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Main content

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Leviathan was well named: its great bulk first appeared in the dangerous waters of the mid-century, causing anger, consternation, and dismay to all who encountered it. Clearly an enemy of faith and conventional wisdom, it posed a threat and a challenge to churchmen, politicians, philosophers, and moralists. Leviathan was vigorously assailed in writing, but as its immense power enabled it to survive, it outlived its opposition and gradually came to be admired, and the secrets of its endurance appraised. Hobbes's ideas and arguments were always the focus of attention. Only recently, as with David Johnston's *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (1986), has there been much interest in Leviathan as a literary construct. Now Charles Cantalupo has subjected Hobbes's great design to intensive literary analysis, in an attempt to show how the political argument is driven and directed by the linguistic ingenuity of the author.

Such at least is the intention, but in practice, Leviathan is too large to be assessed by an evaluation of its rhetoric, metaphors, and tropes. Painstaking enquiry into paragraph after paragraph makes for effortful reading; the frequent citation of words and phrases from the text fills almost every page of this book with a choking froth of quotation marks, and it requires a good deal of resolution to make progress through the dense and unyielding prose of the commentary. The author's habit of glancing sideways for support from some contemporary critic is a frequent cause of distraction from his argument; potent names of the past are too casually invoked,...

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