

‘CHIEF OF THE WAYS OF GOD’:
FORM AND MEANING IN THE *BEHEMOTH* OF
THOMAS HOBBS

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Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; He eateth grass as an ox. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, And his force is in the muscles of his belly. He moveth his tail like a cedar: The sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are as tubes of brass; His limbs are like bars of iron. He is the chief of the ways of God: He only that made him can make his sword to approach unto him. Surely the mountains bring him forth food; Where all the beasts of the field do play. He lieth under the lotus trees, In the covert of the reed and the fen. The lotus trees cover him with their shadow; The willows of the brook compass him about. Behold, if a river overflow, he trembleth not; He is confident, though Jordan swell even to his mouth. Shall any take him when he is on the watch, Or pierce through his nose with a snare?¹

I

Behemoth is perhaps the oddest and most obscure of Hobbes's major works. Some of the oddness is explained by its difficult publishing history. One of a group of works written in the 1660s, the decade after the Restoration, it was not published then – apparently because the King refused to allow it to be – but it circulated in manuscript and eventually appeared in print in 1679 without Hobbes's authorisation and in a particularly poor version. Even the text Hobbes's publisher issued in 1682 after the philosopher's death was in places confused. Yet the difficulties with the text go much deeper than the vicissitudes of the press. The title by which the work is usually

¹ Job 40, vv. 15–24.

known suggests an antithesis with the *Leviathan* (the other overwhelmingly powerful beast described in Job), but nowhere does Hobbes indicate how this is meant to be read, and, indeed, it is unclear whether this title was one which had Hobbes's sanction – or in fact what title he intended it to have. The work purports to be a relatively straightforward account of the English Civil Wars and their aftermath, the period between the mid to late 1630s and 1660. In fact it draws together a narrative largely borrowed from other publications with a summary of the views its author expounded in other works – particularly in the *Leviathan*. Moreover, the narrative is developed in the course of a dialogue between two people, marked 'A' and 'B', a form which seems peculiarly ill-adapted for conveying the hard facts of historical discourse. The effect is rather as if an originally stimulating and opinionated, though slightly one-sided, discussion in a pub has degenerated as one interlocutor virtually abandons the struggle in the hope of persuading his companion to shut up and go home.

It is difficult to fit *Behemoth* into any obvious context. A good proportion of Hobbes's work of the late 1660s was defensive, as, notoriously, Hobbes felt somewhat beleaguered after the Restoration. The reconstruction of the Church of England had restored to ecclesiastical and political power his main polemical opponents of the 1650s, a group of people who regarded him as uniquely dangerous to religion and government.² The views of Churchmen and their supporters would help to prevent almost all of his works from securing the licence required for publication after the passage of the Licensing Act 1662. Hobbes also felt under threat of being proceeded against for heresy, and devoted a considerable amount of his energy in the period to writing about the current enforceability of the law on the subject: apart from the *Historical Narration Concerning Heresie*, he handled it in the *Dialogue ... of the Common Laws*, in one of the appendices to the latin edition of *Leviathan*, and in *Behemoth*. However, as Philip Milton has shown, the threat was considerably greater in Hobbes's imagination than it was in reality. Hobbes's fears were centred on the bishops, whom he regarded – according to those who recorded his views during the decade – as the authors of a heresy prosecution in Parliament. As Milton points out, although there was a resolution in the Commons in October 1666 which was intended to lead to an attack on *Leviathan*, it amounted to far less than a charge of heresy against the book's author. A bill ultimately issued from the Commons against athe-

² See Philip Milton, 'Hobbes, heresy and Lord Arlington' *History of Political Thought* 14 (1993), pp. 504-8, for Hobbes's relationship with the bishops, especially John Bramhall and Seth Ward.

ism and profaneness, although it became embroiled in legal argument in the Lords and the text that emerged (but was nevertheless not passed) would not have helped anyone to prosecute Hobbes for heresy.

Richard Tuck has suggested a rather wider context for these works of the late 1660s, and has argued that they were meant as a contribution to the debates which took place in the House of Commons from 1667 to 1670 about whether to permit comprehension or toleration.³ Philip Milton has also answered this point: Hobbes 'never mentioned the Act of Uniformity, the Conventicle Acts or any of the other measures against dissenters, and I very much doubt whether he disapproved of them. As *Behemoth* so clearly shows, he shared to the full the royalist view that dissenting conventicles were seed-beds of rebellion, and he would have few if any qualms about their suppression'.⁴ Indeed, Hobbes condemns Independents and other 'enemies which arose against his Maiesty from the private interpretations of the Scripture exposed to every mans scanning in his Mother tongue'.⁵

Behemoth cannot be uncomplicatedly linked to any specific contemporary debate, and certainly not one about comprehension and toleration. Which is not to say that it does not engage with a number of contemporary ideas and polemics. *Behemoth's* theme of the uses of eloquent demagoguery to lead people into discontent and violent disorder has been recognised by most commentators, and some scholars have fitted *Behemoth* into wider interpretations of Hobbes's work based on these lines. Stephen Holmes has read in it Hobbes's 'mature understanding of political breakdown and the reestablishment of authority'. The work provides insights into 'the subversion of rationality – into discombobulating passions, intoxicating doctrines, imposing names, and mesmerizing norms'.⁶ Quentin Skinner has found in it an analysis of the destructive power of misdirected eloquence – the 'victory for irrational but overwhelming power of neo-classical and antinomian rhetoric' (of the 'democraticall gentlemen' and Presbyterian preachers) over the 'small power of science and rationality'; 'faced with interest and ignorance, reason and science have little chance of being heard'.⁷ But its themes seem general, dispersed, and largely derived from Hobbes's more famous philo-

³ Richard Tuck, 'Hobbes and Locke on Toleration', in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. M.G. Dietz (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990).

⁴ 'Hobbes, Heresy and Lord Arlington', p. 532.

⁵ St John's College, Oxford, MS 13 [hereafter MS], fo. 2v; EW VI, p. 167

⁶ Stephen Holmes, 'Political Psychology in Hobbes's *Behemoth*', in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz.

⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 435, 433.

sophical works. As a result, for most writers on Hobbes the work has been of relatively marginal interest in the canon. With little new material, and no very clear link to a political context, it is tempting, indeed, to regard Hobbes's account of the Civil War as a confused and comparatively incoherent work of the philosopher's dotage. Can anything more be made of *Behemoth*?

II

Hobbes did provide some indication of what he was up to in *Behemoth*. The manuscript of the work, in the hand of Hobbes's amanuensis, James Wheldon, and preserved in the library of St John's College, Oxford, contains a dedication to the secretary of state, Lord Arlington, in which he presents his patron with what he describes as 'four short Dialogues concerning the memorable Ciuill Warre in his Maiesties Dominions from 1640 to 1660'. Although there are four dialogues, the work falls more naturally into three sections. The first of the dialogues, he goes on to say, 'contains the seed of it, certaine opinions in Diuinity and Politicks'. The second Dialogue 'hath the growth of it in Declarations, Remonstrances, and other writings between the King and Parliament published'. The third and fourth parts are 'a very short Epitome of the Warre it selfe, drawne out of Mr. Heath's Chronicle'.⁸

This final section relies very heavily on James Heath's *Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine Vvarr in the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland*, originally published in 1662, and apparently largely compiled from newsbook reports. From about a quarter of the way through Hobbes's Third dialogue until the end of the book, beginning with the King's setting up of his standard at Nottingham on 23 August 1642, his text is indeed for much of the time an epitome of Heath's, borrowing many of the same words. It adopts similar breaks as Heath's text, ending part 3 as Heath does a section, after the execution of the King. Heath's text is, of course, vastly more detailed than is Hobbes's – the précis is often very severe; and where Hobbes pauses to provide more detail, the departures from his model are naturally significant. At their mildest, they slant the interpretation, sometimes only just noticeably. On the fight at Brentford shortly after Edgehill, for example, Heath writes separately of the preparations made by Parliament before the battle, and then the effects of the news of the battle itself, which 'brought a general consternation upon the City of *London*, all shops were shut up, and all the Regiments, both Trained Band and Auxiliaries were drawn out, so that the Earl of *Essex* had a

⁸ MS, fo. 1v; EW, VI, p. 166.

most compleat and numerous Army of a sudden'. Hobbes elides the information about preparation for the battle and the effect of the news to imply panic at the approach of the King: Parliament 'caused all the Trained Bands and the Auxiliaries of the City of London (which was so frighted as to shut vp all their shops) to be drawn forth, so that there was a most compleat and numerous Army, ready for the Earle of Essex that was crept into London iust at the time to head it'.⁹ Heath was himself capable of sardonic asides; but Hobbes frequently picks them up to make them much more rhetorically effective. On Fairfax's summons to the Trained Bands of counties adjoining London to join the army in response to the Presbyterian coup of July 1647, Heath notes that 'such Bands were not under pay of the Parliament, and so not under any Command of the General by any Order of Ordinance. But armed violence was not to be stopt with Lawyers niceties'. Hobbes has:

B: Were the Trayned Soldiers part of the Generalls Army?

A: No, nor at all in pay, nor could be without an order of Parliament. But what might not an Army doe after it had mastered all the Laws of the Land?¹⁰

Hobbes is sometimes provoked by Heath's account into a more elaborate digression. Explaining the easy collapse of the same coup, Heath says that 'the wealthier sort began to flinch from those resolutions of adhering to their Engagement to save their bags, nothing being more vogueed among the people then that the City would be plundered, as it was given out by some of the Grandees of the Army'.¹¹ Hobbes takes a longer detour from his narrative, twisting the same point into an attack on the values of the City:

I consider the most part of rich subiects, that haue made themselves so by craft and trade as men that neuer look vpon any thing but their present profit, and who to euery thing not lying in that way are in a manner blind, being amazed at the very thought of plundering. If they had vnderstood what vertue there is to preserue their wealth in obedience to their lawfull Soueraigne, they would neuer haue sided with the Parliament, and so we had had no need of arming. The Mayor and Aldermen therefore being assured by this submission to saue their goods, and not sure of the same by resisting, seeme to me to haue taken the wisest course.¹²

⁹ Heath, p. 70; MS fo. 59; EW VI, p. 315.

¹⁰ Heath p. 249-150 [recte 250]; MS fo. 67v; EW VI, p. 339.

¹¹ Heath p. 247.

¹² MS fo. 68; EW VI, p. 240.

One of the most striking passages of this kind comes when both authors open their accounts of 1648 with a description of the Parliamentary visitation of the University of Oxford. Heath had himself been ejected during this process, from a studentship of Christ Church, Oxford, and not unnaturally injects into his account a strong sense of personal loss and grievance, lamenting the removal of 'the most eminent for Learning, and Piety and Duty to the Church'. Parliament had resolved, he writes,

'to put out (as the accursed *Philistians* did to *Samson*) the eyes of the Kingdome, that so they might make sport with our Laws, Franchises, and Priviledges, and then ruin and fatally destroy us, at last separating the Head from the Body Politique in their ensuing monstrous Regicide'.

One can almost hear Hobbes' snort of derision as he comes across the passage. His version reports that the Parliamentary Commission had:

turned out all such as were not of their faction, and all such as had aproued the vse of the Common Prayer booke; as also diuers scandalous Ministers and Schollars (that is, such as customarily without need took the name of God into their mouths, or vsed to speake wantonly, or haunt the company of lewd women). And for this last I cannot but comend them.

An untraditional view from a royalist, to say the least. Hobbes turns then to a long condemnation of the Universities not only as nurseries of vice, but also because they provided the clergy with a platform from which they could disseminate their views: 'certainly an Vniuersity is an excellent seruant to the Clergy, and the Clergy if it be not carefully look'd to (by their dissentions in doctrins, and by the aduantage to publish their dissentions) is an excellent means to diuide a Kingdome into factions.'¹³

Heath cannot quite be Hobbes's sole source for the third and fourth Dialogues, for there are differences in some details, although usually minor ones. The account of the King's trial and execution may owe something to a separate collection of documents. Some divergences from Heath's account may be explainable by Hobbes's own connections – for example his claim that the Earl of Newcastle had in late 1642 'made himselfe in a manner master of all the North': Heath in fact gives the contrary impression.¹⁴ Some others are difficult to explain, however. The account, for example, in the fourth

¹³ MS fo. 70-v; EW VI, p. 347.

¹⁴ Heath, p. 71; MS fo. 59v; EW VI, p. 316.

dialogue of the treason and summary execution of Manning, Cromwell's spy at the royalist court, contains a number of details which are not derived from Heath, and presumably come from personal information.¹⁵ Sometimes Hobbes alters the order in which he deals with events, presumably to maintain his narrative more effectively, although this can have a somewhat confusing effect. Often he compresses the narrative severely – this is particularly noticeable where he discusses the events leading up to Pride's Purge and the execution of the King – and as a result produces a garbled or confused account.

The second part of *Behemoth* is derived from a different source. He described it as providing an account of the development of the confrontation between King and Parliament 'in Declarations, Remonstrances, and other writings'. It is in fact only about half way through the Second Dialogue that Hobbes begins to describe these exchanges in detail – just at the point where the fullest collection of printed documents, that published by Edward Husbands, begins with the Grand Remonstrance of December 1641. From this point Hobbes goes systematically through all of the significant documents in the collection, describing and commenting on them: Husbands' collection becomes, in fact, the sole basis of his account for the period leading up to the outbreak of war. His own responses to the parliamentary texts he describes are often based on the King's responses printed in the same volume. Understandably much of the detail of the increasingly complex exchanges is omitted or compressed; but at some points Hobbes becomes either disingenuous or cavalier with his sources. Towards the end of the second dialogue, for example, as he discusses the addresses, answers and replies which flew with exceptional velocity around the time of the defiance of the King by Sir John Hotham at Hull, Hobbes attributes to Parliament certain propositions which were in fact ironically given to it in one of the King's Answers – in *His Majestie's Answer to a Printed Booke*, one of the works of royalist propaganda drafted by Hobbes's former acquaintance, now Lord Chancellor, Edward Hyde, which provoked one of Parliament's own most famous polemics, Henry Parker's *Observations upon some of his Majesties late Answers and Expresses*. B's response to Hyde's tendentious summary of Parliamentary political philosophy that 'This is plain dealing and without hypocrisie', echoes the words of the King's reference to Parliament's Remonstrance of 26 May 1642 – which ironically commends the 'plaine dealing and ingenuity of the Framers and Contrivers of that Declaration' – but it fails to recognize the fact that the text he cites came not from Parliament, but its enemies.¹⁶

¹⁵ MS fo. 88; EW VI, p. 394.

¹⁶ MS fo. 50v; EW VI, p. 292.

Much of the text of *Behemoth* after the middle of the second dialogue is in some sense a commentary on Heath and Husbands, and it is tempting to imagine the old man sitting with the two books open in front of him, dictating to James Wheldon his summaries and comments as he leafs through the pages. There are, perhaps, some affinities with his procedure in the *Dialogue between a philosopher and a student of the Common Laws of England*, another work of the 1660s, which treats Coke on Littleton and a set of the statutes in much the same way. In some ways this makes it seem an unambitious text – a work perhaps like the Epitome of Thomas May's History, produced presumably more for commercial than intellectual reasons. But it is clear that Hobbes thought of his text as considerably more serious and significant than was conveyed by the word 'epitome' which he used for the third and fourth dialogues – not just because Heath and Husbands are used to spark off reflections on the history of the period, but also because more than three-eighths of the work are constructed in a rather different fashion. The first of the dialogues, in fact, is much less closely tied to facts and events: indeed, it is only around half-way through the dialogue that Hobbes mentions a specific event – the attempt to introduce the Book of Common Prayer into Scotland in 1637 – and only around three and a half pages out of 38 are taken up with a narrative. The business of the first and second dialogues is weighted towards analysis, rather than reportage; not so much (in the words of B's request at the beginning of the work) an account of the 'actions you then saw', but of their 'causes, pretensions, iustice, order, artifice, and euent'.¹⁷ It is also the polemical heart of the work, in which is contained what appears to be the admonitory message which Hobbes wanted to convey.

III

The first dialogue launches quickly into a discussion of the causes of the collapse of royal authority in 1642. The typology of 'seducers' who had 'corrupted' the people which is sketched out by the main speaker, labeled as 'A', is a familiar one from the views of other royalist commentators: Ministers 'pretending to have a right from God to governe every one his Parish' (in other words Presbyterians); Roman Catholics; Independents and other sectaries; gentlemen who had read too deeply in the classics and 'became thereby in love with their formes of government'; the City of London and other large towns, who saw the prosperity of the low countries and expected that a

¹⁷ MS fo. 2; EW VI, p. 163.

change to republican government would produce the like in England; the ambitious, who 'hoped to maintain themselves... by the lucky choosing of a party to side with'; and the people generally, who 'were so ignorant of their duty, as that not one perhaps of ten thousand knew what right any man had to command him, or what necessity there was of King or Commonwealth, for which he was to part with his money against his will; but thought himself to be so much master of whatsoever he possesseth, that it could not be taken from him upon any pretence of common safety without his own consent'.¹⁸

Hobbes continues by discussing, apparently in the order given above, these various groups and how they had gone about corrupting the people. Much of about the first two-fifths of the first dialogue consists of a discussion of the practices of the Pope and the Roman Church in establishing their power over secular rulers, a discussion which very largely repeats and expands on the points made in the last Chapter of *Leviathan*. Then B turns A's attention to the Presbyterians, asking him 'how came their Power to be so great, being of themselves for the most part but so many poor Schollers?'¹⁹ In the course of this discussion, A refers also to the fourth sort of seducers, the gentlemen who read too deeply in the classics; but the argument hinges largely on the Presbyterians' powers of rhetoric and the effectiveness of their persuasion. At this point, the dialogue starts to move towards narrative, with explanations of the Scottish resistance to the Prayer Book and episcopacy, as well as a lengthy digression concerning nationality rights for the Scots in England. It returns to the analysis when Hobbes criticises the opposition to Ship Money in the late 1630s and the leadership of some of the gentry who sat in the House of Commons, who were capable of drawing with them not only other Members of Parliament, but also the common people as a whole.

Having established the main causes of the events of 1640 and afterwards, the discussion turns naturally to how to avoid a repetition of the chain of events that produced the War: A argues that it comes down to education, that people should be 'taught their duty, that is the Science of Just and Vniust, as diuers other Sciences haue been taught from true Principles, and euident demonstration'; B does not demur, but doubts how these things can effectively be taught 'when it is against the interest of those that are in possession of the power to hurt him?' Hobbes explains through A, with transparent self-advertising intent, that 'The Rules of **Just** and **Vniust** sufficiently demonstrated, and from Principles euident to the meanest capacity, haue not been wanting; and notwithstanding the obscurity of their Author, haue shined not

¹⁸ MS fo. 2v-3; EW VI, p. 167.

¹⁹ MS fo. 11; EW VI, p. 190.

only in this, but also in forraigne Countries to men of good education.²⁰ But as he goes on to say, disseminating these principles can only be done through the pulpit – precisely the source of so much of the teaching that had caused the trouble in the first place: ‘And therefore the light of that Doctrine has been hitherto couer’d and kept vnder here by a cloud of aduersaries which no priuate mans reputation can break through, without the Authority of the **Vniuersities**.’²¹ There follows an explanation of the creation of the universities and the way that they had instituted a form of learning designed to maintain the power of the Pope and clergy, bending the Logic, Physics and Metaphysics of Aristotle to their purposes. A then discusses Aristotle’s Ethics, indicating that he regards there to be a difference between the ethical virtues of subjects and those of sovereigns, and concluding, against Aristotle, that ‘all actions and habits are to be esteemed good or euill, by their causes and vsefullnesse in reference to the Common wealth, and not by their mediocrity nor by their being commended.’²² B objects that he has not considered Religion to be a virtue, though it should be the greatest. A responds, but only after a short passage explaining the relevance of the discussion which would appear to be a digression – a passage which must be intended to flag up that the next few pages are particularly significant. He tells B that ‘all vertue is comprehended in obedience to the Laws of the Common wealth, whereof Religion is one’; and therefore ‘I haue placed Religion amongst the Vertues’. In view of the uncertainty of what God has actually instructed men to do, it is necessary that people should recognize some human authority in the matter. In any question where people’s duty to God and the King is involved, they should therefore accept the word of the sovereign – or the law – rather than the preaching of their fellow subjects or of a stranger. B leaps to the conclusion that he is meant to draw: ‘if the King giue vs leaue, you or I may as lawfully preach as any of them that doe. And I beleeuwe we should performe that office a great deale better, then they that preach’d vs into the Rebellion’.²³ A goes on to describe the principal virtues as conceived by the Church of Rome: ‘to obey their Doctrine though it be Treason; and that is their Piety and Liberality. To be beneficiall to the Clergy, that is to be Religious. And to beleeuwe vpon their word that which a man knows in his Conscience to be false; which is the faith they require’.²⁴

So far, this is not significantly further than Hobbes went in *Leviathan*;

²⁰ MS fo. 19v; EW VI, pp. 212-13.

²¹ *Ibid.*; EW VI, p. 213.

²² MS fo. 22; EW VI, p. 220.

²³ MS fo. 22v; EW VI, p. 221.

²⁴ MS fo. 23; EW VI, pp. 221-22.

and the more specific comments on the clergy are directed pretty clearly at the Church of Rome. But at this point, B asks, reasonably enough, whether it might also be held to apply to the established clergy in England: 'what is the Morall Philosophy of the Protestant Clergy in England?' A is understandably cautious, and answers (though with a sting in the tail) 'so much as they shew of it in their life and conuersation is for the most part very good, and of very good example, much better then their writings'. His next step is cast as a question – in other words, the point is made as deniably as possible: 'Doe the Clergy in England pretend, as the Pope does, or as the Presbyterians doe to haue a right from God immediately to gouerne the King and his subiects in all points of Religion and Manners? If they doe you cannot doubt but that if they had number and strength, which they are neuer like to haue, they would attempt to obtaine that power, as the others haue done.' Without responding to this, B says that he would like to 'see a Systeme of the present Moralls written by some Diuine of good reputation and learning, and of the late Kings party'. A directs him to *The Whole Duty of Man* – 'the best that is extant, and such a one as (except a few passages that I mislike) is very well worth your reading'. *The Whole Duty of Man*, now assumed to be by Richard Allestree, Provost of Eton from 1665 and Regius Professor at Oxford, was perhaps the best-selling manual of practical theology published in the seventeenth century, and a classic statement of Anglican devotion. Yet A goes on to say, now more daringly, that 'if the Presbyterian ministers, euen those of them which were the most diligent Preachers of the late Sedition were to be tried by it, they would go neer to be found **not guilty**.'²⁵

A aims to show, in short, how the Anglican version of the subject's duty is entirely consistent with the doctrine of Presbyterians. Their interpretation of the attributes of God are the same; they acknowledge the word of God to be the same books of scripture, and if (as B objects) it is 'according to their own interpretation', this is no different to the approach of the Bishops and the loyal party. On that basis it was impossible to accuse them of acting against God's will, for as B acknowledges, 'Hypocrisy hath indeed this great Prerogatiue about other sins, that it cannot be accused'. B follows by recognizing that 'the Loyall party and the Presbyterians haue always had an equal care to haue Gods House free from profanation, to haue Tiths duly paid, and Offerings accepted, to haue the Sabbath day kept holy, the Word preached, and the Lord's Supper and Baptisme duly administred', implying that these are services to God which happen to be in the interests of the clergy of whatever persuasion. B moves quickly on to the main point – the duty that is owed

²⁵ MS fo. 21; EW VI, p. 223.

to the King. A quotes Allestree to say that active obedience is owed to rulers in the case of all lawful commands, when the magistrate commands something that is not contrary to some command of God. But when the magistrate commands something that *is* contrary to what God has commanded, then 'we may, nay we must refuse thus to act (yet here we must be very well assured that the thing is so contrary, and not pretend conscience for a Cloak of Stubbornesse) we are in that case **to obey God rather than men**. But euen this is a season for the *passiue* obedience, we must patiently suffer what he inflicts on us for such refusall, and not, to secure our selues, rise vp against him.'²⁶ B reasonably asks why this doctrine should give any excuse for rebellion, or be linked to it; A responds that even if it does not apparently justify rebellion, nevertheless, like the Presbyterian doctrine, it claims to set the individual's interpretation of God's word above the determination of the Sovereign. 'If it be lawfull then for subjects to resist the King when he commands any thing that is against the Scripture, that is contrary to the Command of God, and to be Judge of the meaning of the Scripture, it is impossible that the life of any King or the peace of any Christian Kingdome can be long secure. It is this Doctrine that diuides a Kingdome within it selfe, whatsoeuer the men be Loyall or Rebels that write or preach it publickly.'²⁷ Whether or not the resistance is violent, in short, it still undermines the authority of the sovereign; besides, Hobbes doubts that passive obedience can ever be a realistic doctrine: 'He that means his suffering should be taken for Obedience, must not onely not resist, but also not fly, nor hide himselfe to auoid his punishment. And who is there amongst them that discourse thus of **passiue obedience**, when his life is in extreme danger that will voluntarily present himselfe to the Officers of Justice? Doe not we see that all men when they are led to execution are both bound and guarded. And would break loose if they could, and get away? Such is their **passiue obedience**.'²⁸

B does not object to this claim, but does point out that Allestree at least insists that before refusing active obedience to the King on the grounds that it would be contrary to God's law, the refuser must be 'very well assured that the thing is so contrary'. A tells him that 'because men do for the most part rather draw the Scripture to their owne sense, then follow the true sense of the Scripture, there is no other way to know certainly and in all cases what God commands or forbids vs to doe, but by the Sentence of him or them that are constituted by the King to determine the sense of the Scripture vpon

²⁶ MS fo. 24; EW VI, p. 225.

²⁷ MS fo. 24v; EW VI, p. 226.

²⁸ MS fo. 24v; EW VI, p. 226.

hearing of the particular case of Conscience which is in question. And they that are so constituted are easily knowne in all Christian Common wealths, whether they be Bishops, or Ministers, or Assemblies that gouerne the Church vnder him or them that haue the Soueraigne Power'.²⁹ There is an insinuation here that Allestree's attempted reassurance that the refuser needs absolute certainty of the rightness of his refusal is no reassurance at all, for the judge in these circumstances is likely to be the Church itself. B raises the objection that in that case, why were the scriptures translated into English; and what right had the apostles to defy the high priest? In the latter case, answers A, their knowledge that they had received a revelation from God provided them with just cause; and he argues that the benefits of the scriptures being in English, in terms of the lessons they can provide in both 'faith and manners', much outweigh the disadvantages.

At this point the argument shifts away from the discussion of Anglican political theology and back to the issue about education, how to teach the science of just and unjust. A expands on the benefits of reading scripture, and claims that men who 'are of a condition and age, fit to examine the sense of what they read, and that take a delight in searching out the grounds of their duty, certainly cannot chuse but by their reading of the Scriptures, come to such a sense of their duty, as not onely to obey the Laws themselues, but also to induce others to do the same.'³⁰ B leaps to the conclusion that he means those learned in Greek and Latin, who are 'such as love knowledge and consequently take delight in finding out the meaning of the most hard Tests, or in thinking they have found it, in case it be new, and not found out by others', people who have 'had their breeding in the Vniuersities', where they are exposed to both pointless controversies about the nature of God and seditious discussions about the rights of civil and ecclesiastical government; he goes on to argue that reform of the universities to bring them to 'such a compliance with the actions of state, as is necessary for the business' is essential for the maintenance of peace.³¹ A responds in an arch fashion that since the universities had so effectively served the authority of the Pope against the right of Kings and contrary to the law, 'why can they not as well, when they haue all manner of Laws, and Equity on their side, maintaine the Rights of him that is both Soueraigne of the Kingdome, and Head of the Church?' B asks why did this not happen at the Reformation, when Henry VIII became head of the Church; A tells him that this is because the Bishops contrived,

²⁹ MS fo. 25-v; EW VI, p. 228.

³⁰ MS fo. 26v; EW VI, p. 231.

³¹ MS fo. 27; EW VI, p. 233.

rather than abandoning the powers and rights that the Pope had lost, to take them over themselves: 'For though they were content that the Diuine Right which the Pope pretended to in England, should be denied him; yet they thought it not so fit to be taken from the Church of England, whom they now supposed themselves to represent'.³²

At this point Hobbes seems to try to divert attention from the bitterness with which he is assailing the Church of England by returning to the Presbyterians and their hypocrisy. But he quickly returns to the universities and the need for their reform: he recommends that they were

'not to be cast away, but to be better disciplin'd, that is to say, That the Polyticks there taught be made to be (as true Polyticks should be) such as are fit to make men know that it is their duty to obey all Laws whatsoever shall by the Authority of the King be enacted, till by the same Authority they shall be repealed; such as are fit to make men vnderstand that the Ciuill Laws are Gods Laws, as they that make them are by God appointed to make them; and to make men know that the People and the Church are one thing, and haue but one Head the King, and that no man has title to gouerne vnder him, that has it not from him. That the King owes his Crowne to God onely, and to no man Ecclesiastick or other. And that the Religion they teach there, be a quiet waiting for the comming againe of our blessed Sauour, and in the mean time a resolution to obey the Kings Laws (which also are Gods Laws) to iniure no man, to be in charity with all men, to cherish the poor and sick, and to liue soberly and free from scandall.'³³

Given that B has already suggested that he and A could preach as effectively as the clergy, it seems clear that Hobbes is suggesting nothing less than a repeat of the purge of the Universities which he praises in the third dialogue, but one guided by himself – or at least by his doctrine. Peace demands, in effect, the takeover of the higher education system by the secular authorities, and its reform on lines drawn up by Hobbes. Only this will overcome the power of the Clergy, as dangerous in Anglican hands as in Roman Catholic or Presbyterian ones.

In short, within the first dialogue of *Behemoth*, there exists a carefully constructed and very specific argument and message. The doctrine of the Church of England threatened the peace and stability of the kingdom just as significantly as did that of the Presbyterians (or indeed the Romanists); and

³² MS fo. 27v; EW VI, p. 234.

³³ MS fo. 28-v; EW VI, p. 236.

peace and stability could not be guaranteed without the civil power seizing control of the system which educated those who wielded social and educational influence. The clergy of the Church of England and the universities are not, it is true, *Behemoth's* only targets – the text throughout is particularly virulent on Presbyterianism and on the common-law culture of mid-seventeenth century England – but the attacks on them do form the most original aspects of the work. *Leviathan* had mounted an assault on priestcraft; it had not, however, specifically or directly attacked the Church of England, largely, no doubt, because during the 1650s Anglicanism was almost irrelevant (as Hobbes pointed out). It had also made a number of references to the role of papally instituted universities in upholding clerical power and had (in the Review and Conclusion) advertised his own doctrines as the antidote. But the point had been made there much less vigorously than in *Behemoth*. This part of *Behemoth's* message, at any rate, was not missed by contemporaries. A member of the Privy Council, Sir Thomas Chicheley, noticed its appearance in 1679, telling a friend 'I think [it] as well worth your reading as any thing you have read a great while there is no fault in it but his animosity to the universities'.³⁴

IV

Why, though, is this argument juxtaposed with a more straightforward narrative of the civil war, its origins and its consequences? It may be explained by a very specific set of circumstances, which ties *Behemoth* not to a particular contemporary political debate, but with one of Hobbes's ongoing controversies; it also, I think, increases the likelihood that *Behemoth* was the title intended by Hobbes.

Towards the end of the discussion outlined above Hobbes uses a peculiar and apparently irrelevant quotation. As B talks about the continuing inadequacies of Presbyterians he quotes a phrase from Book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*: 'haeret lateri letalis harundo' ('fast to her side clings the deadly shaft', according to the Fairclough translation).³⁵ The phrase comes as part of a simile about the lovelorn Dido, who is compared to a hind, already mortally wounded by an arrow, running about in a frenzied attempt to escape. It would naturally be taken to refer to the following sentence: 'The Seditious

³⁴ Legh MSS, John Rylands Library (unnumbered). I am grateful to Mark Knights for this reference.

³⁵ IV, 73 (Loeb ed., vol. I. p. 400).

Doctrine of the Presbyterians has been stuck so hard into the peoples heads and memories (I cannot say into their hearts, for they vnderstand nothing in it, but that they may lawfully Rebell) that I fear the Common wealth will neuer be cured'.³⁶ Yet the phrase seems forced in this context, and it does, in fact, have a much more precise significance.

Bramhall's 1658 review of *Leviathan, The Catching of Leviathan or the Great Whale*, was the target of one of Hobbes's other works of the late 1660s. There is some evidence that this text was in Hobbes's mind in 1668, about the same time as he was working on *Behemoth*. In the preface to his Answer to Bramhall, Hobbes writes that although Bramhall's text was published ten years previously, he had seen it for the first time only three months before. If this comment is not mistaken or disingenuous (both of which are possible), it dates the *Answer* to 1668. This seems confirmed by the fact that he was corresponding with the Under secretary of state, Joseph Williamson, in June 1668 about alterations to the text of his *Historical Narrative concerning Heresy* – a work which was eventually published with and appears to be linked to the answer to Bramhall.

Bramhall's work has a preface, addressed 'to the Christian Reader', in which the Bishop plays with the image of Leviathan at some length, applying it to Hobbes himself – 'The Leviathan doth not take his pastime in the deep with so much freedom, nor behave himself with so much height and insolence, as T.H. doth in the Schooles, nor domineer over the lesser fishes with so much scorn and contempt, as he doth over all other authors'. Hobbes is not so absolute a sovereign as he imagines himself to be: 'Our Greenland fishers have found out a new art to draw him out of his Castle, that is, the deep, though not with a fish hook, yet with their harping irons'. Three of these harpoons have been provided (by Bramhall of course): the first is aimed at his heart, the theological part of his discourse, to show his principles are not consistent with Christianity or any other religion; the second at the backbone, the political part of the discouse, to show that his principles are 'pernicious to all forms of government and all societies'; and the third at his head, or the 'rational part of his discourse', to show that his principles are inconsistent with themselves and contradict one another. Bramhall concludes with the warning 'Let him take heed, if these three darts do pierce his Leviathan home, it is not all the Dittany which groweth in Creet that can make them drop easily out of his body, without the utter overthrow of his course', and the quotation: 'haerebit lateri lethalis arundo'.³⁷ Hobbes's use of this quotation ten years lat-

³⁶ MS fo. 28; EW VI, p. 235.

³⁷ John Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan*, preface, in *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes his last animadversions in the case concerning liberty and universal necessity* (1657).

er in *Behemoth*, with its reference to doctrines being stuck hard into people's heads, memories and hearts, show, I think, that he is making a deliberate and teasing reference here to Bramhall's words; moreover, the fact that it is Presbyterian doctrines which are stuck is perhaps intended to back up the main thesis – that Anglican views on matters of clerical power are no different in practice from Presbyterian ones.

That this is the essential message of *Behemoth* is, I think, clinched by the work's odd title – a subject on which it is the controversy with Bramhall, again, that casts some light. That the title was intended by Hobbes has been doubted: he never referred to it by this name, and complained of its 'foolish title' when it emerged in its unauthorised state in 1679.³⁸ Yet the title he must have been referring to then was not *Behemoth* but the *History of the Civil Wars of England*, the title borne by the unauthorised printings of 1679; the St Johns manuscript does bear the title *Behemoth*, apparently in Wheldon's hand, as does Crooke's 1682 edition. Hobbes's use of the word in his earlier controversy with Bramhall in the 1650s – published as *Liberty, Necessity and Chance* – is relatively well known. Archbishop Bramhall said that two of his own Church were busy preparing answers to *Leviathan*, and offered to write one himself, to show how Hobbes's principles 'are pernicious both to piety and policy, and destructive to all relations'. Hobbes responded that 'I desire not that he or they should so misspend their time; but if they will needs do it, I can give them a fit title for their book, *Behemoth against Leviathan*.'³⁹ When he came to read *The Catching of Leviathan* in 1668 he would have been reminded of the comment, for Bramhall alludes to it there, in the same preface as he uses the Virgilian quotation referred to above.

In the remark in the controversy with Bramhall, the word *Behemoth* is used to mean the Church: the clerical estate against the civil power. Hobbes was not the first to use the word in this way, or close to it. Patricia Springborg has emphasised how Reformation writers such as Beza and Calvin avoided allegorical interpretations of Job, and stressed instead a more naturalistic interpretation,⁴⁰ but Mornay's anti-papal tract *The Mystery of Iniquity* (to which Hobbes makes a gratuitous reference in *Behemoth*) quotes allegorical uses in pre-Reformation texts. One of St Bernard's sermons refers to *Behemoth* (according to Mornay) as antichrist, who 'hath devoured the founts of the Wise, and the streams of the mightie', and 'trusteth that he can draw up Jordan in-

³⁸ Letter 208, *Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), vol. II, p. 772.

³⁹ *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*, EW V, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Patricia Springborg, 'Hobbes's biblical beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth', *Political Theory* 23 (1995), pp. 357-60.

to his mouth, that is the simple and humble that are in the Church'.⁴¹ Mornay also quoted Matthew of Paris's account of the prophecy of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln in the time of Henry III: 'he did manifest by what meanes the Roman Court, like as Behemoth (in Job) promised to swallow up all Iordan in this throat, might usurpe unto herselfe the goods of all intestates, and distinct legacies, and for the more licentious performance hereof, how she might draw the King to be a partaker and consort with her, in her rapine'.⁴² In these examples, the word is used to describe the Roman Church, or various manifestations of it. But I think that, as Hobbes's reference to the word during the mid-1650s implies, we should read it as referring to the Church of England and its episcopate.

An objection to this interpretation is that the title used in the St John's manuscript – *Behemoth or the Long Parliament* – seems to suggest that Behemoth should be taken as meaning the Long Parliament, and some commentators have viewed it in this way.⁴³ Such a meaning need not be excluded: Hobbes enjoyed creating ambiguity, and he may well have intended that *Behemoth* could be taken to mean either the Long Parliament or the Church – whether Roman or Anglican – either because both are aimed at in the text, or else because he was keen to confuse his critics. It is also the case that Hobbes used the word in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in a different sense: here Leviathan and Behemoth are depicted as both being ensnared by their common enemy, the papacy:

But now the Pope his end completely gains
And leads the People, and their Prince, in Chains:
Now vast *Leviathan* the Hook receives,
And *Behemoth* his wounded Nostrils grieves:
All gently own the Pope's Imperial Sway
Where'r the *Roman* eagles wing their Way.⁴⁴

Again, I don't believe that this should prevent us from interpreting Hobbes's use of the word in *Behemoth* in a different sense: Hobbes makes use of the phrase as his polemical or rhetorical requirements take him, and in the verse ecclesiastical history he plainly wished to pick up on the idea that here were two beasts described in Job as impossible to capture, which the pa-

⁴¹ Philip Mornay, *The Mysterie of Iniquitie: That is to say, the Historie of the Papacie, englished by Samson Lennard* (London, 1612), p. 304.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 400.

⁴³ Patricia Springborg, 'Hobbes's biblical beasts', p. 368.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 363.

pacy had succeeded in taming. Other interpretations have been advanced: Luc Borot has suggested that 'the fact that the word behemoth is in the plural, and connected to the explanation of the behaviour of groups makes me think that there is a connection – one that takes account of one of the most fundamental assumptions of the way of thinking of the time' – in other words Behemoth represents the turbulence of the common people. While plausible, and, as Borot says, consonant with contemporary ideas of the nature of popular interventions in political life, I can find no evidence in the text to support it.⁴⁵ Using *Behemoth* as the title for the dialogues seems intended by Hobbes as a sort of joke, offered in a spirit of some ambiguity, but containing a message meant to be in line with significant parts of the text: Behemoth, the 'chief of the ways of God', is to be read as an ironic reference not just to the Church, but more specifically to the Church of England, its hierarchy and to one of its chief defenders, Archbishop Bramhall.

V

Behemoth remains an ambiguous work, so oddly put together that it is worth considering whether its gestation is more complex than at first appears. Karl Schumann speculated that *Behemoth* was the work that Hobbes told Du Verdus about in a lost letter of 1666.⁴⁶ If this is right, if *Behemoth* does contain references made in response to *The Catching of Leviathan*, and if that response can be dated to 1668, then it seems conceivable that it was originally a relatively straightforward narrative work – though with some commentary – onto which Hobbes grafted, somewhat uncomfortably and well after it was begun, some elements of a response to Bramhall. This interpretation would certainly fit with the fact that Hobbes referred in his letter to Du Verdus to an 'epitome', and described the third and fourth dialogues in his dedication to Arlington as an 'epitome', yet did not use the word to describe the work as a whole.

It also seems possible that the work – or at least these polemical parts of it – may be associated with a particular moment and opportunity. The fall of

⁴⁵ Luc Borot, 'Hobbes's *Behemoth*', in *Hobbes and History*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Tom Sorrell (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁶ In a review of 'Thomas Hobbes, *Oeuvres*', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (1996). The letter referred to is Letter 180, *Correspondence*, II, 697-98. Du Verdus writes in April 1668 in reply to a letter of Hobbes of 20 July 1666 (which he had only recently received). He says 'O que je jouirous aussi avec tres grand plaisir de votre Epitome de vos Troubles si vous le donies au public et qui'il pleut a Dieu qu'il me vint' (If only I might also have the very great pleasure of reading your Summary of your Tribulations, if you were to publish it and if it pleased God to let me have a copy).

the Earl of Clarendon in August 1667 was widely seen as removing from power one of the Church's principal defenders and allowing the reopening of the debate on the Restoration ecclesiastical settlement. One result was the sporadic debates on comprehension and toleration which ensued. While *Behemoth* seems clearly not to be designed as a contribution to those debates, it may stem from the same moment – a moment which may have seemed to Hobbes particularly apt to offer his thoughts on the need for a revision of the relationship between Church and State.

These are speculations. But it is clear that some of the most significant parts of *Behemoth* do constitute a shrewd and provocative assault on the central claims of the Restoration Church of England to a close alliance with the monarchy of Charles II, coupled with a recommendation that the Universities, controlled by the clergy, should be radically reformed. The discussion of *The Whole Duty of Man* and the points that it provokes occupy only about seven pages out of 38 in the first Dialogue, or out of about 140 in the whole work. Yet it seems to me to be central to Hobbes's agenda in *Behemoth*: to demonstrate to the King and others that the Anglican clergy, who trumpeted their loyalty to the monarchy and their political reliability, on whom the state relied for the education of the people in their political duties, were essentially as untrustworthy as all other clergy, Roman or Presbyterian. Though the Church tried strenuously to insist that it and the State were inseparable allies and that the viability of the state depended on the survival of the Church, it was already nervous, only a few years after the Restoration, that the State held a very different perspective on the problem; twenty years later such intense pressure would be placed on the political loyalty of the Church of England that Hobbes's dissection of the meaning of its doctrine of passive obedience might have appeared apt and prescient.