

DRAFT PAPER

Hobbes and the Crisis of Exemplarity:
History and Sovereign Visibility in *Leviathan*

Esben Korsgaard Rasmussen
Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen

ekr@teol.ku.dk

Me quidem nichil est quod moveat
quantum exempla clarorum hominum
Fransesco Petrarca, *Le familiari*, VI, 4

Im Staat kan es kein Heroen mehr Geben:
diese kommen nur im ungebildeten Zustande vor
G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, §93

Hobbes and the Crisis of Exemplarity:

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1. *The Crisis of Exemplarity*

One of the preeminent functions of the writing of history in the Renaissance was its ability to furnish its readers with guidance for practical life. Typical of such guidance was the narration of the great exploits of past political actors by which a string of eminent *exempla* were conjured up. These examples were meant to provide guidance for future action by means of imitation on the part of the intended audience.¹ Thus, historiography was in no way a simple theoretical endeavor. Rather, it involved high moral stakes as the ability for virtuous political action was premised upon the knowledge and correct rhetorical narration of the examples that were to constitute the normative guidelines for public action.²

That feature was, of course, not specific to the rediscovery of Ancient historiography in fourteenth

¹ Although he complains that no one have imitated the political exploits of the Ancients, Machiavelli expresses this idea eloquently in his preface to the *Discorsi*. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *Tutte le Opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Firenze/Milano: Bompiano, 2018), 307. See as well Francesco Petrarca, *De viris illustribus*, ed. Guido Martellotti (Firenze: G.C.Sansoni Editore, 1964), 4: “Apud me nisi ea requiruntur, que ad virtutes vel virtutem contraria trahi possunt; hic enim, nisi fallor, fructuosus historicorum finis est, illa prosequi que vel sectenda legentibus vel fugienda sunt.” See as well Thomas Blundeville’s succinct statement: “The way to that peace wherof I speake, is partly taught by the Philosophers in generall precepts and rules, but the Historiographers doe teache it much more playnlye by peticular examples and experiences.” Hugh G. Dick, “Thomas Blundeville’s *The true order and Methode of wryting and reading Hystories* (1574), *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 2 (1940), 161.

² For the practical implications of Renaissance rhetoric and its effect on the *vita activa*, see Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985). On the relation between narration and exemplarity, history and moral philosophy, see Karlheinz Stierle, “L’histoire comme exemple, l’exemple comme histoire”, *Poésie*, 10, 1972, 182-186. Of course, already Aristotle had made explicit the relation between example and rhetoric, see Aristotle, *Ars rhetorica*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 1356b5: the example (*paradeigma*) corresponds to the philosophical notion of “induction” (*epagôgê*) insofar as both departs from a particular case and proceeds to a universal statement.

and fifteenth century Italy. To be sure, historiography had always aimed to do the same.³ By recounting the glorious actions of past figures, historiography had always meant to instruct its readers in what paths to choose in situations similar to those in which the original *exempla* were situated.

The idea that the narration of history could provide guidelines for contemporary action did not, however, restrict itself to the immediate effects upon the sole audience of the narration. Indeed, the virtuous action that were to be instigated by the force of the *exempla* was itself to act as an example with a view to the general proliferation of virtue. Although this procedure was not limited to principalities but was envisaged to work for republics as well, its function was all the more obvious in a polity with only one ruler. When the audience for the historical narration was a conspicuous public figure such as a prince, his example were in turn to act as a model for imitation.⁴ Addressing the Neapolitan prince Alfonso in the 1460s, Italian humanist Giovanni Pontano exhorted him to imitate the great figures of the past. Through this imitation the prince was not simply to be virtuous in his own right, but to be a shining example to his subjects. Consequent to the conspicuous position of the prince within the polity, Pontano stresses that

you must exert yourself so that all you say and do is such that it not only gives you praise and authority, but so that even servants and the people are incited to virtue. To which nothing will

³ See Polybius: “there is no more available improvement (*diorthôsin*) for men than the knowledge of the acts of their predecessors (*tês tôn progegenêmenôn praxeôn epistêmês*).” Polybe, *Histoires, Livre I*, ed. Paul Pédech (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1969), 18. For an account of Greek historiography and the shift towards political history in Thucydides and the subsequent tradition, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1990), 29-48. For the connection between the appearance of historiography and politics, see François Châtelet, *Naissance de l'histoire. Tome 1* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962). See as well Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita. Tomus I. Libri I-V*, ed. Robert Seymour Conway & Carol Flamstead Walters (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1914), 3. Here, Livius explicitly states the relation between the narration of *exempla* and present *imitatio* as a matter of historiography. For the use of examples in Livius, see Jane D. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.) For a concise consideration of ancient historiography and the historiography of the Renaissance, see Thierry Méniessier, *Machiavel, la politique et l'histoire. Enjeux philosophiques* (Paris: PUF, 2001), 15-86. See as well Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁴ Of course, this was the case for the entire genre of the “mirror of princes” literature, hugely influential during the middle ages but with roots in the Ancient historiography as found in, for example, Xenophon. See Wilhelm Berges, *Die Fürstenspiegel des hohen und späten Mittelalters* (Leipzig: Verlag Karl W. Hiersemann, 1938.) For the at least partial dismantlement of that genre with Machiavelli's *Il principe*, see Michel Senellart, *Les art de gouverner. Du regimen médiéval au concept de gouvernement* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), 211-230. In the Middle Ages, kingship was sometimes considered as an imitation of Christ – the king was *christomimêtês*. For this “Christ-centered Kingship”, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 46-61. Such a conception constitutes a variation on the idea of *rex imago Dei*, that is, the king as the image of God. For the *rex imago Dei*, see as well Senellart, *Les arts*, 148-154; Berges, *Fürstenspiegel*, 25-34. For the transformation and sudden uptake of the “mirror of princes” literature in the wake of the reformation, see Naïma Ghermani, *Le Prince et son portrait. Incarner le pouvoir dans l'Allemagne du XVIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 123-165.

incite more than the sight of your virtue and your perfect manners.⁵

The imitation of past figures on the part of the prince would thus seem to condition the proliferation of the virtues these ancient heroes had embodied. Acting as a conduit for virtue, the prince was to be imitated by his subjects as a function of his preeminent visibility.

Yet, by the rediscovery of the Ancients and their promotion to the ranks of *exempla* for public action, a chasm had been opened up. For only on the premise that universal models of virtue were indeed possible to dislodge from the mutable fabric of history, was it possible to consider the virtue of the ancients as models for contemporary action. But by fashioning itself as a “re-birth” of a long gone past, conceivable only after the intercession of the dark middle-ages, the humanist movement of the renaissance seemed to involve an inherent contradiction.⁶ To be sure, implicit in the rediscovery of ancient virtue was the recognition of its specific historical rootedness and as an almost inevitable correlate to this recognition, the awareness that such rootedness severely complicated the process of imitation. If the exercise of virtue was always contingent upon a highly specific historical situation, no guarantee could be given that such circumstances either were or ever could be reproduced. If virtuous action were contingent upon historical context, it would seem as if such action could only be reproduced on condition of the presence of similar, even identical, circumstances. Yet, the very idea of a renaissance could be seem to deny this very possibility, insofar as it by necessity implied a recognition of its own specific historical circumstances.

The gradual recognition of this difficulty has led a number of scholars to speak of a “crisis of exemplarity” usually located within the late Renaissance. As Timothy Hampton succinctly puts it:

the humanist reading of history was marked by a tension between an idealistic faith in the absolute value of models from the past and a gnawing sensitivity to the contingencies that kept ancient

⁵ Pontano quoted from *Prosatori latini del quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milano/Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1952), 1045-1046: “praebetque sese spectandam omnibus, studendum est ut dicta factaque tua omnia eiusmodi sint, quae non modo laudem tibi atque auctoritatem pariant, sed et familiares et populares ipsos ad virtutem excitent. Ad quam nulla eos res magis excitabit, quam spectata ipsis virtus tua et mores quam probatissimi.” Despite the seemingly high moral stance of this passage, Susan Gaylard has proposed a convincing reading of Pontano’s *Principe* suggesting that it is, in fact, much closer to *Il principe* of Machiavelli than has usually been assumed. See Susan Gaylard, “Re-Envisioning the Ancients: Pontano, Ghirlandaio, and Exemplarity,” *Italian Studies*, vol. 64, 2009, 245-265. See as well James Hankins, *Virtue Politics. Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 510: “What princes should do, above all else, is to set an example for their subject. Humanist educators often repeated the admonition that everything the prince does is visible to the people, as though he were placed in a high tower or on a stage.” Apart from Pontano, Hankins lists passages in Machiavelli, Alberti and Maio where we find such an image. However, the most famous example, not mentioned by Hankins, is perhaps that of the prologue to Machiavelli’s *Principe*. See Machiavelli, *Opere*, 804. The image recurs in chapter XV as well, see Machiavelli, *Opere*, 859. Yet, see Hankins, *Virtue*, 31-62, for a brilliant exposition of the principles and pervasiveness of what he calls “virtue politics” in the Renaissance. See as well Quentin Skinner’s analysis of the Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s cycle of frescoes, considered in a specifically republican light: Quentin Skinner, *Vision of Politics. Volume II: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39-117.

⁶ See Ulrik Muhlack, “Die humanistische Historiographie: Umfang, Bedeutung, Probleme” in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zu Humanismus und Historismus, Absolutismus und Aufklärung*, ed. Notker Hammerstein and Gerrit Walter (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006), 124-141; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 61-63.

models of excellence rooted in their own culture.⁷

And indeed, Machiavelli's *Il principe*, written in 1513, does seem to mark a profound shift within the historiographical tradition of exemplarity. Here, Machiavelli stresses that the prince, as a direct consequence of the mutability of things, must be ready to change his manner of action with each turn of the tide.⁸ Those who are not ready to do so, will inevitably fail. As a direct consequence of the recognition that virtuous conduct always depends upon historical context, Machiavelli derives a complex strategy of visual manipulation. For given that the ruler cannot always *be* the perfect embodiment of traditional moral virtuous, he must appear either to be so or at least not so bad that he will get a reputation for the opposite vice.⁹ Without such manipulation, the ruler quickly loses his possessions.

By this excessively brief exposition, we can see how Machiavelli profoundly alters the mechanisms of exemplarity. As a consequence of the radical contingency of “the human conditions” (*le condizione humane*), it is no longer possible to extract infallible rules for virtuous conduct from history. If history teaches us anything, it is only that seemingly universal moral prescriptions cannot be upheld when the times demand otherwise. Yet, insofar as the prince retains his conspicuous position within the polity, he must appear in a way that caters to the moral virtues still in credence among his subjects.¹⁰ This appearance, ideally in the prince's complete control, are meant as a prudential remedy to the broken continuity with the past. Thus, the radical mutability of the historical context that determines the right practical procedure translates into a separation between the normative measure holding for the prince and that of his subjects. Or, to put it in other words: virtue is

⁷ Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History. The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 298; Susan Gaylard, *Hollow Men: Writing, Objects and Public Image in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); François Rigolot, “The Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 59 (1998), 557-563; Karlheinz Stierle, “Three Moments in the Crisis of Exemplarity: Boccaccio-Petrarch, Montaigne, and Cervantes,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 59 (1998), 581-595. Though these writers all stress the applicability of a notion of “crisis” related to the widespread use of examples, they wary according to the exact moment at which to locate it.

⁸ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 898: “quel principe che s'appoggia tutto in sulla fortuna, rovina come quella varia; crede ancora che sia felice quelle che riscontra el modo del procedere suo con le qualità de' tempi, e similmente sia infelice quello che con il procedere suo si discordano e' tempi.”

⁹ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 860.

¹⁰ See as well Sébastien Roman, *Nous, Machiavel et la démocratie* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017), 100-108. Yet, as Gérard Sfez rightly stresses, the conduct of the prince is not merely a “politics of appearance.” See Gérard Sfez, *Machiavel, le prince sans qualités* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1998), 270-279. Indeed, sometimes the prince has to display a cruelty that cannot be hidden behind an appearance of moral virtue. See for instance, Machiavelli, *Opere*, 828, where Remirro de Orco's gruesome fate is discussed. For the relation between the prudence of the prince and the values still in credence among his subjects, see Eugene Garver, “After *Virtù*: Rhetoric, Prudence and Moral Pluralism in Machiavelli,” *History of Political Thought*, vol. 27 (1996), 195-223.

no longer univocal.¹¹ The prince is excused for using measures that would not be allowed according to a traditional conception of moral virtue when the conditions of a specific situation demands it.¹² Yet, he must still maintain an appearance adjusted to such a traditional conception of morality. The appearance of the prince is consequently molded, in large measure, according to the traditional traits of exemplarity despite the divorce between the actual being and the mere appearance of the prince.

Such a manipulation of appearances was part and parcel of the “new humanism” that flourished in the wake of Machiavelli and was nourished by a general skepticism towards universal moral standards.¹³ But despite its uneasiness over the universal validity of exemplary virtue, this tradition remained firmly within the historiographical tradition revitalized by the former humanists. It might be that the examples to be imitated no longer conformed to an ideal Ciceronian, of even Christian, model, yet, the format of political discourse was still largely dependent upon the practical study of

¹¹ The fact that one sort of virtue holds for the prince and another for his subjects is clearly reflected in Giovanni Botero’s *Della Ragion di Stato*, first published in 1589. See especially Giovanni Botero, *Della Ragion di Stato*, ed. Carlo Morandi (Bologna: L. Cappelli Editore, 1930), 26. Botero distinguishes two virtues (“valore”, “prudenza”) that are particularly apt to gain the prince a glorious reputation and are not necessarily aimed at securing the “good” of another. See as well Botero, *Ragion*, 53: “Veniamo ora alle cose, ch’aggiungono riputazione, che son due principalmente, la Prudenza e il Valore. Questi sono due pilastri, su i quali si deve fondate ogni governo.” Yet, such a separation seems to be present already in Thomas Aquinas’s treatment of *prudentia*, as has been demonstrated by Michel Senellart. The distinction between a *prudentia regnativa* and a *prudentia politica* has its roots in Aristotle. However, while the latter had softened this distinction by his notion of government taken in turns that option does not seem to have been a possibility to Aquinas. See Senellart, *Les Arts*, 176-179, 221-222; Aristotle, *Politica*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 1333a11-15; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, IIae, ed. Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis (Ottawa: Collège Dominicain d’Ottawa, 1942), q. 47, a. 12; q. 50, a. 2. For monarchy as the best option for political rule, see Thomas d’Aquin, *La Royauté*, ed. D. Carron and V. Decaix (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2017), 100. It should be noted as well that monarchy is considered the best as a function of its *efficiency*: “Quanto igitur regimen efficacius fuerit ad unitatem pacis servandam, tanto erit utilius (...) Manifestum est autem quod unitatem magis efficere potest quod est per se unum quam plures (...) Utilius igitur est regimen unius quam plurimum.”

¹² This novel conception of the conditions of political action would in turn profoundly alter the concept of “prudence.” For Machiavelli’s notion of *prudenza* in relation to its preceding history, see Christian Lazzeri, “Prudence, éthique et politique de Thomas d’Aquin à Machiavel” in *De la prudence des anciens comparée à celle des modernes*, ed. André Tosel (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995), 79-128. For the growing disaffection with prudence as a model for political theory and its gradual effacement from political theory, see as well Merio Scattola, *Dalla virtù alla scienza. La fondazione e la trasformazione della disciplina politica nell’età moderne* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2003), 109-172.

¹³ See Francis Bacon, *The Complete Essays of Francis Bacon* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), 16-19. Indeed, Bacon’s essay “Of Simulation and Dissimulation” opens with a quote from Tacitus. For the development of “Machiavellianism” and the related “Tacitism,” which Richard Tuck terms “new humanism,” see Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.) Tuck brilliantly narrates the growth and spread of this new humanism inspired by Tacitus rather than Cicero. That development would seem to be closely related to the “crisis of exemplarity,” insofar as the turn away from Cicero was marked by a skepticism towards a universal morality seen in abstraction from the specific historical situation of each nation. See as well Momigliano, *Classical*, 109-131. For the concept of *ragion di stato* and its relation to Machiavelli, see Michel Senellart, *Machiavélisme et raison d’état: XII^e-XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1989.) For Hobbes’s relation to the *ragion di stato*-literature, see Noel Malcolm, *Reason of State, Propaganda, and the Thirty Years’ War. An Unknown Translation by Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 105-123.

history.¹⁴ To put it another way: it might be that its examples had changed, still, this “new humanism” drew its deepest inspiration from the prudent reading of history and the lessons that were to be drawn from it. Despite its alterations, the relation between history and the figure of the ruler that were characteristic of early renaissance exemplarity remained in effect, insofar as this was still the model that the writers of the *ragion di stato*-literature struggled to come to terms, and, to be sure, manipulate, with.

2. *Hobbes and Renaissance Historiography*

If we take the conclusions of Arlene Saxonhouse and Noel Reynolds for granted, there can be no question that Hobbes during the 1620’s belonged completely to the new strand humanism that was skeptical towards traditional models of virtuous conduct. For then we must attribute to Hobbes the short *Discourse on the Beginnings of Tacitus*, written around 1620.¹⁵ Here, the ability of Augustus to manipulate his public appearance such that he will not be hated despite having gained the supremacy over Rome is discussed and, rather obviously, praised.¹⁶ Besides the evidence of its subject matter, even the wording of the text suggest its debt to renaissance historiography. After having related how Augustus gave titles to the sons of his wife in addition to his own, Hobbes concludes that “[t]herefore it is not good for a Prince in appointing his successors, to the leave the reversion of the State to such as may have power and means to subvert the first heirs thereof.”¹⁷ Despite the somewhat cynical character of Augustus, this is clearly a prudential prescription drawn from a historical example. Augustus might not be the perfect example of moral virtue, yet, his conduct demonstrates the political expediency needed if a new prince is to remain in power.¹⁸ In short: from the writing of history we can extract examples that serve as guidelines for contemporary political action.

But even if Hobbes is not the author of the *Discourses*, his debt to renaissance historiography is evident from another work he undoubtedly fathered, that is, the translation of Thucydides’ *The*

¹⁴ Indeed, insofar as Machiavelli had attempted to construe a model of exemplarity based upon the sheer mutability of past successful princes, the historiographical method implied by the renaissance rediscovery of ancient virtue continued to make its effects felt even here. The inherent contradictions of such a model of exemplarity was clearly stated by Henri de Rohan in the 1630’s: “[O]n ne peut établir une règle immuable dans le gouvernement des Etats. Ce qui cause la révolution des affaires de ce monde, cause aussi le changement des maximes fondamentales, pour bien régner. C’est pourquoi, ceux qui en ces matières se guident plus par les exemples du passé que par les raisons présentes, font par nécessité des manquements notables.” See Henri de Rohan, *De l’intérêt des princes et des Etats de la chrétienté*, ed. Christian Lazzeri (Paris: PUF, 1995), 159. That being said, however, Rohan’s work is primarily a historical consideration of “negative examples.”

¹⁵ See the introductory essays in Thomas Hobbes, *Three Discourses*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds and Arlene W. Saxonhouse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.) For a corroboration of the authenticity of at least the first of these discourses, see as well Richard Tuck, “Hobbes and Tacitus” in *Hobbes and History*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers and Tom Sorell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 99-111 and Daniela Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli nell’Inghilterra degli Stuart* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2011.) For a critical assessment of the discourses’ authenticity, see, however, Malcolm, *Reason of State*, 7, 110-112.

¹⁶ Hobbes, *Discourses*, 38.

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Discourses*, 54.

¹⁸ Just as in Machiavelli, the problems implied by the radical contingency of human affairs seem to be paradigmatically expressed by the figure of the “new prince.” See Hobbes, *Discourses*, 43-44. See as well Machiavelli, *Opere*, 807: “Ma nel principato nuovo consistono le difficoltà.”

Peloponnesian War, published in 1629.¹⁹ In his dedication of the work to Sir William Cavendish, Hobbes insists that while the young Earl has “both examples and precepts of heroic virtue (...) at home,” he still recommends the reading of Thucydides because it will supposedly “confer not a little to your institution.”²⁰ Shortly after, in the *Preface to the Readers*, Hobbes explains that

the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future.²¹

Here, historiography is evidently tied to the aim of instructing its readers by the display of examples. Indeed, it is in this regard that Thucydides shows himself as a master of his craft. For he does not simply add moral precepts to his narration, rather, he “setteth his reader in the assemblies of the people.” As Plutarch, whom Hobbes quotes with approval in his essay *The Life and History of Thucydides*, had explained: Thucydides makes his “auditor a spectator.”²²

Historiography, when written correctly, is thus able to furnish contemporary actors with guidance insofar as it can display *exempla* so vividly as to appear almost visible. It might be that these examples do not suit perfectly the lineaments of a Ciceronian ideal, they do, however, still fit within a general scheme of renaissance historiography.²³ To be sure, it is a telling fact that some of Hobbes’s first literary productions are comments on two classical historiographers – if, of course, we grant the authenticity of the *Discourse*. This interest in the Ancient historiography is not to be understood as a mere scholarly exercise, but seems to constitute a political engagement written in a format that

¹⁹ Of course, Hobbes’s debt to the *studia humanitatis* has been magisterially shown by Quentin Skinner who specifically emphasizes the influence of the rhetorical tradition in order to show how even Hobbes’s *Leviathan* was indebted to that tradition. At least as concerns the figure of the sovereign in that work, however, I cannot agree to such a continued debt to renaissance humanism. See Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.)

²⁰ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War. The Complete Hobbes Translation*, ed. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), XX.

²¹ Thucydides, *Peloponnesian*, XXI. For Hobbes’s characterization of Thucydides as “the most politic historiographer that ever writ” and its possible connection to Tacitism, see Malcolm, *Reason of State*, 113: “in early modern English the adjective “politique” or “politic(k)” implied skill and shrewdness in the contrivance, conduct, or understanding of policy.”

²² Thucydides, *Peloponnesian*, 577.

²³ See, however, Gigliola Rossini, “The criticism of rhetorical historiography and the ideal of scientific method: history, nature and science in the political Language of Thomas Hobbes,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 306: “Hobbes, however, did not conceive of history in terms of the Ciceronian notion of *magistra vitae*. The *object* of history should, he claimed, consist only of the careful and objective reconstruction of facts.” Although I agree with Rossini that Hobbes’s does not follow a Ciceronian model in his appraisal of Thucydides, I still think that he remains within a scheme of *exemplarity* even if that scheme is determined by a “new” and Tacitean humanism.

perhaps, in the 1620's, would have presented itself most readily to the mind of Hobbes.²⁴ What we might learn from Thucydides would, for instance, be the inherent evils of a democracy. For “he notheth the emulation and contention of the demagogues for reputation and glory of with; with their crossing of each other's counsels, to the damage of the public.”²⁵ In this regard, Hobbes remains within the confines of a Tacitean humanism, skeptical towards the universal validity of moral virtues, yet, determined to amend political action by the prudential reading of history.

Although Hobbes would later return to the writing of history with *Behemoth*, it is nonetheless important to stress the radical change that the format of his political writings were to take from at least the 1640's and on, first with *The Elements of Law* in 1640, later with *De cive* in 1642 and finally with *Leviathan* in 1651. In these works, or so I will argue, Hobbes tried to overcome what he had come to consider the inherent failings of a political doctrine that relied solely upon the humanist tradition of historiography – whether Ciceronian or Tacitean in form. Only in this basis, so I claim, could he again turn to historiography as he did in the 1660's with *Behemoth*.²⁶ The change of mind that occurred after Hobbes's initial historiographical writing would in turn gravely affect his idea of the visibility of the sovereign ruler, that is, the way he where to symbolically appear to his subjects. This latter development were only to occur, or at least be taken to its final consequences, in *Leviathan*.²⁷ It is thus to the configuration of history and visibility in this work, the actual subject of this article, that we shall now turn.

3. Prudence, History and Morality

In *Elements of Law*, Hobbes categorically asserts that “experience concludeth nothing universally.”²⁸ On account of what we have experienced before – the glass breaking after its encounter with the rock –, we tend to draw inferences about what will happen on similar occasions, that is, we form an expectation towards what will happen in the future. Yet, no matter how many times we have seen the window shattering having thrown a rock at it, we cannot conclude with certainty that such an event

²⁴ For the idea that it was for political reasons that Hobbes chose to translate Thucydides, as he does indeed claim in his autobiography, see Iohannis D. Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy. The Rhetoric and Science in Hobbes's State of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 27-43. See as well Skinner, *Reason*, 242 and Tuck, *Philosophy*, 282. As Tuck points out, we have every reason, especially based on the catalogue he drew up of the Hardwick library (Chatsworth Hobbes MS E.I.A), where *ragion di stato* writers figure prominently, to take Hobbes's choice of Thucydides as motivated by an interest in this sort of literature of an explicitly political kind.

²⁵ Thucydides, *Peloponnesian*, 572.

²⁶ Thus, I cannot agree completely with Tuck's assessment of *Behemoth* as a thoroughly Tacitean work. It might be that it Hobbes's Tacitean past plays a crucial role in his late writing of history, yet, that influence had in the meantime been profoundly revised through his works of “political science.” See Tuck, “Hobbes”, 109-110.

²⁷ If for no other reason, the dramatic shift in iconography that occurred between the frontispieces of *De cive* and *Leviathan* should make us suspect that visibility plays a novel role in the latter work. I shall not, however, consider the frontispiece in any detail in this article. See, amongst many others, Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes. Der Leviathan. Das Urbild des modernen Staates und seine Gegenbilder. 1651-2001* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2020.)

²⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33.

will take place upon a like occasion. Having amassed a certain amount of experience we will, however, be able to conjecture better about the future. Such conjecture is what Hobbes terms “prudence.”²⁹ As he affirms in *Leviathan*: “Prudence is a *Praesumption* of the *Future*, contracted from the *Experience* of time *Past*.”³⁰ The reason why prudence can never obtain a sufficient degree of universality so as to be certain, stems from the fact that each singular event, in which we can distinguish a seeming cause and a seeming event, involves a degree of complexity such that we can never ascertain what was indeed acting as the complete cause.³¹ As Hobbes concludes: the “conjecture” that is prudence “through the difficulty of observing all circumstances” is “very fallacious.”³²

It is against this background that Hobbes excludes history from his indexation of the sciences later on in *Leviathan*. History is merely the “Register of *Knowledge of Fact*.”³³ Although it might register and arrange these facts in a manner conducive to a prudential understanding of the past, history can never produce absolute certainty. The exclusion of history from the domain of science thus stems from the fact that experience is necessarily imbedded in a complex net of circumstances, the exact nature of which can never be properly determined. Prudence, and with it, history, are essentially fallible insofar as they both depend upon a finite and therefore contingent set of observations. While this is not necessarily a novel insight,³⁴ Hobbes takes it to its final consequences.

For it is essentially on the basis of the avowed weakness of prudential reasoning that Hobbes criticizes a Machiavellian conception of politics later in *Leviathan*. Discussing the famous “Fool” who

²⁹ Hobbes, *Elements*, 33. See as well Thomas Hobbes, *Critique du De mundo de Thomas White*, ed. Jean Jacquot and Harold Whitmore Jones (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1973), 354: “Quamadmodum autem experimentorum memoria *experientia* dicitur respectu praeteriti, ita eadem respectu futuri vocatur *expectatio*, ideoque experientia multa eadem res est cum prudentia, sive futuri providentia.”

³⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 44.

³¹ For the notion of “complete cause” (*causa integra*) and its possible paradoxes, even attested by Hobbes himself, see Thomas Hobbes, *De corpore. Elementorum philosophiae sectio prima*, ed. Karl Schuhmann (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1999), 96; Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works, vol. V*, ed. William Molesworth (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1966), 302: “For there is hardly any one action, how casual soever it seem to the causing whereof concur not whatsoever is *in rerum natura*. Which, because it is a great paradox, and depends on many antecedent speculations, I do not press in this place.”. See as well Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works, vol. IV*, ed. William Molesworth (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1966), 246-247; Luc Foisneau, *Hobbes et la toute-puissance de Dieu* (Paris: PUF, 2000), 110-123; Martine Pécharman, “Philosophie première et théorie de l’action selon Hobbes” in *Thomas Hobbes. Philosophie première, théorie de la science et politique*, ed. Yves Charles Zarka and Jean Bernhardt (Paris: PUF, 1989), 47-66.

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 42. See as well Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1052: “the omission of every little circumstance altering the effect, frustrated the expectation of the most Prudent.”

³³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124.

³⁴ For the critique of the Aristotelian idea of a universal science of particulars, see Tuck, *Philosophy*, 22-30.

“hath said in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice,”³⁵ Hobbes asks if it is against reason to obtain a kingdom by violence “when it is impossible to receive hurt from it?”³⁶ The question is particularly thorny as history seems to show that such a usurpation of the highest power, without consequent hurt, is indeed possible. At least, that is what Machiavelli’s own examples could be taken to suggest. It is thus that “Successful wickedness hath obtained the name of Vertue.”³⁷ Yet, despite the fact that such a manner of action has proven successful before that does not make it just, that is, conformable to reason. If this were the case, it would imply that “examples of former times” were indeed “good reasons to do the same again.” This is, however, exactly what Hobbes denies.³⁸ Rather, it is *against* reason to use former examples as an argument for doing the same again, exactly due to the weakness of the knowledge that can be extracted from history. To be sure, this is the point Hobbes is trying to drive home a few lines further on:

When a man doth a thing, which notwithstanding any thing can be foreseen, and reckoned on, tendeth to his own destruction, howsoever some accident which he could not expect, arriving, may turne it to his benefit; yet such event do not make it reasonable or wisely done.³⁹

Although history might contain examples of unjust action that remained unpunished, they were nevertheless done without reason, insofar as their outcome could never have been foreseen with any certainty. As a consequence of its innate fallibility, prudential reasoning, and with it the entire reading

³⁵ The literature on the fool in *Leviathan* is abundant. It is not, however, necessary to my argument to engage with this figure in more detail. For only one notable contribution, see Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbes and the Foole,” *Political Theory*, vol. 25 (1997), 620-645 as well as Hayes’ response to Hoekstra, Peter Hayes, “Hobbes’s Silent Fool. A Response to Hoekstra,” *Political Theory*, vol. 27 (1999), 225-229. I do, however, take a critical approach to Hoekstra’s interpretation insofar as it seems to leave the door open to exactly the kind of Machiavellian manipulation with appearances that I take to be one of Hobbes’s primary targets. In the same direction, see Luc Foisneau, *Hobbes. La vie inquiète* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2016), 254-276.

³⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 222. The identification of this figure with the Machiavellian “new prince” stems from Jean Terrel, *Hobbes. Matérialisme et politique* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1994), 179-180. However, Terrel rightly notes that Hobbes is perhaps not making a reference directly to Machiavelli. This interpretation is put to brilliant use in Foisneau, *La vie*, 94-117. The present discussion owes much to this latter work.

³⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 222. Perhaps the most telling example of the difference between Hobbes’s general outlook from the 1620’s to the 1650’s is the fact Hobbes in the *Discours on the Beginnings of Tacitus*, cites with approbation the expression: “prosperum et felix scelus virtus vocatur.” See Hobbes, *Discourses*, 33. That is, as should be clear, the exact opposite of what Hobbes claims here in *Leviathan*.

³⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 458. Here, Hobbes enumerates among the defects of reasoning the following “Presumption of false Principles: as when men from having observed how in all places, and in all ages, unjust Actions have been authorised, by the force, and victories of those who have committed them; and that potent men, breaking through the Cob-web Lawes of their Country, the weaker sort, and those that have failed in their Enterprises, have been esteemed the onely Criminals; have thereupon taken for Principles, and grounds of their Reasoning, *That Justice is but a vain word: That whatsoever a man can get by his own Industry, and hazard, is his own: That the Practice of all Nations cannot be unjust: That Examples of former times are good Arguments of doing the like again.*” The Latin text concerning examples is perhaps even more explicit: “*Exempla longi temporis pro Legibus habenda esse.*” Even further on, Hobbes explicitly states that “Examples prove nothing.” See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 926. As concerns the shift from humanist historiography to the political science of *Leviathan*, it is certainly worth noting that the image of the “Cob-web Lawes of their Country,” were already used in the *Discourse on the Beginnings of Tacitus*, although here it was not explained in terms of a “defect of reasoning.” See Hobbes, *Discourses*, 49.

³⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 224.

of history, can never prove that specific practical procedures will have one and only *one* outcome.

In fact, this is not all. For with the breach of the already agreed upon contract that were the presupposition of Hobbes's consideration of the fool, we end up reverting back into the state of nature. Characteristic of this state is the fact that the laws of nature, in turn identified with morality,⁴⁰ cannot be upheld in want of a sovereign power to enforce them. In this state, only the "right of nature" is in effect, that is, "*By all means we can, to defend our selves.*" This fundamental right further implies that we "*use, all helps, and advantages of Warre.*"⁴¹ In such a war, which is the inevitable consequence of the state of nature, we are allowed to use every means we can in order to save our lives, including "Force, and Fraud" that "are in warre the two Cardinall vertues."⁴² When there is no sovereign power to enforce the laws of nature, such behavior is, then, legitimate insofar as it derives from the fundamental *right* of nature and not from any unwarranted and illegitimate selfishness.

Indeed, the attempt to gain supreme power by breaking covenant is against reason on two levels. Not only is it against reason insofar as its outcome could not have been foreseen with any certainty, it will furthermore endanger the very position that is sought to be obtained by such a breach. For, perhaps not without a degree of sarcasm, Hobbes notes that "by gaining it [Sovereignty] so, others are taught to gain the same in like manner," and, in this regard, the Latin is even more telling: "quia exemplo suo docentur alii tantundem audere contra ipsos" – "for by their example others are taught to venture the same thing against them."⁴³ Once the laws of morality have been broken, they will be broken again. To take historical examples as guidelines for rebellious action will only teach others to do the same, thus further weakening the efficiency of such a procedure.⁴⁴ By demonstrably showing that it is not possible for others to count on the efficiency of universal rules, the usurper invalidates the very principles he had to count on if he were to be successful. In this way, the efficiency of historical examples is diminished by its very use. By seeing the universal moral laws breached, others are invited to do the same, thus making the outcome of practical action, insofar as it is contingent

⁴⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 242: "the true Doctrine of the Lawes of Nature, is the true Morall Philosophie." See as well Thomas Hobbes, *De cive*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 120: "*Lex ergo eo ipso quod praecipit media ad pacem, praecipit bonos mores, sive virtutes, Vocatur ergo moralis.*"

⁴¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 200.

⁴² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 196. In the 18th chapter of *Il principe*, tellingly entitled "Quomodo fides a principibus sit servanda," Machiavelli had expressed the idea that the prince has to be ready to use "astuzia" and "forza" if he is to last in his seat, which would in turn imply breaking covenant the moment it were no longer perceived to be advantageous. See Machiavelli, *Opere*, 868.

⁴³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 224-225.

⁴⁴ Seen in this light, Machiavelli's heroic prince seem like a tragic figure. His action is needed given the already instability of things, yet, by reacting to these shifting circumstances he ends up furthering the very process he attempts to stop. It is not given that Machiavelli did not himself recognize this problem, see for instance, Machiavelli, *Opere*, 899. For a reading along the same lines, see Senellart, *Les arts*, 228. In this regard, we should note the quite different approach taken in the *Discourse on the Beginnings of Tacitus*. See Hobbes, *Discourses*, 35: "though violence cannot last, yet the effects of it may; and that which is gotten violently, may be afterwards possessed quietly, and constantly. For Augustus also took upon him the Monarchy by force, and yet he so settled it, as the State could never recover liberty."

upon the behavior of others, even less certain than it was before.⁴⁵ And although the violent usurpation of an entire kingdom might be a rare case, it merely serves as a demonstration of the fact that every breach of covenant, no matter who commits it, will eventually result in conflict. The “new prince” is thus only a special case of Hobbes’s general argument. Contracts must be upheld by *all* if peace is to be possible: *pacta sunt servanda*.⁴⁶

And, indeed, it is to a radically uncertain situation we descend without a sovereign power to guarantee that the moral laws are observed. Consequent to the state of nature is the war “of every man, against every man.” Here, “there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain (...) no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society.”⁴⁷ Without certainty of how others will behave it is ultimately impossible to know what will happen tomorrow as everything, in the eyes of another, might be perceived as a necessary means for their survival. Not without a certain paradox, we can say that prudential action, guided solely by the reading of examples from the past, ultimately ends up excluding the notice of time implied by the historical works – whether strictly personal or public in character – from which it draws.⁴⁸ If historical register, in however small a scale, are to be possible, it is consequently necessary that the moral laws are *unequivocally* in effect, that is, that they are universally upheld and not merely by the subjects of a given principality. If the behavior of princes, considered as an exemplary case, falls outside the scope of the universal morality established by reason, the entire edifice constituted by the laws of nature falls. Hence, a prudential reasoning based

⁴⁵ As far as I can tell, this point has not been sufficiently explored, even noticed, by the literature on Hobbes’s notion of prudence. See, for instance, Allen S. Hance, “Prudence and providence: On Hobbes’s theory of practical reason,” *Man and World*, vol. 24 (1991), 155-167; Donald W. Hanson, “Science, Prudence, and Folly in Hobbes’s Political Theory,” *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1993), 643-664; Gianfranco Borrelli, *Il lato oscuro del Leviathan. Hobbes contro Machiavelli* (Napoli: Edizioni Cronopio, 2009), 108-113. Hance remarks that “prudence leads only to diversity of opinion and conflict,” but he does not go into this point in any detail. See Hance, “Prudence”, 162. Hanson, on the other hand, claims that “there is nothing wrong with prudence in principle.” See Hanson, “Science”, 656. That is true, but only on condition that prudence be subject to the overriding principles of natural law. If not, prudence cannot guarantee the stability that is needed if its own operations are to be successful. For Hobbes’s relegation of prudence to the private sphere, see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 76 and 108: “To govern well a family, and a kingdom, are not different degrees of Prudence; but different sorts of business.” By contrast, Borrelli’s exposition of the “incapacity of political prudence,” rightly connects this idea to a critique of the *ragion di stato*-literature. See Borrelli, *Il lato*, 111. He does not, however, explain the exact mechanisms of the failure of such a “political prudence.” For Hobbes’s harsh critique of “pretenders to Political Prudence,” see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 516.

⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 220; Hobbes, *De cive*, 108; Hobbes, *Elements*, 88.

⁴⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 192.

⁴⁸ Consequently, I think that Philippe Crignon goes too far when he asserts that the state of nature involves a negation of “being,” rather than our perception of its coherence. See Philippe Crignon, *De l’incarnation à la représentation. L’ontologie politique de Thomas Hobbes* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), 88: “À défaut d’institution, l’être se nierait lui-même.” Rather, the state of nature describes a situation where we are unable to make sense of our own experience insofar as we cannot constitute the normal chains of signification that are characteristic of experience. The consistency of being remains the same, exactly because it is ultimately founded upon the causality of God whether we perceive it or not. See for instance, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 172: here Hobbes claims that the “heathens” gave the name of “Fortune” to “their own ignorance.” Indeed, we should be weary of concluding from “perception” to “being” in Hobbes. In this regard, it must be remembered that what Hobbes is initially after is knowledge of “ratio actionum humanarum,” with a certainty equal to that of geometry. See Hobbes, *De cive*, 74: “*Cognita enim, pari certitudine, ratione actionum humanarum, qua cognoscitur ratio agnitudinum in figuris, ambitio & avaritia quarum potentia falsis vulgi circa ius & iniunruam opinionibus innititur, inermes essent.*”

upon past examples cannot serve as a foundation for political stability.

We can see how Hobbes takes the political ideal of exemplarity, already weakened, yet, still in effect in the “new humanism,” to its most extreme consequences. When left to itself, that is, without the firm scaffolding of natural law behind it, historical reasoning is contradictory. The inherent fallibility of prudence makes it impossible to ascertain the exact outcome of any given action, even if based on a former example, and as a direct consequence of this fallibility, reason simply cannot suggest action that consists in the opportune violation of universal morality. In a situation where there is no guarantee that the universal laws are observed it is, however, implied by natural right that we take every means necessary in order to survive, including the use of “Force, and Fraud.” Yet, given the universality of that right, a radical uncertainty, even worse than what were innate to prudence before, results.

The historical reasoning constitutive of the entire *ragion di state*-literature ultimately fails because it refuses to ascertain the conditions for its own possibility.⁴⁹ If morality is not generally upheld, so Hobbes suggests, the opportune action of princes is made utterly impossible. But there is no reason to expect that morality will not eventually crumble under the cynical manipulation of the princely rulers unless sovereign power is given another foundation than mere history. The continuity of rule, that is, the very thing that princely manipulation was meant to guarantee through the imitation of historical figures, will succumb to the inherent contradiction of a procedure that takes the violation of faith as a possible principle for the perpetuation of the same political power. The Tacitean reaction to the inefficiency of the old univocal morality ends up contradicting itself as long as the historiographical format of its political reasoning is not given another foundation.

It is exactly this task Hobbes sets himself. He takes the “crisis of exemplarity” to its most extreme consequences in order to overcome it through the institution of a new paradigm for political rule. As a consequence of the dismantlement of exemplarity, this novel figure cannot, however, consist in a simple rehashing of the old image of the virtuous ruler – at least not without that ideal having been founded on something radically different. It is thus to this novel figure of the sovereign ruler that we shall now turn.

4. *Sovereign Visibility*

The morality embodied by the natural laws is what needs to be upheld if peace is to be had. But despite the fact that reason informs us of the content of these moral prescriptions, they have no effect as long as we remain in the “state of nature.” As long as the prevailing paradigm for human action, consequent to the universal right of nature, is the use of “force and fraud,” it would indeed be against reason to uphold any universal moral rules. Committing to these rules entails an initial and necessary laying down of the universal right to everything, yet, no reason can be given for doing so when others

⁴⁹ Thus, Meinecke’s otherwise groundbreaking study should be corrected when it comes to Hobbes. It is simply not possible to consider Hobbes’s concept of sovereignty as having brought the *ragion di stato*-literature to its “peak”. See Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*, ed. Walther Hofer (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1976), 249-255. For a similar line of interpretation, critical of the confusion between *ragion di stato* and sovereignty, see Luc Foisneau, “Sovereignty and Reason of State: Bodin, Botero, Richelieu and Hobbes” in *The Reception of Bodin*, ed. Howell A. Lloyd (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 323-342.

do not:

if other men will not lay down their Right, as well as he; then there is no Reason for any one, to devest himselfe of his: For that were to expose himselfe to Prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose himselfe to Peace.⁵⁰

As a response to the others using whatever means they can in order to survive, even by killing or otherwise subduing their perceived enemies, it is reasonable to do the same. The non-observance of universal morality breeds the perpetuation of the exact same non-observance on the part of others.

What is needed, then, is the existence of a source of power that can guarantee that the laws of nature are upheld once the initial right to everything has been laid down. It is, however, exactly such a source of power that is missing from the “state of nature.” As a consequence of the universal mortality of humankind, no one can ever amass enough power to conclusively secure himself from others: “as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest.”⁵¹ The power struggles within the natural state are essentially vain seeing the impossibility of gaining anything more than a relative advantage. No matter how powerful you become through the manipulation of the intricate honor-system,⁵² it will never suffice to exclude the possibility of someone taking your life. Which, of course, will be legitimate as long as we remain in the state of nature where everything can be taken as a necessary means of personal survival. What we need is an “absolute” source of power that can punish any breach of the universal rules of morality once they are agreed upon, without thereby being endangered by those that are punished. It is exactly this function that the sovereign ruler is meant to exercise.

Without going into detail on the elaborate scheme of Hobbes’s concept of representation,⁵³ it will suffice for our present purposes to say that a sovereign is erected when all the future members of the common-wealth agree “to conferre all their power and strenght upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men.”⁵⁴ The thing to note here, is that all members place *all* their power at the disposal of the sovereign, whether it will consist of one of several natural persons. Through this “conferral,” however it is to be understood,⁵⁵ a “*Sovereigne Power*” is created.⁵⁶ However contrary it may seem to modern

⁵⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 200.

⁵¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188. For the significance of human mortality in the political philosophy of Hobbes, as well as its theological foundation, see Foisneau, *La vie*, 293-316.

⁵² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 132-144.

⁵³ The literature on this subject is, of course, abundant. For only two of the more interesting recent interpretations, see Crignon, *De l’incarnation*, 219-258; Mónica Brito Vieira, *The Elements of Representation in Hobbes. Aesthetics, Theatre, Law and Theology in the Construction of Hobbes’s Theory of the State* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 145-206.

⁵⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 260.

⁵⁵ And it is indeed extremely tricky to understand exactly how such a “conferral of power” is possible, a point Hobbes had previously granted. See Hobbes, *De cive*, 134: “vim suam in alium transferre naturali modo nemo potest.” For a brilliant interpretation of how Hobbes solves this problem, see Sandra Field, “Hobbes and the Question of Power,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 1 (2014), 61-86.

⁵⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 262.

sensibilities, it is indeed through the “terror” of the power now conferred upon the sovereign that “he is unable to conforme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad.”⁵⁷ Only if the sovereign is perceived to possess the collected force of the entire commonwealth will it be able to instill a fear of punishment sufficient to prevent the breach of the agreed upon covenant.⁵⁸ Although its foundation is ultimately founded upon the formal logic of representation and the conferral of rights, it must additionally, as Hobbes unequivocally affirms, be a “visible” source of fear. Humankind will remain in

that miserable condition of Warre (...) when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and observation of those Lawes of Nature set down in the fourteenth and fifteenth Chapters.⁵⁹

This visible figure of the sovereign must be unique. It alone must instill fear, by somehow making manifest its enormous power, if its laws are to be universally upheld. If this were not the case two obligations would be in possible conflict with each other as stemming from two different sources. In reality, this would bring us back to the state of nature.

In this specific regard, there can be no question of ever “imitating” the sovereign, that is, trying to amass an amount of power that can challenge the effective observance of the laws of the unique sovereign.⁶⁰ For only on this condition will it be possible to make effective the rules of morality, in turn the condition of a lasting peace. Although its fundamental aim is to invalidate its implicit distinction of virtue into one for rulers, another for subjects, Hobbes’s fundamental procedure consists in a consummation of the “crisis of exemplarity,” insofar as the ruler, considered as a source of fear, is meant to bar any imitation: the sovereign is no longer an example to follow, no longer a direct conduit for virtue.

Yet, this is not Hobbes’s final say in the matter. For given that Hobbes’s aim was exactly that of laying a foundation for the effectiveness of a universal morality, the sovereign must, all the while inspiring an overwhelming fear, possess the same universal virtues as those to be possessed by the

⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 260.

⁵⁸ Whether or not the obligation to uphold these covenants is merely “prudential,” insofar as it allows for our self-preservation, or instead constitutes an authentic moral obligation is not of importance to the present argument. For these two opposing views, see the now classical David Gauthier. *The Logic of Leviathan. The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.) See as well Foisneau’s ingenious solution in Foisneau, *La toute-puissance*, 236-242.

⁵⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 254-255. The Latin edition reproduces the same idea almost verbatim: “e conditione misera Belli omnium contra omnes exirent (...) quando nulla extat potentia visibilis quae passiones illas terrore poenarum temperare possit, legesque naturales, & pacta observari faciat.”

⁶⁰ This tendency of informal “power-associations” is given a much larger attention in *Leviathan* than in any of the former works and constitutes an important development. See, for instance, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 498-520. On this subject, as well the convincing analysis in Sandra Leonie Field, *Potentia. Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2020), 80-91.

subjects.⁶¹ For instance, if the sovereign is to correctly exercise the office of judge, which in proper belongs to him,⁶² he must first and foremost possess the virtue of “equity”: “The things that make a good Judge, or good Interpreter of the Lawes, are, first, *A right understanding* of that Principall Law of Nature called *Equity*.”⁶³ And in general it holds that “the Science of Naturall Justice, is the onely Science necessary for Sovereigns.”⁶⁴ In short, the only knowledge required in a sovereign ruler is the knowledge of what constitutes morality as such and *not* any extraordinary providential reasoning.

In this way, we can see how Hobbes takes the crisis of exemplarity to its most extreme consequences, but only to overturn its internal logic so as to make universal morality possible again.⁶⁵ In order to do so he had not only to devise a novel figure of the sovereign, he further had to reconsider the entire format of previous political theory. As history could no longer serve as a sufficient guide for practical life, the construction of a *science* was the answer. Consequently, political theory took a different shape altogether. Rather than a practical consideration of the heroes of the past, it now consisted, or at least aimed to so do, in a deductive framework that on principle could not draw its legitimacy from any historical sources. Although that story cannot be told here, the invention of sovereignty as a format of political government would in turn profoundly alter the practice and nature of historiography itself.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Indeed, Hobbes continues to assert that princes do, *de facto*, act as examples for their subject. In that regard, princes ought to possess qualities that are not a threat to civil peace. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 476: “The examples of Princes, to those that see them, are, and ever have been, more potent to govern their actions, than the Lawes themselves. And though it be our duty to do, not what they do, but what they say; yet will that duty never be performed, till it please God to give men an extraordinary, and supernaturall grace to follow that Precept.” Although I am generally sympathetic to Hoye’s ambition of assessing the non-formal grounds for obedience, I still think he undervalues the symbolic function of fear at least at the moment of institution. I would maintain that all exemplarity is radically subordinate to, and contingent upon, this institution of the sovereign. After the institution this situation might well be different, yet, it is still necessary to keep them apart. See J. Matthew Hoye, “Obligation and Sovereign Virtue in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*”, *The Review of Politics* 79 (2017), 23-47.

⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 380.

⁶³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 438.

⁶⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 574.

⁶⁵ Luc Borot has recently argued that what James Harrington did to his predecessors in political theory, including Hobbes, could be understood in terms of a Hegelian “Aufhebung.” He “overtakes, he goes beyond, and yet he includes the past contents and ideas” in his own thought. See Luc Borot, “Are Hobbes’s and Harrington’s Commonwealths the End of the Renaissance Commonweal?” in *The “Commonwealth” as political space in late Renaissance England*, ed. S.G. Zeitlin, Raffaella Santi, Luc Borot, Myriam-Isabelle Ducrocq (Assago: CEDAM, 2014), 55-90. Much the same thing could be said of Hobbes in relation to the past *ragion di stato*-literature. Or, perhaps in a less speculative manner, we could say with Noel Malcolm that: “his [Hobbes’s] political theory can be seen as solving problems which the reason of state literature had raised.” See Malcolm, *Reason of State*, 119.

⁶⁶ For the ambivalence of “exemplary history” in a context of absolute sovereignty, see Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1981), 100-104.