There is a developing interest among Hobbes scholars in the idiosyncrasies of his texts. A generation ago, we became preoccupied with approaches to interpretation when Hobbes studies became the site for sophisticated applications of approaches as diverse as contextualist history and game theory. Now, attention is turning to the nature of the texts themselves. The concern links Hobbes studies into the field of the ‘history of the book,’ which treats the historical sociology of book and manuscript production. Markers of the renewed interest in Hobbes’s texts include a 2003 critical edition of *Leviathan*, edited by Karl Schuhmann and G. A. J. Rogers, who devote a volume to comparing seventeenth- through twenty-first-century editions; François Tricaud’s introduction and French translation of the Latin *Leviathan*; as well as the ongoing project of Clarendon Press, under Noel Malcolm’s direction, to produce a definitive collected edition that will supersede the nineteenth-century Molesworth.

It is illustrative that a recently-published volume of essays on *Leviathan After 350 Years* opens with a section on “*Leviathan* among Hobbes’s Political Writings,” in which the essays take on the question of whether *Leviathan* is continuous with, or distinct from, the earlier *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. Are they three independent texts or a single, reworked one? In the case of most classics in the tradition of political theory, the question of what constitutes the text would never arise. But in the case of *Leviathan*, it is basic. In this essay, I propose to lay out why the question arises and what it entails, as well as to explore

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related problems of continuity and consistency among Hobbes’s political-theory texts.

Hobbes studies have an amorphous subject due to his practice of serially composing multiple works with overlapping content and arguments. Common as a practice among early-modern authors, serial composition invites interpretive disputes over the definition of the relevant set of texts and the relationship between them, their continuity or lack thereof. In Hobbes’s case, these problems are compounded by the particular way in which he went about serial composition. John Aubrey, a friend and his first biographer, described the method as it played out in the composition of *Leviathan*: Hobbes walked much and contemplated, and he had in the head of his Staffe a pen and inke-horne, carried always a Note-book in his pocket, and as soon as a notion darted, he presently entred it into his Booke.…. He had drawn the Designe of the Booke into Chapters, etc. so he knew whereabout it would come in.\(^5\)

When he slotted new material into preexisting frameworks, Hobbes did not always rework the text in the interest of consistency.

Hence the upshot of serially composing works in this fashion was to make consistency problematic both between and within works. *The Elements of Law* (1640), *De Cive* (1642, with a second edition in 1647), and *Leviathan* (1651) were produced in several languages over the course of the Civil War decade, and publication of related works continued through 1668. For any author, such a publication history could be expected to breed problems of inconsistency between works as the author’s thinking changes and develops over time. In Hobbes’s case, the tumultuous context, to which many changes in his arguments responded, only increased the occasions for inconsistency.\(^6\) But it was his habit of sloting new material into old that made changes between works into a source of internal as well as external inconsistency. When he left old formulations standing next to new ones, the result was at least complication and, sometimes, contradiction. A well-known example is the dual accounts of the political covenant in *Leviathan*—nonresistance (an account which is developed in the *Elements* and


\(^6\) For the argument that Hobbes’s arguments should be read as “polemical intervention[s] in the ideological conflicts of his time,” see Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. xvi.