conclusions; and it is, perhaps, on account of this that mankind in general must be so little interested in philosophy, and so little understand it, as always to wish to assimilate it to what can more easily be appreciated by neglecting this characteristic. Agreement between two men, in some fields, may be significant even if it be merely agreement about what is to be done, agreement about a conclusion; but in philosophy such agreement has no significance whatever; no two philosophers can be said to agree unless their conclusions and their reasons for those conclusions alike coincide. And it is particularly necessary in the case of Hobbes to enquire into the reasons he gives for his views, because he has, in the past, suffered greatly at the hands of expositors who are content to press the similarity of some of his views with those (for example) of Bodin, or even Machiavelli, and neglect altogether the dissimilarity of reason which lies behind it. And even the much advertised similarity between Hobbes and Spinoza almost disappears when their doctrines are closely examined. Hobbes's originality consists almost wholly in the reasons he gives for his conclusions, and a true
interpretation of his work is impossible unless these are considered with the greatest care.

Now, if these are the most outstanding results of the study to which, during the last ten years, the writings of Hobbes have been subjected, there are also some important acquisitions of a more detailed character. Ten years ago it was possible for Vaughan\textsuperscript{1} to write as if Hobbes was something other than the most profoundly philosophical individualist in the history of political theory, to write as if he were to be classed among those whose views must be rejected by the liberal tradition, as if his philosophy were a reaction against the individualism of his time, to assert even that Hobbes is 'the deadliest enemy of individualism.' And this false interpretation is no longer possible: Hobbes, we can now see, had more of the ground of liberalism in him than even Locke. I think that the true nature of Hobbes's individualism has yet to find its expositor, we have still to wait for the interpreter who will show us that this individualism is based, not upon any foundation in moral opinion at all, but upon a thorough-going nominalism and an almost as extreme solipsism. But the progress which has been made in this direction is already enough to indicate the extent of the error involved in these earlier views. And again, it was long customary to expound Hobbes's political philosophy as a philosophy of Fear; this for example is what it is represented to be by Vaughan. But a closer study of the writings has shown that Pride, and not Fear, is the master-conception of this political philosophy. But here, also, we have still to ascertain the full implication of this revised view. And lastly, although it is (unfortunately) still possible for writers to simulate the grotesque moral indignation to which both Vaughan and Figgis are apt to abandon themselves, we may fairly be said, during the past ten years, to have outgrown this kind of absurdity. Hobbes, it has been said, 'put truth under the heel of policy' and 'dragged religion under the Juggernaut car of reason of state'; and his theory has been described as 'one of unadulterated despotism or nothing.' But these misconceptions, arising from a failure to make elementary distinctions and from a fatal ignorance with regard to the foundations upon which Hobbes's views are based, are fast becoming errors of the past. And we may now find even an otherwise not profoundly instructed writer willing to distinguish between absolutism and sovereignty, and thus remove from the exposition of Hobbes's political philosophy a longstanding misrepresentation paralleled only in its foolishness by the confusion of absolutism and the Absolute which used to disfigure the interpretations of Hegel.

The misunderstandings of the philosophy of Hobbes which the work of the last ten years has removed are, in the main, misunderstandings due to ignorance. And if we turn to inquire, What remains to be done? the answer must be that we have yet to remove many misunderstandings due to lack of insight. 'Research' will never take the place of thought; and what Hobbes's philosophy stands in need of is a more profound consideration.

The student of Hobbes's philosophy is faced with an initial difficulty which requires to be met, not merely with patience, but with faith—I mean the difficulty of believing that Hobbes really means what he appears to say. For what he says is so unlike what is commonly said, and appears at first sight to be so extravagant, that the reader is inclined to exclaim, what Hobbes himself is said to have exclaimed on being presented with the proof of the forty-seventh theorem in Euclid's \textit{Elements}—'By God, this is impossible.' And some readers, so impressed with the impossibility of what Hobbes says, conclude that he meant something other than what he appears to mean, and make of his philosophy something more commonplace than it in fact is. Hobbes, we have to remember, is, of English philosophers, the one possessed of the greatest measure of philosophical imagination; and so comparatively rare is this in English philosophical writing, that we may almost be forgiven for failing to appreciate it in Hobbes. English philosophical writers are not, generally speaking, given to the construction of systems; and this abstinence is both the strength and the weakness of English philosophy. But Hobbes did construct a system, a complete and comprehensive view of the universe; and he conceived this system with such imaginative power that, in spite of its relatively simple character, it stands comparison with even the grand and imposing creation of Hegel.

\textsuperscript{1}In \textit{Studies in the History of Political Philosophy} (1925), Vol. 1.
And further, he had the capacity, the patience and the opportunity to elaborate the details of this system so thoroughly that, whatever its imperfections, it cannot be said to have been imperfectly imagined or imperfectly elaborated. But if the power of philosophical imagination, a power possessed by only the greatest philosophers, is one Hobbes's most remarkable qualities, it is also the source of some of the more obvious defects of his philosophical writing. For his imaginative propensities are not confined to the conception of a comprehensive theory, they penetrate also the form of his exposition and his diction. To think in metaphors and not to restrain one's fancy must always be defects in a philosopher; and Hobbes, while complaining of these faults in others, suffered from them himself. In Hobbes's writing is exemplified both the virtue and the danger of philosophical imagination; he is an imaginative thinker, but also an imaginative writer. And it is not only the imaginative grasp of Hobbes's philosophical thinking which make it remarkable in the history of English philosophy: it has another equally unexpected quality. Radicalism, extravagance, the intrepid following out of a theory conceived in the grand manner and the absence of any sign of alarm, dismay or compromise, are not qualities often to be found in English thinkers; but they flourish in Hobbes almost unchecked.

As a nation we are more easily alarmed at the creations of our intellect than at those of our practical activity; and we do not require to be persuaded that truth and moderation live in the same street, we believe it en instinct. But Hobbes appears never to have been even tempted to make his conclusions more moderate than he found them; and compromise and fear had no place in his intellectual character. And on account of this, also, Hobbes's writings are sometimes as difficult to credit as they are to believe. But it is as foolish to doubt that a writer means what he writes as it is insulting to doubt that a companion means what he says. And if we are to interpret Hobbes correctly, we must avoid this mistake. There are, of course, writers who do not know what they mean, but Hobbes certainly is not among these.

Now, if our insight into the meaning of Hobbes's philosophy is hindered by this initial difficulty of crediting its doctrines, it is apt to be restricted by a failure to appreciate the fact that this system is a philosophy. We are content to take its doctrines separately and are reluctant to follow Hobbes back to the foundation of his thought: we find imbedded in its superstructure ideas with which we think ourselves familiar and, ignorant of what lies underneath, we do not question that familiarity. And bringing with us a somewhat different notion of what philosophy is from that which Hobbes himself entertained, we fail to adjust our expectations to what is offered us and consequently end by misinterpreting it. Let us consider briefly three examples of the restricted insight into Hobbes's philosophy which arises from this failure to appreciate its philosophical character.

It is often said that in Hobbes's view human nature is essentially selfish; and this doctrine of the selfishness of man is represented as the foundation upon which he builds his social and political philosophy, as the premise of his reasoning. And it is suggested also that it is in his premises, and not in his reasoning, that his error lies. But when we turn to what Hobbes actually wrote, and treat it as a systematic whole, we find that the essential selfishness of man is not, in Hobbes, a premise, but (if the doctrine is to be found anywhere) is a conclusion, the result of a long and complicated argument. His premise is a doctrine of solipsism, a belief in the essential isolation of men from one another, and expounded as a theory of knowledge. This isolation, it is true, is modified by 'the most noble and profitable invention of all other,' speech; but it remains a merely artificial modification. And when this genuine premise of Hobbes's argument is appreciated, the attribution to him of the doctrine of the essential selfishness of man is seen at once to be mistaken. Others have held an egoistic view of human nature, and have based that view upon their observation of human behaviour; but no such argument is to be found in Hobbes. His doctrine is that each man is unavoidably shut up within the world of his own sensations; and there is no more meaning in speaking of him as 'selfish' than there is in speaking of anything else that is monadically conceived as selfish—the universe as a whole, or an electron. Here also the reason for belief conditions the character of what is believed.

Again, Hobbes's doctrine of authority has suffered from its being isolated from the system of his thought. But here also Hobbes's argument begins not from a view of the moral character
of man as so many theories of authority begin, or from insight into contemporary political needs, but from a view of the nature of man merely as an experiencing being. Hobbes's theory of law and government has, indeed, no ethical foundation, in the ordinary sense; but it is conceived throughout in purely naturalistic terms, and begins in the theory of language. The creation of language and the establishment of the state are, for Hobbes, inventions of the same character and serve the same end. The necessity of an absolute sovereign in the community arises not from any such subsidiary observation as the misery of mankind without it, but is a necessity exactly paralleled by the necessity of fixing the meanings of names if language is to serve any useful purpose at all. Hobbes's belief in the necessity of a single decisive authority does not arise from his political fears, and he does not think of this authority as a practical expedient; it is conceived and presented by Hobbes as a logical necessity. Pascal said, 'Lorsqu'on ne sait pas la vérité d'une chose, il est bon qu'il y ait une erreur commune qui fixe l'esprit des hommes'; Hobbes asserts that there is never anything but a common error, that truth itself is a common error, and that since what is important is that it should be genuinely common, it must be fixed by authority. A language which is understood by only a single person and a way of behaviour which is pursued by one man independently of all other men are, for Hobbes, examples of the same kind of anarchy. And as authority alone can put an end to anarchy in the one case, authority alone can put an end to it in the other. For what is remarkable in Hobbes's doctrine of authority, and what on any other interpretation appears as a mere contradiction, is that it finds no place whatever for authority except in the control of men's actions. Both the intellect and the conscience are excluded from its control, and they are excluded because when a man is by himself, when he is speaking to himself, it is not necessary that the language he uses should be understood by others. Nobody was a more determined opponent that Hobbes of anything like authority in philosophy, in belief, in opinion; and his stand against the authority of Aristotle in philosophy is not merely not inconsistent with his view of the necessity of an absolute authority in matters of social conduct, but, when we consider upon what that view is based, is seen to be involved in it.

And thirdly, Hobbes's so-called Erastianism is different from the Erastianism of Erastus and different from the Erastianism of any other writer whatever, because it is based upon different reasons. His view of the place of religion and a Church in a community is a philosophical view; that of Erastus and of those who follow him is not more than an opinion about what is most convenient. Hobbes's view is based upon, not moral principles, but the principles of his theory of knowledge, upon his doctrines of nominalism and solipsism; theirs is based upon expediency and an observation of the world. And consequently they have, at bottom, little or nothing in common. Hobbes, it has been said, 'was an Erastian without limitations,' and it is this absence of limitations which makes it misleading to speak of him as an Erastian at all.

It appears, then, that Hobbes has come again; surprisingly, there seems even to be a prejudice in his favour at the present time. But our business must be to see that in this appearance he is neither applauded nor abused for views he never held. In point of knowledge we are in a better position with regard to Hobbes than our predecessors; our business is to improve our insight. And I think our insight will become deeper when we are more prepared to credit what he says, when we are more firmly persuaded of the error of taking his doctrines separately, and when we have grasped more surely that what we are offered by Hobbes is a philosophical system and not a mere collection of opinions. And someday, perhaps, Hobbes's writings will suffer the fate which has already overtaken the works of some of the more notable philosophers—they will be understood by others better than by the man who composed them.

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