

Book Reviews



The Essential Leviathan: A Modernized Edition; Nancy A. Stanlick, editor; Daniel P. Collette, Associate Editor; Hackett Publishing Company; 320 pages; Paper: \$14.00 £11.99; Cloth: \$42.00 £34.99.

In an article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 8, 2014), Carlin Romano remarks that a sure way to 'shut down interest' in a classical work is to present it in original complicated prose, with its relevance to students' own contemporary lives subsequently obscured. These are sentiments which Nancy Stanlick claims to share, and a problem she and her co-editor Daniel Collette propose to address in regards to Thomas Hobbes' landmark work in political philosophy: *Leviathan*.

Stanlick insists that the *Essential Leviathan* is a translation of Hobbes' work, due to the fact that certain words and grammar have been altered to make the text more approachable. This 'translation' is very good: it makes the text highly accessible, certainly for the first time reader, but achieves this without jeopardising original spirit or meaning. When essential terms that may appear strange to modern readers remain necessarily unaltered, as is the case with 'diffidence', a supplementary footnote is included providing definition and explanation. This is also supported by a glossary of terms. This greatly enhances the reading experience and accessibility without compromising Hobbes' original meaning.

Something which grasps one's attention is how incredibly short Stanlick's introduction is; only two pages, consisting of a very short biography and structural overview. This is in notable contrast to editions of *Leviathan* such as: J.C.A. Gaskin's Oxford edition; C.B. MacPherson's Penguin Classics edition; and Richard Tuck's Cambridge edition, each of which have lengthy discussions of political and intellectual history, and dissections and analysis of Hobbes' *Leviathan*.

Nonetheless, Stanlick and Collette make up for a short introduction with a wealth of supporting footnotes, which give much needed information and clarification. This method has immediate benefits: it allows for the student to

learn the background and context of *Leviathan* as they read through the text, as opposed to having a lengthy introduction which she must either read before being able to engage directly with Hobbes, or which she has to continually refer back to if she requires clarification on certain points. In addition this also allows the student to engage with Hobbes' work first before consulting background information, as opposed to having been already influenced by the editor's introduction before she begins reading the text.

The footnotes on the intellectual context of *Leviathan* are particularly well done: they are both extensive and informative, and effectively enlighten the reader to the philosophical issues Hobbes was addressing. There are however far less footnotes addressing political context. Nonetheless, this is not necessarily a problem: for a student first encountering Hobbes' thought, too much political context can be a disadvantage; it facilitates the possibility for students to disengage from proper analysis, using the contextual information provided to instead dismiss Hobbes' thought as simply reflective of his time period, and thus not considering the greater worth of his underlying arguments and principles, or their relevance today.

Footnotes instead frequently provide illustration of Hobbes' arguments using more recent political examples, examples which will be more familiar to modern students. This is an effective way of conveying Hobbes' thought as it prompts the reader to consider arguments in more depth, and their applicability beyond Hobbes' own time period. References given to World War II and the Cold War will, in particular, convey the relevance of Hobbes' thought effectively to students of politics and international relations.

Another issue one may raise is the removal of Hobbes' original paragraph notes, which were a useful means of quickly identifying arguments in passages. Nonetheless, this is more than compensated for by excellent chapter introductions which effectively make the purpose of each individual chapter clearer, and link the arguments of different chapters together. This practice is particularly helpful in Book I. Commentators have remarked that modern readers may be confused by the purpose of the first chapters of Book I, dealing as they do predominantly with physiology and psychology.¹ There would however be no confusion for the reader of the *Essential Leviathan* as Stanlick and Collette's chapter introductions make evidently clear how these arguments fit together and contribute to the overall thesis. They particularly convey how the famous Chapter XIII must be understood as a culmination of arguments presented in Chapters I–XII, thus encouraging the reader to consult previous arguments as

1 See Newey G., *Routledge Philosophy Guide to Hobbes and Leviathan*, (London: Routledge, 2008) p. 42.

opposed to skipping ahead to Chapter XIII, a frequent practice which results in students missing the deeper philosophical framework upon which Hobbes' arguments rest.

One final issue that might be raised is the significant condensation of Books III and IV. Such a decision may be controversial given the increasing significance given to these later books in Hobbes scholarship. Stanlick justifies her decision on the grounds of brevity, condensing the work to make it more appropriate to teaching in a University semester, and accessibility, these chapters being the least approachable for the modern reader. I would concur with this reasoning, especially in regards to the central intention of making the work more accessible. This decision is indeed further supported by a clear rendering of Book I, in particular Chapter XII and its discussion of religion and political obligation. This allows the reader to grasp Hobbes' principle arguments against religion in politics without getting overly entangled in the contextual specifics of the Seventeenth Century, such entanglement being something likely to mask contemporary relevance and 'shut down the interest' of the modern student.

As a teacher of Hobbes, one is aware of how incredibly rewarding a proper engagement with *Leviathan* can be for students. One is also however aware of how the challenges of language and presentation can alienate *Leviathan* from the modern reader, causing students to forego such a potentially rewarding experience and instead rely on abstracted soundbites and textbook summaries. Educators familiar with this problem will certainly welcome Stanlick and Colette's modernized edition; it is a work which successfully makes Hobbes' arguments clear, approachable, and most importantly, relevant to the Twenty-First Century reader, whilst simultaneously maintaining the spirit and beauty of Hobbes' original text.

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