

Review of *Images of Anarchy. The Rhetoric and Science in Hobbes's State of Nature* by Ioannis D. Evrigenis, 2014 New York: Cambridge University Press

According to J. L. Austin, 'comments on comments, criticisms of criticisms, are subject to the law of diminishing fleas'. This means, I suppose, that over time interpretations of masterpieces of philosophy decrease in originality and richness of insights. The Law of Diminishing Fleas is possibly rather alarming for Hobbesian specialists: what hope does a contemporary interpreter have to contribute something novel and worthwhile to three hundred and fifty years of Hobbesian scholarship? What can one add to Michael Oakeshott's reading of the state of nature as an ancient myth that can materialise at any time, or to David Gauthier's and Jean Hampton's understanding of the state of nature as a game-theoretical model, or to Norberto Bobbio's claim that the state of nature and the political state represent the greatest dichotomy of modernity, or to Quentin Skinner's suggestion that the state of nature is a rhetorical device? What can be discovered in Hobbes's texts that politics undergraduates do not already know about the state of nature, namely, that life there is solitary, nasty, poor, short, and, arguably, British?

Perhaps as a reaction to the Law of Diminishing Fleas, and in order to say something novel, Hobbesian scholarship over the last twenty-five years has shown a tendency to concentrate on aspects of Hobbes that are interesting but not central to his theory and that had therefore not attracted as much attention from Warrender, Oakeshott, Watkins and Gauthier: for instance, Hobbes's concept of modesty, his idea of companionship, his understanding of counsel, his notion of just war, and so forth.

One of the striking characteristics of Ioannis Evrigenis' new work is that far from being intimidated by the Law of Diminishing Fleas, it challenges it. Instead of offering the analysis of some under-studied if peripheral facet of Hobbes's theory, Evrigenis proposes to re-examine the Archimedean point of Hobbes's political philosophy, the core concept that since the seventeenth century every interpreter of Hobbes has discussed in one way or another: the Hobbesian state of nature.

In the Prologue, Evrigenis acknowledges that 'no part of Hobbes's legacy is as well known as his account of the natural condition of mankind' (p. 1) but points out that many important questions about it have neither been addressed nor satisfactorily answered. He reminds the reader that Hobbes's description of the state of nature is deeply puzzling and proposes to use the concept as a vantage point from which to address the issue surrounding the interpretation of Hobbes's works (p. 2).

The book is organized in four parts, and every part is a source of insightful observations and comments that can stimulate the imagination of the historian, the philosopher, the political theorist, the expert of English literature, the established academic as well as the young undergraduate. The analysis is inventive, authoritative, and inspiring. Evrigenis navigates the primary texts with ease and discusses the differences between them; pays attention to relevant contexts; considers Hobbes's work against the background of Greek and Roman political thought; commands the secondary literature without overwhelming the reader with it. He puts forward a coherent, challenging, and absorbing case.

Evrigenis takes a position on many issues that have generated debates in the secondary literature on Hobbes in the last century. His focus, though, is the debate on the meaning, role, and significance of science and rhetoric in Hobbes's works. Evrigenis questions very convincingly the interpretation of Hobbes's intellectual development as a series of phases marked by 'turns', the most important of which would be from humanism to science (p. 5); he argues that although there are major differences between, say, the *Elements of Law* and the Latin *Leviathan*, it is not true that 'Hobbes went through a phase during which he thought it possible to persuade others without recourse to rhetoric' (p. 6); he challenges the widely spread idea that while in earlier writings Hobbes was committed to science, in a Review and Conclusion of *Leviathan* we witness 'a dramatic shift away from a complete faith in the power of reason to convey truth and a complete repudiation of rhetoric as a tool of manipulation' (p. 248). Over the 260 pages of this well-presented book, Evrigenis builds the case that Hobbes used science as a rhetorical strategy, and approached rhetoric scientifically: 'behind Hobbes's rhetoric of science lay something of a science of rhetoric' (p. 256).

As I belong to the camp that claims that Hobbes was genuinely committed to science, I do have a couple of reservations about Evrigenis' interpretation that Hobbes used science as a rhetorical strategy.

Evrigenis is rightly critical of the tendency among interpreters to reduce the complexity and richness of Hobbes's thought to a single principle or concept; he writes: 'The desire to discover Hobbes's Archimedean point has led to attempts to distil his thought down to a single method – rhetoric or science; a single force – reason or the passions; or a single passion – fear or vainglory' (p. 17). Arguably, however, Evrigenis himself succumbs to the tendency he denounces in others insofar as a single concept is at the core of his interpretation.

Firstly, by claiming that Hobbes used science as a rhetorical strategy, and developed a science of rhetoric, Evrigenis is saying that in order to enter Hobbes's Quarters all we need is one key, namely rhetoric; by insisting that science is a 'rhetorical strategy', Evrigenis is

suggesting that science is one of the possible materials from which the key can be made; by talking about a ‘science of rhetoric’, Evrigenis is adding that science may be used to ensure that the key works well.

Secondly, Evrigenis is postulating that Hobbes wrote for only one type of reader: the reader who needs to be persuaded and whose belief must be won by means of rhetoric: the preacher, the parliamentarian, the man of the university, the potential leader of the next rebellion, the ignorant, the young.

But we know from the correspondence that Hobbes was writing also for readers such as Sorbriere, du Verdus, Marsenne, Peleau, Leibniz, and so on; did Hobbes intend to use science as a rhetorical strategy also for such readers? Did he want to persuade them by means of rhetoric of the truth of his principles, or did he mean to provide a logical demonstration? In letter 195 of Hobbes’s Correspondence (dated tentatively 1674 by Noel Malcolm) Leibniz writes to Hobbes:

you ... were the first person to place the correct method of argument and demonstration ... in the clear light of political philosophy ... I can see clearly enough that your demonstrations, like those of geometry, are universal and abstracted from the matter which they deal with (Hobbes, *The Correspondence*, edited by Noel Malcolm, Clarendon Press: Oxford; vol II, pp 733-4).

Clearly Leibniz did not think that Hobbes was using science as a rhetorical device; he believed that Hobbes founded political science and not the science of rhetoric.

To conclude, Evrigenis’ book has all the ingredients of an excellent work: it makes claims that are novel, thought-provoking and controversial; it is likely to generate fresh debates on central aspects of Hobbes’s theory; ultimately, it provides proof that the Law of Diminishing Fleas need not apply to Hobbes Studies.

Gabriella Slomp

gs21@st-andrews.ac.uk

University of St Andrews