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. 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

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