Historical examples in Hobbes's political science

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Abstract: Hobbes never has a rest to criticize speech that is full of imagery, and to blame the resort to metaphorical discourse. Words have to be unambiguous in order to reach real scientific knowledge. The project of the *Elements of Philosophy* relies on clear language. Nevertheless, the reader discovers many examples in the *Elements*, in *On the Citizen* and in both *Leviathans*. Hobbes finds in historical literature especially many stories he adds to his argumentation. If those examples simply illustrate his analysis, this rhetorical process runs the risk of disturbing the reader's attention. Because they suggest images, the examples could affect the strictly rational thought. From then on, how can we understand this use of historical examples in Hobbes's political science? I would like to show here that, far from disturbing the reader's attention, historical examples play a decisive role in the construction of a new demonstrative science. One can see history, and especially ancient history as a source of examples that allows everyone to obtain scientific knowledge by themselves. The problem of examples in the Hobbesian corpus invites us to think more generally about how we learn, and what History is.

Keywords: Hobbes; Examples; History; Actors; Political Science.

1. History and examples

In the project of the *Elements of Philosophy*, Hobbes's claim is to establish a new demonstrative science. Under the stress of political circumstances, he does not abandon it for the writing of the *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, and neither does he for that of the *Leviathan*. To understand something is always for Hobbes to show how it has been generated[1]. This scientific research then has to rely on a clear and unambiguous speech. Indeed, reason is nothing else than a correct denomination of phenomena, whether they are natural or political. Correlated to this defining task, Hobbes draws an orderly method of composing assertions. Reason or science

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[1] See, for example, the genetic definition of the circle given by Hobbes in *Concerning Body*: T. Hobbes (1962,180) [1656]. I will now note the Molesworth's edition EW.

are “attained by Industry”[2], that is to say by elaborating a rigorous discourse describing a genesis. Correct knowledge implies defining precisely all the words that we use. For that reason, Hobbes never has a rest to reject the use of “metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words”[3].

In that context, examples should not be used to expose knowledge: as illustrations, they will interfere in demonstrations; they will complicate the discourse that is supposed to be as simple as possible. To give an example signifies to propose another rival image. Far from clarifying the argumentation, the appeal to an example could divert the reader from the right comprehension. Actually, examples are quite rare in Hobbes's texts, with the exception of *historical examples*. Hobbes uses this sort of examples in almost all of his works, not only in his historical productions. The references to ancient history, Greek or Roman, increase in *Elements*, in *On the Citizen* and in both *Leviathans*. This is all the more surprising as Hobbes sees in historical reading one of the most important causes of the failure of republics[4]: “And as to Rebellion in particular against Monarchy; one of the most frequent causes of it, is the reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the ancient Greeks, and Romans”, and considers it to be among the most important causes of the Civil War in Great Britain[5]:

> For it is a hard matter for men, who do all think highly of their own wits, when they have also acquired the learning of the university, to be persuades that they want any ability requisite for the government of a commonwealth, especially having read the glorious histories and the sententious politics of the ancient popular governments of the Greeks and Romans.

How should we then understand why Hobbes punctuates his texts by references to Nero, Commodus, Tiberius, Antiochus, or furthermore, Marcus Brutus? Why does he so frequently quote Suetonius, Plutarch and Sallustius? Is Hobbes inconsistent with his own conception of science, or does he have a particular use of examples? I would like to show here that history, and in particular ancient history, constitutes a collection of examples that allows everyone to obtain scientific knowledge by themselves. Far from disturbing the reader's attention, historical examples play a role in the elaboration of a new demonstrative science. I will first outline different views on the use of historical examples in Hobbes's political science in order to situate this work in the literature. Then I will demonstrate

[2] Hobbes (2012, 21).
[3] *Ivi*, 22.
[4] *Ivi*, 170.
[5] Hobbes (1962, 192-193) [1681].

that Hobbes elaborates a quite original perspective that must neither be mistaken for the prudential and edifying approach of Machiavelli, nor for a simple rhetorical process.

My work will mainly centre on three texts: the *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, *On the Citizen* and the *Leviathan*. To understand the role of examples in Hobbesian scientific enterprise implies first to set aside historical works as the *Horae Subsecivae* (hours of boredom)–including one discourse about Tacitus, one discourse about Rome and another about the laws[6] –Hobbes's translation of *The Peloponnesian War* of Thucydides, the *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* and the *Behemoth*. Indeed, we have to understand the role of historical examples in scientific discourses. Moreover, I will focus my interest on *political* texts, turning away from the *De Corpore* or the *De Homine*, for the following reason: Hobbes uses examples almost exclusively in political analysis. Thus, we can already say that it is not the abstraction that makes examples useful: the reader does not need any example to understand the movement of bodies. We will have to understand why Hobbes needs to use examples presenting his political theory. Furthermore, I will put aside sacred historical examples insofar as the biblical exegesis constitutes a specific part of Hobbes thought: because Hobbes discusses biblical stories to criticize the Pope's power at home, his examples correspond to those used by the Church.[7] It is also important to note that Hobbes rarely uses biblical examples in his strictly political analysis: most examples in the first two parts of the *Leviathan* are *civil* examples and moreover *ancient* civil examples.

Before starting to read the texts, it is important, however, to ponder the specific place that Hobbes gave to those ancient civil examples. Why did he almost exclusively take examples from Thucydides', Plutarch's or Suetonius' texts, even when medieval history was expanding in Europe at this time? It is possible to distinguish four levels of explanation regarding the pre-eminence of ancient history in Hobbes's political philosophy. The magnitude of references to Greco-Latin Antiquity is due, first of all, to the fact that Hobbes received, as did numerous scientists of his time, a humanistic training.[8] But the predominance of references to ancient culture can also be explained by an anthropological argument: choosing examples that are remote in time is the best way to make the homogeneity of human

[6] On the authenticity of these three discourses see Malcolm (2002, 7); Saxonhouse (1981, 541-67); Terrel (2008, 80); L. Strauss (1963).

[7] On the question of sacred history see Dubos (2014); Dubos (2015, 59-76); (Berthier *et al*. 2013, 389-469).

[8] On Hobbes' humanistic training see Skinner (1996, 215-49).

nature known. Hobbesian anthropology is one of the keys of his paradoxical use of historical examples. The multitude of historical examples can also be strategic in the battle against the Church. Indeed, borrowing examples from ancient history means developing thought in a mainly civil perspective. Before the establishment of an independent Church, the religious questions used to fall within temporal power. Finally, it seems to me that Hobbes' interest for ancient civil history is mainly explained by an argumentative motivation. Taking an interest in ancient narratives is to depend on an already made history. In the *Elements*, in *On the Citizen* and in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes did not intend to write history, to produce a historic discourse, but rather to make *use* of it. What use does Hobbes intend to make of historical examples in his political system?

2. Different views on the use of historical examples in Hobbes's political science

Contemporary researchers all quite agree to say that Hobbes gave up the traditional literature of *exempla*. Humanistic thought used to see in historical examples a double source of knowledge: as a narrative of singular events, history constituted a stock of *political* and *moral* actions worthy of imitation[9]. The past was full of "highest examples"[10] that should light up the indeterminate present and edify the reader. But "the moral end of writing history, which for the humanists was its main *raison d'être*, is transferred by Hobbes to philosophy (…). Historical *exempla* can never acquire the status of philosophical truths"[11]. Even if, contrary to Descartes[12], Hobbes did not condemn history in the name of epistemological uncertainty, he noted that historical examples cannot be considered as "arguments"[13]. Although nobody could "justly doubt of the truth" of Thucydides whom "overtasked not himself by undertaking an history of things done long before his life, and of which he was not able to inform himself"[14], historical examples are

[9] Guion (2008).

[10] "Let no one be surprised if, in speaking of entirely new principalities as I shall do, I adduce the highest examples both of prince and of state; because men, walking almost always in paths beaten by others, and following by imitation their deeds, are yet unable to keep entirely to the ways of others or attain to the power of those they imitate," Machiavelli (1945, 41).

[11] Schuhmann (2000, 8).

[12] Descartes (2010, 574).

[13] Hobbes (2012, 295).

[14] Hobbes (1962) [1629].

not able to show us the *geneses* of a phenomenon. For Hobbes, insofar as we understand only what we make by ourselves[15], the narrative of a past fact can tell us nothing about our political and moral actions; reason only can tell us what to do. Hobbes's conception of knowledge thus implies a refusal of both the *illustrative* and *edifying* functions of historical examples.

This did not signify that Hobbes did away with all prudential perspectives: prudence can be useful, but it has to be complemented by science to be infallible, to reach truth or to permit effective action[16]. To tell past facts, to give historical examples, can shed light on a phenomenon but it cannot explain it. Hobbes nominalism does not rely on similitude[17] but on the emphasis of geneses.

If historical examples persist in the *Elements*, in *On the Citizen* and in the *Leviathan*, it is mainly because they operate at the margins of political science. First of all, Hobbes uses historical examples to criticise the political actions that he observes. As William R. Lund noticed, "properly conducted, the value of history lay in the fact that analyses of the origins of a particular practice could demystify it and open the way to arguments that changed circumstances required the rational reevaluation of the practice." Historical examples are propaedeutic; they are useful to condemn the conduct of actual civil or ecclesiastical power before rationally explaining how it works. Historical examples become a rhetorical process, as in Chapter 7 of the *Leviathan*. Livy can tell us that gods "made once a Cow speak, and we believe it not; wee distrust not God therein, but *Livy*"[18]. This ancient example indirectly allows Hobbes to criticize the Church: clerical power tells us things that are absurd (such as the existence of spirits) but we can refuse those discourses without offending God. However, historical examples do not only have a propadedeutic critical function; more generally Hobbes resorts to them every time he reaches the limits of political science.

According to Deborah Baumgold, Hobbes needed history "when he needed to answer the question of who was sovereign"[19]. Rationally, men can choose to give authority to a monarch or to an assembly; reason only commands to erect a sovereign power. If such choice is free, Hobbes also

15 On this idea, see Jaume (1986).

16 Hobbes (1962, 22) [1651-1668]. About the distinction between *prudence* and science, Schuhmann (2000, 73-81).

17 Here I disagree with Nicolas Dubos's interpretation: for him, Hobbes relies on historical knowledge to invent scientific definitions. Hobbes would proceed by a prudential analysis to forge a definition, revealing similitude between phenomena. But showing a genetic movement has nothing to do with similitude. See Dubos (2014, 224).

18 Hobbes (1962, 32) [1651-1668]. See Livy (1967, 35).

19 Baumgold (2000, 32).

wants to warn about the dangers of representative power. He cannot do this in the strict limits of rational consecution. To convince the reader of the superiority of monarchy and symmetrically of the danger of having a strong Parliament, he calls the example of the Norman Conquest[20]. The reference to William's conquest is moreover one of the rare non *ancient* historical example in the *Leviathan*.

It is mainly about the question of the sign of honour that Hobbes uses historical examples. The entire tenth chapter of *Leviathan*'s filled with references to Mordecai, the prince of Persia, the "ancient Heathen" or the "ancient Germans". Hobbes is thereby explaining how signs of honour contribute to power. Public opinion is one of the elements that make someone powerful. Natural reason can describe some honourable conducts: for example, to believe in someone is to honour them, because it is the sign that we assign power and virtue to them[21]. But everything can become a sign of honour; "in Common-wealths, where he, or they that have the supreme Authority, can make whatsoever they please, to stand for signes of Honour, there be other Honours"[22]. Signs of honour and dishonour are so important that Hobbes cannot stop short at that point: he needs to give examples of this historical variety. Because it is so crucial to understand mechanisms of honour, that is to say mechanisms of fancy, public opinion and power, Hobbes needs to present all the ways in which men honour themselves. Historical examples can disturb the rational appreciation of the Republic, but they are precious *to complete the scientific discourse*. As a propaedeutic moment or as a supplement, historical examples can light up our conception of present time. But those interpretations take no notice of all of the historical examples that Hobbes uses *at the very heart* of his rational argumentation. What meaning should we give to the examples that Hobbes introduces in his scientific thought?

3. Historical examples in political science argumentation

I have already mentioned that Hobbes's understanding of knowledge implies putting aside ambiguous words, or words that are full of imagery. Metaphors and examples should be banished from the political science[23].

[20] Hobbes (1962, 95) [1651-1668].
[21] *Ivi*, 43.
[22] *Ibidem*.
[23] The metaphor is for example one of the possible abuses of speech. See: Hobbes (1962, 13) [1651-1668] "To these Uses, there are also foure correspondent Abuses.

To be consistent, Hobbes should not use examples to illustrate his work. Nevertheless, the number of examples increases from the *Elements* to the *Leviathan*. Hobbes inserts examples, and in particular ancient civil examples, in his scientific demonstrations. Most of the time, those examples come after the argument, at the end of the development. If we look at them carefully, we understand that they are not mere illustrations. First of all, some of those examples play the role of a *confirmation*. Past facts corroborate the *possibility* of what has been rationally demonstrated. Thereby, in Chapter 7 of the *Elements*, Hobbes takes the example of Nero and Commodus to confirm that felicity "consisteth *not* in *having* prospered, but in *prospering*"[24]. Here, this example, which was probably inherited from Bacon[25], does not illustrate the sentiment, but confirms the effective reality of Hobbes's conception of felicity. Because they are relating past facts, historical examples confirm the "probable"[26] nature of an argument.

Historical examples do not confirm the abstract demonstration only. Because Hobbes takes them from historical literature, the examples are quite well-known. By using classical examples, Hobbes creates a sort of epistemic connivance with the reader. For example, in *On the Citizen*, just after having exposed the fourth law of nature Hobbes refers to Cicero *In Verrem*[27]:

> Hence it follows (and this is what I was aiming to show) that it is a precept of nature to be considerate of others. Anyone who violates this *law* may be said to be *inconsiderate* and difficult. Cicero regards *inhuman* as the opposite of *considerate*, as if he had this law in mind[28].

According to reason, every man makes himself useful to others. The allusion to Verres seems here to come as an addition. This example is unnecessary for the demonstration itself. Shall we say that, after trying to *convince* readers with reasonable arguments, Hobbes managed to *persuade* them? Does this historical example make us exit the scientific domain to enter the rhetorical one? This interpretation should not be very charitable.

First, when men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of the signification of their words…. Secondly, when they use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense that they are ordained for; and their by deceive others." More generally, about Hobbes's use of metaphors, see: Willson-Quayle (1996, 15-32).

24 Hobbes (1962, 33) [1640].

25 Bacon (1937, 77).

26 "And this conception is nothing else but excessive *vain glory*, or *vain dejection*; which is most probable by these examples following," Hobbes (1962, 57) [1640].

27 Cicero (1976, 27).

28 Hobbes (1998, 48).

It seems to me that if Hobbes quotes this example here it is because it firmly fixes the demonstration into the reader's imagination. Using historical examples, Hobbes does not slide from demonstrative discourse to rhetorical speech. Rather, he creates the possibility for his argument to be rationally understood by his addressee. Because he appeals to a figure that the cultured reader knows well, the latter is invited to take the argument upon him.

This explanation of Hobbes's uses of historical examples is confirmed both by his rejection of *clichés* and his conception of knowledge. Indeed, Hobbes criticizes the use of commonplaces on many occasions: *clichés* are always empty words. When we know something too well, we no longer think. It is, for example, the case of the beggar that recites the *paternoster*: he puts words together without having any image or conception in mind[29]. So, if Hobbes uses well-known examples, it is not only because they are part of a common culture, but because they refer the reader to himself. What does it change to read an argument that refers to us?

Right from the *Elements*, Hobbes sees in *self-judgment* the principle of true knowledge. Repeating the Socratic adage[30], he sets self-knowledge as the basis for science:

> It is impossible to *rectify* so many errors of any one man, as must needs proceed from those causes, without beginning *anew* from the very first grounds of all our knowledge and sense; and instead of books, reading over orderly one's own conceptions: in which meaning, I take *nosce teipsum* for a precept worthy the reputation it hath gotten[31].

In 1651 Hobbes made the *nosce teipsum*, which he translated as "read thyself", the key principle of the introduction to the *Leviathan*:

> But there is another saying not of late understood, by which [men] might learn truly to read one another, if they would take the pains; and that is, *Nosce teipsum*, *Read thy self*: …. Whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, fear*, &c, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions[32].

[29] Hobbes (1962, 25) [1640]. About Hobbes's critic of commonplace, see also Hobbes (1998, 7) and Hobbes (2012, 9) [1651-1668].
[30] On the history of this maxim see Milanese (2011).
[31] Hobbes (1962, 25) [1640].
[32] Hobbes (1962, 2) [1651-1668]

A little further he added, about his own work:

> When I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be only to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration[33].

To read in oneself means to make an effort to be attentive to what is happening within us when we think or desire–these thoughts being experienced first-hand or received through a narrative. If science must be demonstrative, and if philosophy must follow the reasoning rigour of geometers, the fact remains that the scholar, as the reader, can only discover in himself the first principles of science. From then on, historical examples, because they are part of our culture, are a way of firmly fixing science in a personal experience, which allows us to develop judgments and therefore positive knowledge.

Using ancient examples, Hobbes does not only appeal to our historical culture; if we are able to judge by ourselves in reading those stories, it is because examples are *eloquent and lively*. Taking up the words of Plutarch[34], Hobbes says that Thucydides was a great historian because he "marketh his auditor a spectator"[35]. The examples that are recalled by the historian are specific insofar as they plunge us directly into the heart of the action.

> But Thucydides is one, who, though he never digress to read a lecture, moral or political, upon his own text, nor enter into men's hearts further than the acts themselves evidently guide him: is yet accounted the most politic historiographer that ever writ. The reason whereof I take to be this. He filleth his narrations with that judgment, and with such perspicuity and efficacy expresseth himself, that, as Plutarch saith, he marketh his auditor a spectator. For he setteth his reader in the assemblies of the people and in the senate, at their debating; in the streets, at their seditions; and in the field, at their battles. So that look how much a man of understanding might have added to his experience, if he had then lived a beholder of their proceedings, and familiar with the men and business of the time: so much almost may he profit now, by attentive reading of the same here written. He way from the narrations draw out lessons to himself, and of himself be able to trace the drifts and counsels of the actors to their seat[36].

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33 *Ibidem*.

34 "Assuredly Thucydides is always striving for this vividness in his writing, since it is his desire to make the reader a spectator, as it were, and to produce vividly in the minds of those who peruse his narrative the emotions of amazement and consternation which were experienced by those who beheld them," Plutarch (2005, 347).

35 Hobbes again used this image of a spectacle a few pages later: "For the greatest part, men came to the reading of history with an affection much like that of the people in Rome: who came to the spectacle of the gladiators with more delight to behold their blood, than their skill in fencing," Hobbes (1962) [1629].

36 *Ibidem*.

More than a theatre performance, historical examples make us live the scenes from the inside: we do not see the senators discuss on the stage, but we are settled "in the assemblies," closest to the actors. The performance that the historian allows us to see is not only a general description, a picture of the situation, but it is the opportunity for personal investment. It is a performance that we see, but also one which we project. It was without doubt to support this performance of Thucydides that Hobbes added some geographical maps to his translation–maps that he drew himself[37]. To truly invest in the facts in the first person, one should be able to picture them in a precise way[38].

In the extract quoted above, Hobbes shows that it is the narration that allows Thucydides to make his story lively. A few pages further, he goes back to the importance of narration:

> Digressions for instruction's cause, and other such open conveyances of precepts, (which is the philosopher's part), he never useth; as having so clearly set before men's eyes the ways and events of good and evil counsels, that the narration itself doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effectually than can possibly be done by precept[39].

When relating past facts, the historian carries out a storytelling. This one consists of tracing the "ways" and "events." Writing history then aims, according to Hobbes, at rebuilding the chain of causes and effects in order to present them in front of the reader without judgment. What makes Thucydides strong and great is the fact that he refrains from giving comments or making syntheses. He only presents facts to the reader–tidy facts. Therefore, according to Hobbes, history was not a discipline of analysis and synthesis, but only a register of facts. By taking ancient examples, Hobbes does not only illustrate his arguments: rather, examples are opportunities for the reader himself to experiment with the facts and to become a judge. It is because the reader relives those examples in the first person that he is able to judge those past experiences. We do not learn an immanent norm from historical facts, from ancient examples; we learn it from what we read in ourselves, when we take a collective experience upon ourselves.

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[37] Bredekamp (1999).

[38] On this idea see the introduction of Arnaud Milanese's French translation of the *Elements,* T. Hobbes, *Éléments de loi suivi de Sur la vie et l'histoire de Thucydide, Court traité des premiers principes, "De Corpore" à l'époque des "Elements of law", reconstitué d'après des notes et brouillons*, ed. Milanese (2006, 12).

[39] Hobbes (1962) [1629].

Historical examples are so eloquent that they produce *actors* whose roles we could assume. It should be noted that Hobbes almost only uses ancient examples that relate the lives of certain characters. We already talked about Nero, Commodus and Mordecai, but Antiochus[40], Catilina[41], Marcus Brutus[42], Alexander[43], and Numa Pompilius[44] are also crossing the pages of the *Elements*, of *On the Citizen* and of the *Leviathan*. Those examples present us with actors in action; they make us see the world through the characters' eyes. We are then able to judge an action from what we read inside ourselves.

It seems to me that it is in this sense that we must understand Cato's famous quotation in the epistle dedicatory to *On the Citizen*. Addressed to William Cavendish, this text opens on the ancient opinion according to which all monarchs, but also all men, are predators:

> The Roman People had saying (Most Honoured Lord) which came from the mouth of Marcus Cato, the Censor, and expressed the prejudice against Kings which they had conceived from their memory of the Tarquins and the principles of their commonwealth; the saying was that Kings should be classed as predatory animals[45].

We usually only remember the maxim borrowed from Plautus that says that "*homo homini lupus*". Now, the maxim taken up by Hobbes is in fact double: "There are two maxims which are surely both true: Man is a God to man, and Man is a wolf to Man"[46].

References to Cato and Plautus do not aim at denouncing the nastiness of human nature but at introducing the virtue of political science. As citizens, that is to say when men are governed by the laws of a republic instituted in accordance with the principles of political philosophy, men are equals to gods; states, by contrast, always have conflicting relations with one another. According to Hobbes, international relationships are necessarily hostile. This ancient reference then does not introduce the reader to a pessimistic anthropology, but rather to the definition of science that will occupy the end of the dedication. Why does Hobbes use this type of ancient reference here? Reading this text for the first time, this use of history

[40] Hobbes (1962, 90) [1655].
[41] *Ivi,* 209 and Hobbes (1998, 12-13)
[42] Hobbes (2012, 5) [1651-1668]
[43] *Ibidem.*
[44] *Ivi*, 57.
[45] Hobbes (1998, 12-13), 'Epistle dedicatory', 3. On the history of those phrases see Tricaud, (1989, 61-70); Lagrée (1995, 116-32).
[46] Hobbes (1998, 3),

appears as a quite clumsy rhetorical process. Why does he start with a historical example in order to invite men to follow the precepts of the rising political science? However, just before describing his scientific enterprise, Hobbes came back to the strength of ancient narratives and maxims. He commented, in a sense, on his own use of ancient examples:

> The famous deeds and sayings of the Greeks and Romans have been commended to History not by Reason but by their grandeur and often by that very wolf-like element which men deplore each other; for the stream of History carries down through the centuries the memory of men's varied characters as well as their public actions[47].

It is not reason that makes Greek and Roman acts unforgettable, it is rather their cruelty. At first sight, history has no place in the elaboration of political science: if the actions of the Ancients are rough and brutish, they will not be used as examples for the establishment of a reasoned republic. However, Hobbes added that history has, at the same time, carried along "characters" and their "public actions". It seems to me that this simple remark partly explains why Hobbes decided to open *On the Citizen* with an ancient example. What history allows us to see are certainly cruel actions, but history mainly produces actors–people acting. If historical examples have their place in political science, it is not because the narrative of past actions enlightens the present situation, but it is firstly because the facts put forward are part of a common cultural background, and secondly because history abounds in characters who are many agents that we can follow while paying very close attention to their motivations.

Moreover, the attention that is paid to *characters* in his examples conducts Hobbes to mix mythical and historical figures. When he refers to Greco-Roman Antiquity in his political science texts, Hobbes calls upon historic characters and mythological icons indiscriminately. So, Hercules becomes the double of Alexander[48], or Catilina the partner of Pelias' daughters[49]. Even when Hobbes opposes the use of tales, mythical and dramatic characters seem to find favour with him. What makes the difference between these kinds of fictions? Why should Prometheus' myth have a better place in philosophy than fauns and nymphs[50]? It seems to me

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47 *Ivi,* 4.

48 Hobbes (2012, 5) [1651-1668].

49 On this double example see Hobbes (1962, 209) [1655] and Hobbes (1998, 12-13).

50 Hobbes uses Prometheus' character in Chapter XII of *Leviathan* to explain the beginning of religion. Fauns and nymphs are used as examples for absurd opinions of Gentiles in the same Chapter. See: Hobbes (2012, 55) [1651-1668].

that it is because mythical and dramatic performances have this concentration of attention on personalities in common. On this point, the figure of Coriolanus is particularly interesting: when Hobbes gives the example of Marcus Coriolanus in *On the Citizen*[51], it should be a reference both to Plutarch and to Shakespeare's text. Reminding the reader of the importance the patrician attached to his mother's opinion, Hobbes can quote both the biographer and the playwright[52]. This mix underlines the importance of characters as actors in Hobbes's examples[53]. On this point, it is hardly inconsequential that Hobbes should be the first to transpose the concept of the legal person to the State and the Sovereign. The person's theory constitutes one of the major innovations of *Leviathan*[54].

These historical examples, because they are personified, are opportunities for the reader to judge by himself. Because the reader lives those narrative experiences first hand, through his imagination, he can really understand what he is reading, that is to say he is able to read in himself the new genetic science that Hobbes exposes. But Hobbes makes two different uses of those examples: in certain instances, ancient references are opportunities to make available what was just abstractly put forward, but in others, historical examples are sometimes opportunities for a major conceptual improvement that could not be presented in an abstract manner. It seems to me that it is exactly in this way that we should read the example of Marcus Brutus' icon in *Leviathan*'s Chapter II. Having defined the imagination as a "decaying sense"[55], Hobbes criticizes the traditional dream argument and then concludes the Chapter by using an example taken from Plutarch's *Lives*. Worried by the battle he must lead the next day, Brutus is confused and sees a frightening beast in his dream[56]. Using this example, Hobbes is in reality adding a new idea to his study of imagination. If he uses an example, it is not to illustrate what he is saying – this example has nothing to do with the refutation of the dream argument – but to lead

[51] Hobbes (1998, 15).

[52] "But whereas other men found in glory the chief end of valour, he found the chief end of glory in his mother's gladness," Plutarch (1959, 125). "First Citizen I say unto you, what he hath done famously, he did it to that end. Though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother and to be partly proud – which he is, even to the altitude of virtue," Shakespeare (1998, 160-161).

[53] More generally, about Hobbes's links with dramatic circle, see Roux,(1981, 245-88).

[54] See Chapter XVI of *Leviathan*, entitled "Of Persons, Authors, and Things Personated."

[55] Hobbes (2012, 5) [1651-1668].

[56] Plutarch (2001, 205-207).

the reader to understand by himself the very close connection that links fear to imagination. If Brutus really thinks that he has seen a ferocious beast while he was asleep, it is because fear endows mental pictures with an exceptional degree of presence. This historical example has *a priori* no obvious connection with Hobbes' speech in this chapter, and this gap is a sign that this is a way to further the argument. The idea of the affective nature of imagination was not positively repeated after this example. The silence of positive scientific discourse on this point can be explained by the subject considered here: we better understand the motion of passions by living them through lively examples than through the abstract exposition of precepts.

We could understand the examples of the Milesian girls[57] and of Prometheus[58] in the *Leviathan* in the same way. When telling us that the young girls hung themselves to defend their honour, Hobbes invites the reader to directly see in oneself the power of the public image, and the importance of imagination in the public sphere. Borrowing Bacon's reading of Prometheus's myth,[59] Hobbes urges us to understand by ourselves the straight link that exists between fear, imagination and vision of the future. The example of Prometheus is an opportunity to make the reader understand by himself that fear and curiosity lay at the origins of religion.

A quick read-through of the *Elements*, of *On the Citizen* and of the *Leviathan* then lets us discover that historical examples intervene at every key moment in the Hobbesian system. In *Elements* Nero and Commode appear to think about felicity,[60] Tiberius and Catilina work on revenge and eloquence as troubles for civil peace[61] and Antiochus thinks about promise[62]. In *Leviathan*, the example of the Milesian girls and the figure of Prometheus speak to the power of imagination; the case of Numa Pompilius makes readers understand that important people often attribute divine origins to themselves[63].

57 Hobbes (2012, 37) [1651-1668].
58 Hobbes (2012, 52) [1651-1668].
59 Bacon (1963, 629-86).
60 Hobbes (1962, 33) [1640].
61 *Ivi*, 43.
62 Hobbes (1962, 90) [1655].
63 Hobbes (2012, 57) [1651-1668].

4. Conclusion

After tracing Hobbes's use of historical examples, it appears that he is not inconsequentially doing so. Examples are not only rhetorical devices; they constitute a real part of his scientific project. Carefully choosing his examples in historical literature, Hobbes managed to criticize the contemporary positions of both the Parliament and the Pope and to complement his scientific political discourse with a criticism of democracy; but he also develops an effective manner for the reader to receive his new political science. The function of historical figures is neither to illustrate nor to edify; if Hobbes uses ancient examples it is because he highly understood that knowing is always discovering principles in oneself and by oneself. Historical examples are part of a Hobbesian theory of knowledge. Because History overflows with characters, it is in ancient texts that Hobbes finds most of his examples. This study of examples in political science must then invite us to think more generally about the place of history in Hobbes's thought[64].

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64 Schuhmann K. (2000).

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