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The Language of “Political Science” in Early Modern Europe

Sophie Smith

When we think about the history of political science where should we begin? If Thomas Hobbes had his way, the answer would be with him. In the Epistle Dedicatory to his *De Corpore* (1655) he famously announced that “civil philosophy [*philosophia civilis*]” is “no older . . . than my own book *De Cive*.”¹ Hobbes’s propaganda had modest success: historians of modern political science, when they extend their view much before the eighteenth century, do often turn to him, even if usually to his *Leviathan* (1651).² Historians of early modern political thought, too, have been preoccupied with Hobbes’s conception of civil science, against which they contrast the alternatives available to him. The present article also looks to the languages of political science before Hobbes, which, I argue, remain to be fully understood.

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¹ Thomas Hobbes, “Elements of Philosophy: The First Section, Concerning Body,” in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. William Molesworth (London: Bohn, 1839–45), 1:ix.

² Peter Lassman, “Political Philosophy and the Idea of a Social Science,” in *The Oxford*

The thought that the interpretation of past texts requires the reconstruction of particular “languages” has been widely adopted by historians of ideas.³ This emphasis on discourses or linguistic practices is especially familiar to historians of political thought, who often speak of “political languages,” or, as one volume put it, the “languages of political theory” in a given period.⁴ Less common among early modernists are reflections on what historical agents might themselves have recognized as a “political” language, or, more specifically, about the existence or development of the very vocabulary of “political theory,” “political philosophy,” or indeed “political science.” As a result, many such projects end up discussing how early modern texts fulfill the criteria taken to be sufficient for “political theory” by modern scholars.⁵

More recently, historians have asked how medieval and early modern writers discussed, categorized, and institutionalized the study of politics, and the sources upon which they drew to do so.⁶ Donald Kelley’s work revealed that for many jurists in medieval and Renaissance Europe to speak of civil science was to refer to legal science and specifically to knowledge of the *ius civile*, the body of Roman law.⁷ Maurizio Viroli showed that Brunetto Latini—the author suggested by Quentin Skinner as “perhaps the first writer to think of himself with complete self-consciousness as a political scientist”—closely associated political science with the rhetorical arts.⁸ The

Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 436–55.

³ Annabel Brett, “What is Intellectual History Now?,” in *What is History Now?*, ed. David Cannadine (London: Palgrave, 2002), 113–31.

⁴ John Pocock, “Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought,” in Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 3–41. See also Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Conal Condren, *The Language of Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

⁵ Among many examples consider “formal political theory” in Anthony Black, *Monarchy and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 53.

⁶ Merio Scattola, *Dalla virtù alla scienza* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003).

⁷ Donald Kelley, “Civil Science in the Renaissance: Jurisprudence in the French Manner,” *History of European Ideas* 2 (1981): 261–76; Kelley, “Civil Science in the Renaissance,” in Pagden, *The Languages of Political Theory*, 57–78; Kelley, “Law,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought: 1450–1700*, ed. John Henderson Burns with Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 66–94.

⁸ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:350; Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 26. Viroli himself sometimes discusses “the language of civil philosophy” without reference to how an author used the term, rather to identify a set of commitments, e.g. to the life of action, the well-ordered political community, or the prudent rule of cities, etc. See chaps. 1–2.

most influential work on early modern civil science came from Skinner himself. In *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (1996) he focused on questions about the propositional content of civil science and its status as a discipline in the late sixteenth century. By this period, Skinner suggested, most educated Europeans would have understood “civil science” as a part of the art of rhetoric, which consisted in probable knowledge and thus concerned things that could always be argued from both sides. It was *this* idea of civil science, Skinner argued, which Hobbes, in his early political texts, sought to overcome. When set against the works of the Renaissance rhetoricians, what Hobbes is up to in the opening of *De Corpore* seems clear: his would be the first attempt at an analysis of politics whose claims would achieve true scientific certainty. In this article, I bring into focus another, contrasting, way of speaking about civil science available to early modern readers. I chart an intellectual context in which the concept of political science was reducible neither to knowledge of the civil law nor to the Roman art of rhetoric, and whose practitioners were often styled not primarily as lawyers or orators but as political men—*politici*—or, indeed, as philosophers. The source for this alternative story is the Aristotelian commentary tradition.

When I speak here of a “language of political science” I refer to the ways of speaking about what medieval and early modern authors in early modern Europe called *scientia civilis* or *scientia politica*. Where recent Anglophone scholars tend to translate these phrases as “civil philosophy” or “civil science,” early modern authors writing in English would also speak of “politicke science” and “politicke philosophy.”⁹ (It is notable that while this is the period in which we begin to see the language of “theory” and its cognates used in discussions of politics, as I explore further below, the phrase “political theory” was not widely adopted in England or North America until the early twentieth century.¹⁰) In this article I move, as my authors did, between talk of “political” and of “civil” science; I nonetheless privilege the former to emphasize that where most accounts of early modern *scientia civilis* have turned on the reception and interpretation of texts from Roman antiquity, the authors I consider here were grappling with texts originally written in Greek, and they sometimes indicated to readers that the *scientia* known as *civilis* was also rightly called *politica*.

⁹ Francis Bacon uses “Science Ciuile and Politicke” in *The twoo bookes of Francis Bacon* (London: Henry Tomes, 1605), 75v.

¹⁰ John Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

The use of “political science” might prompt worries about anachronism. Does it risk suggesting a link—worse, an origin story—between early modernity and the way that “political science” is understood today? When we talk about “political science” now we are not merely signaling the disciplinary study of politics in general. We tend to mean a specific approach to that study, one which involves, broadly speaking, the quantitative analysis of political behavior, institutions, and practices, which aspires to apply to political phenomena the methods of the natural sciences, and, in turn, to reach similar levels of certainty in its conclusions.¹¹ Political science, its practitioners suggest, merely describes, explains, and analyzes. It tells us how things are, not how they should be.¹² Normative work is left primarily to political philosophy or to political theory.¹³ The emergence of this understanding of political science—and of an institutionalized distinction between empirical political science and normative political philosophy—is traced by historians to different contexts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ “Political philosophy,” it is suggested, can be used amorphously and atemporally, to refer to the contents of a retrospectively constructed canon of “great books,” or to a vaguely defined practice of thinking systematically or, more recently, analytically about politics. On the other hand, “political science,” properly speaking, emerged over a particular time period and out of a combination of concerns, not least with experimental methods, value neutrality, and quantitative political economy.¹⁵ Clearly this is not an early modern phenomenon.

Here I show that while many of the arguments and preoccupations of nineteenth-century political science might have been new—with methods, content, and motivation dependent on specific contemporary material and

¹¹ In the English context, Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹² Skinner, “The Empirical Theorists of Democracy,” *Political Theory* 3 (1973): 287–306.

¹³ David Runciman, “History of Political Thought,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3 (2001): 84–104.

¹⁴ Collini et al, *Noble Science*, 7. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Farr, “The New Science of Politics,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 431–46; Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross, eds., introduction to *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–10; Farr, “Political Science” in Porter and Ross, *The Modern Social Sciences*, 307–29; Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon C. Stimson, eds., *Modern Political Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Andrew Sartori, “From Statecraft to Social Science in Early Modern English Political Economy,” *Critical Historical Studies* 3 (2016): 181–214.

¹⁵ For “political philosophy” as a trans-historical category denoting “systematic” thought about politics, see Lassman, “Philosophy,” 437.

intellectual conditions—much else was not. Debates about the proper definition and practice of “political science” and about the role in thinking about politics not only of theology, history, and rhetoric but also of logic, mathematics, and what was then called natural philosophy also characterized earlier discussions of political science. Authors from the late thirteenth to the late sixteenth centuries were engaged in what we might call meta-reflections on the nature of political science. My use of “political science” in what follows is meant to indicate that the aspiration to determine what about the political world might conform to contemporary criteria for *science* is far older than is sometimes implied. To confine the language of “political science” to the recent past is to take up too willingly a historical analysis made by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers who, in the bid to carve out their own distinctive interventions, risked mischaracterizing, and so homogenizing, much of what came before.

I begin with the Latin reception of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* (1246–47 and ca. 1260) and the claims about political science that emerged in some of the most influential commentaries on those texts. I then focus on the discussion of political science by the Oxford philosopher John Case (1539–1600). Finally, I turn to the new perspectives this history offers on Hobbes. Throughout this article I bear in mind that this period was one in which ideas of the political, and ideas about science, were in flux; to consider the history of the idea of “political science” is in part to learn about the historical construction of both of these categories, as well as how they were understood to relate.

I. POLITICAL SCIENCE IN ARISTOTLE AND THE COMMENTATORS

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes political science (*politikē epistēmē*) as the “most authoritative” and “most architectonic” of the sciences, and suggests that its concerns include the inquiry into “knowledge of the good.”¹⁶ Its focus is not simply on individuals but on cities: “while the good of an individual is a desirable thing, what is good for a people or for cities is a nobler and more godlike thing.”¹⁷ One purpose of political science is to legislate within the city not only what people should know—

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1094a27.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1094b5–6.

“which of the sciences there should be in cities”—but also “what one ought to do and refrain from.”¹⁸

The emphasis on right action contributed to the classification of political science as a practical discipline as opposed to a speculative one. For Aristotle, speculative disciplines, like natural philosophy, have an end in contemplating the subject in question. Practical disciplines, by contrast, concern action rather than knowledge for its own sake, and include politics, ethics, and household management. The former have an end in *theoria*, the latter in *praxis*.¹⁹ Insofar as there were rules for what counted as good action, they were inexact: “The spheres of what is noble and what is just, which political science examines, admit of a good deal of diversity and variation.”²⁰ Where theoretical disciplines traded in true and certain knowledge, or aimed to, practical disciplines concerned probable knowledge, precisely because “what is done can be otherwise.”²¹

That political science concerned the probable raised questions of method. Practical knowledge was produced by enthymemes—syllogisms based on opinion—or on probable premises that issued probable results. As Aristotle made clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Posterior Analytics*, scientific knowledge is concerned with the necessary, with “what is known and cannot be otherwise”; it covers eternal, those things that do not “come into being or cease to be.”²² As such, it proves its conclusions not by enthymemes but by demonstration: by deductive inference from universals or induction to first principles. Demonstration gave rise to knowledge that was considered true and certain. One of the characteristic attributes of a science was that it could be taught. To be taught, a conclusion had to be demonstrable.²³

There is a puzzle, then, in Aristotle’s use of the word “science”—*epistēmē*—in relation to politics: the contingencies of political life appear to defy any scientific account. When it comes to politics, “we should be content . . . to demonstrate the truth sketchily and in outline,” Aristotle says. “It is a mark of an educated person to look in each area for only that degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject permits. Accepting from a mathematician claims that are mere probabilities seems rather like demanding logical proofs from a rhetorician.”²⁴ Yet Aristotle repeatedly refers to

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1094b1–5.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1095a2–5.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1094b14–15.

²¹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1140b4.

²² Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1139b25.

²³ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1139b.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1094b25–27.

politics as a science. This is not a puzzle Aristotle addresses. It was, however, a prompt for his medieval and early modern readers to ask their own questions about the epistemic status of civil science.

By the mid-thirteenth century, medieval scholastics had taken from the Arabic commentator Averroes (1126–98) the thought that a *scientia* implied true and certain claims produced by syllogistic demonstration from principles, or the ability to demonstrate with certainty the causes of an observed effect.²⁵ After the thirteenth-century translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, and faced with Aristotle’s various claims that there was a *political* science, scholastic authors began themselves to question how a discipline could be concerned with the contingencies of action and also a science—how it could concern itself with the mutable and yet proceed via demonstration from universal principles and causes.²⁶

A full investigation of how Aristotle’s Latin commentators addressed every aspect of this tension across their meditations on both the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* is beyond the scope of this article.²⁷ I offer instead a brief survey of the development of the language of political science in the commentary tradition that focuses on the emergence of three key claims. First, that politics was scientific in the sense that it could be taught—that it included content capable of being demonstrated. Second, that the method for the study of politics should be drawn from natural philosophy. Finally, and relatedly, that the object of political science, on this view, is “civil bodies.”

Albert the Great (d. 1280)—the first Latin commentator on the *Politics*—made a series of pertinent interventions on these issues in a discussion of moral philosophy, the category under which, for him as for most medieval and Renaissance thinkers, both ethics and politics were included. Albert laid the ground for later developments when he had his Objector raise questions concerning the relationship of knowledge to morality. Moral thinking, his Objector suggests, should not be classed as a science

²⁵ Charles Lohr, “The New Aristotle and ‘Science’ in the Paris Arts Faculty (1255),” in *L’enseignement des disciplines à la Faculté des arts*, ed. Olga Weijers and Louis Holtz (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 251–69, at 261.

²⁶ The first complete extant Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was by Robert Grosseteste in 1246–47. William of Moerbeke’s Latin translation of the *Politics* appeared in 1260.

²⁷ Jean Dunbabin, “The Reception and Interpretation of Aristotle’s *Politics*,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Political Thought*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 723–38; David Luscombe, “Commentaries on the ‘Politics’: Paris and Oxford, XIII–XVth centuries,” in Weijers and Holtz, *L’enseignement*, 313–29. Christoph Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation der Aristotelischen Politica im späten Mittelalter* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1992).

because where science is concerned with leading us to a state of knowing, morality is concerned with leading us to good action. “In all *scientia* knowing is very useful,” he argues, “but . . . knowing is insufficient, or of no benefit, to morals.”²⁸ What matters is how you act, not what you know. To this Albert responds—using a distinction drawn from Avicenna (980–1037)—that there is in fact a “science of morals” and that it “should be considered in two ways, either according to use or according to teaching.”²⁹ Use implies practical knowledge; whereas, following Aristotle, teaching is associated with demonstration from universal principles. Albert had his Objector continue to doubt that moral philosophy might bear features of a speculative science rather than be solely concerned with contingent particulars of action: “All *scientia*,” the Objector declares, “is at its most perfect in the universal, but the knowledge of morals exists primarily in particular actions.”³⁰ Again, in his response Albert uses the language of *scientia* properly speaking for the description of moral philosophy: “The use of this knowledge, which exists in action according to virtue, is brought to completion in particulars, concerning which there are actions, and doctrines, in universals.”³¹ Here we see a vocabulary in which speculative and practical science are not mutually exclusive but are two sides of the same coin. It was Albert’s student, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), who developed this discussion and applied its distinctions to politics.

Aquinas begins his own commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a division of the sciences that includes moral philosophy, itself divided into ethics, economics, and politics.³² He then makes a second division, between the speculative and the practical intellects. Following Aristotle, he locates science in the former, and art and prudence in the latter. Moral philosophy, he suggests, utilizes both: “we seek a definition of virtue not only to know its truth but to become good by acquiring virtue.”³³ This twofold nature

²⁸ “In omni scientia maxime proficit scire; sed . . . scire parum vel nihil proficit ad mores,” Albert the Great, “Super Ethica Commentum et Quaestiones, libros quinque priores,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. W. Kübel (Münster: Aschendorff, 1968), 14:1.

²⁹ “Quod scientia morum potest considerari dupliciter, scilicet aut ut utens aut ut docens,” Albert, *Ethica*, 2. On the *utens-docens* distinction see Noah Dauber, *The Invention of Political Science* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006), 36–41.

³⁰ “Omnis scientia maxime perfecta est in universalis; sed cognitio morum maxime est in particularibus operationibus,” Albert, *Ethica*, 2.

³¹ “Usus huius scientiae, qui est in operatione secundum virtutem, perficitur in particularibus, circa quae sunt operationes, et doctrina in universalibus,” Albert, *Ethica*, 2.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Charles Litzinger (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox, 1993), 1. Latin compared with *In decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis Ad Nicomachum Exposito*, ed. Raimondo Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1964).

³³ Aquinas, *Ethics*, 88.

of moral philosophy is underscored when, in Book Six, Aquinas doubts Aristotle’s division of the rational soul into two parts, one concerned with necessary things (the scientific part), the other with contingent things (the deliberative part). Aquinas queries the rigidity of this distinction, claiming, in language similar to Albert’s, that “the true in necessary matter and the true in contingent matter resemble perfect and imperfect in the genus of what is true.”³⁴ Both the practical intellect and the speculative intellect aim at truth.³⁵ Therefore, writes Aquinas, there *can* be “universal concepts of contingent things,” which are nevertheless also “immutable,” because “contingent things can be understood in two ways: in one way according to their universal concepts, in the other as they are in the concrete.”³⁶ Contingent things can be considered as manifestations of demonstrative truths.

This reasoning will be familiar to students of Thomist natural law, but what of it in relation to the discussion of politics as a science to be studied and taught? In the prologue to his commentary on the *Politics*, Aquinas argues that *civilis scientia* denotes the *doctrina politica* that are situated in the realm of philosophy; philosophers must focus on *politica* because it gives “instruction” on the *civitas* and so offers one vital part of a complete philosophy.³⁷ And while Aquinas speaks of political science as the “architectonic” *practical* science, he does not regard it merely as a practical science. The guiding text for this claim is Aristotle’s *Physics* and its injunction that art imitate nature.³⁸ God’s creation and manmade artifacts are connected precisely because the human intellect that makes artificial things is derived ultimately from the divine intellect. Humans engaged in any kind of artifice should try to imitate God’s natural works. Aquinas uses this connection to subtly refigure the relationship between speculative sciences and practical sciences. Speculative sciences study those things made by God; they are speculative because they require only cognition. Practical sciences concern things made by human reason, and these are both “cognitive and causative.” We need both to understand those things and to be confident of producing them ourselves.

Aquinas takes this thought a step further by emphasizing the methodological continuities between political science and speculative science—

³⁴ Aquinas, *Ethics*, 356.

³⁵ Aquinas, *Ethics*, 362.

³⁶ Aquinas, *Ethics*, 356.

³⁷ Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 2. Latin compared with *In octo libros politicorum Aristotelis exposito*, ed. Raimondo Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1966).

³⁸ Aquinas, *Commentary*, 1, replacing “skills” with “art.”

what he calls the “method and order” of political science—arguing that “speculative sciences contemplating a whole consider its parts and sources and so arrive at knowledge about it by showing the things it undergoes and the things it does. Just so, a political science, considering the sources and parts of a community, teaches knowledge about it and shows its parts, the things it undergoes, and the things it does. Moreover, political science, since it is practical, shows how individual things can be accomplished, something necessary in any practical science.”³⁹ Politics is a speculative science as it offers a causal analysis of the commonwealth. It is also a practical science, because the speculative knowledge is put to use: commonwealths are, to a certain extent, manmade. Aquinas does not abandon the distinction; he bridges it, saying that the speculative and the practical are the two faces of political science. This is more than the suggestion of a set of practical precepts from which we deduce how to act: this is the suggestion that politics includes its own body of speculative knowledge about the city (an insight that Marsilius of Padua and Dante arguably both came to share).⁴⁰

An instructive comparison here is with Giles of Rome’s (1247–1316) *De regimine principum* (1277–80)—a hybrid commentary and “mirror for princes”—which offers a contrasting interpretation of *scientia civilis*, inflected by Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. Giles denies that the study of politics has a scientific character. “In all moral business,” he says, “the way of proceeding is figurative and imprecise.”⁴¹ He insists that politics is a part of the art of rhetoric; it does not exist, as Aquinas had suggested, purely in reason. Consequently, students of politics do not demonstrate their conclusions. Giles refigures Book One of the *Ethics* to make his point: “It is not for a geometer to persuade, but to demonstrate: truly it is not for rhetoricians or politicians to demonstrate, but to persuade.”⁴² The insertion of *politici* here is Giles’s own. The Aristotelian tradition, then, was also a source for debate about the kinds of knowledge that could be had about politics and how that knowledge should be communicated. For all of the *De regimine*’s subsequent popularity—and indeed, considering the ubiquity of the idea that the rhetorical language of political science was *the* dominant language of

³⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary*, 1, replacing “theoretical” with “speculative” for “speculativa.”

⁴⁰ Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, “Marsilius of Padua’s Conception of Natural Law Revisited,” in *The World of Marsilius of Padua*, ed. G. Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 125–42; Gillian Evans, “The Use of Mathematical Method in Medieval Political Science,” in *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences* 32 (1982): 78–94.

⁴¹ “In toto morali negotio modus procedendi . . . est figuralis et grossus,” Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum libri III* (Rome, 1556), 1v–2r.

⁴² “Geometrae igitur est non persuadere, sed demonstrare: Rhetoris vero et Politici, non est demonstrare, sed persuadere,” Giles of Rome, *Regimine*, 2r.

the Renaissance—the perspective developed by Aquinas had an afterlife of its own.⁴³

In humanist commentaries Aquinas’s concern with the correct method for political science was amplified and combined with an interest in Aristotle’s comments early in the *Politics* that the city must be investigated “according to our established method.”⁴⁴ The Italian Donato Acciaiuoli (1429–78) was one of many authors to suggest that the method Aristotle had in mind at the start of the *Politics* was the same as that which he detailed in his *Physics*.⁴⁵ In Book One of the *Physics* Aristotle had argued that “when the objects of an inquiry, in any department, have principles, causes or elements, it is through acquaintance with these that knowledge and understanding is attained. For we do not think that we know a thing until we are acquainted with its primary causes or first principles, and have carried out our analysis as far as its elements.”⁴⁶ For some Aristotelian authors the implication seems to be that the distinguishing feature of political science, that which set it aside from, say, moral philosophy, was a concern to analyze and explain political bodies. For Acciaiuoli, reading the opening of the *Politics* through the *Physics* entailed treating the *civilis societas* just as one would a *corpus naturale*: resolving the city into its parts such that “we are able to perceive which are those [constitutive] associations and those governments and in what way they might differ.”⁴⁷ For Pietro Vettori (1499–1585) the body of the city is to be compared to that of an animal, and the job of the civil philosopher is to examine the city’s parts in the same way a natural philosopher might observe (and take apart) the members of an animal’s body.⁴⁸

The connection between the *Physics* and the *Politics* is expressed even more explicitly in Louis Le Roy’s (1510–77) translation (with commentary) of the *Politics* from Greek to French. (This important text formed the basis

⁴³ For more on the connection between the *De regimine* and the *Politics* see Lidia Lanza, “La, *Politica* di Aristotele e il *De regimine principum* di Egidio Romano,” *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 15 (2001): 19–75; Francis Oakley, *The Mortgage of the Past* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 118–25.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair (London: Penguin, 1992), 1252a21.

⁴⁵ “Ut in dialecticis ex primo physicorum manifeste apparet,” Donato Acciaiuoli, *In Aristotelis libros octos Politicorum commentarii* (Venice, 1566), 12v. Similarly the Melanchthonian Martin Borrhaus, *In Aristotelis Politicorum* (Basel, 1545), 3.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1984), 184a13–14.

⁴⁷ “Poterimus percipere quae sint illas societates, et gubernationes, et in quo differant,” Acciaiuoli, *Aristotelis*, 12v.

⁴⁸ Pietro Vettori, *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo* (Basel, 1582), 3. Annabel Brett, “‘The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-wealth’: Thomas Hobbes and Late Renaissance Commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *Hobbes Studies* 23 (2010): 72–102.

for the first English translation of the *Politics* by the anonymous I.D. in 1598.) Le Roy riffs on the passage from Book One of the *Physics*

The direct manner of proceeding in all Sciences, is to begin at their first principles and grounds, and to proceed on from the most single to the composed, because we may then be well said to know a thing, when we know the first causes and the first principles thereof, even to the verie bottome and ground thereof, as is written in the beginning of [Aristotle's] Naturall Philosophie. Forasmuch therefore as the dutie of him that dealeth with the matters of State, is to treat of civill Societie and to seeke out the causes thereof from Nature; Aristotle purposing to write thereof, sheweth first of all from whence this societie proceedeth, wherein it consisteth, and to what end it is ordained, beginning at the first and simplest partes thereof.⁴⁹

Le Roy presents Aristotle as clearly applying the principles of his *Physics* to his investigation of the commonwealth. By the late sixteenth century, political science was being spoken about not merely as a discipline concerned with persuasion and contingency, but one that shared a method with natural philosophy, that was concerned itself with certainty, and which had in “political bodies” its own distinctive object.

II. POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE *SPHAERA CIVITATIS*

The *Sphaera civitatis* (1588, the “Sphere of the commonwealth” or “city”), written by the Oxford philosopher John Case, is a mesmerizing and unusual commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*. It was ostensibly dedicated to explicating Aristotle, but it often departed from him, either by offering new answers to old questions or by raising new questions of contemporary relevance. One aim was to help Oxford students understand the *Politics* and thus pass their Arts course exams (whose *quaestiones* were sometimes drawn straight from the *Sphaera*).⁵⁰ But Case also presented the *Politics* as a way of understanding politics, both in a local Elizabethan context and more universally.

⁴⁹ Louis Le Roy, *Aristotles Politiques or Discourses of Government*, trans. I. D. (London: Adam Islip, 1598), sig. Ciiiir.

⁵⁰ Jeremy Catto and Ralph Evans, eds., *A History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 431; Strickland Gibson, ed., *Statuta antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 33, 235; J. McConica, ed., *A History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 40–41; Lawrence Ryan, “Richard Hakluyt’s Voyage into Aristotle,” *Sixteenth*

It can be understood as one of the first examples of a “politics textbook” to be published in England.

Case opens the *Sphaera* by stating that he will “speak after the custom of the dialecticians,” so that “the engaged reader understands that the art of reason is necessary in every science.”⁵¹ Dialectic was the discipline more commonly known as logic, and here readers of Hobbes might well prick up their ears. For Hobbes, a mark of giving a properly scientific account of the commonwealth—one that sought to demonstrate rather than simply persuade audiences of its truths—was the use of logic not rhetoric. Elsewhere, Case himself appeals to a similar binary: he distinguishes between speaking as a rhetorician or orator on the one hand, and as a logician or a philosopher on the other. His readers are encouraged to act as the latter. We might further infer that when Case recommends dialectic he is saying that he will only proceed in a mode appropriate for theoretical sciences, that is, *pace* Aristotle’s own advice, that he will do nothing but offer demonstrative syllogisms and logical proofs about politics.

Renaissance dialectic, however, did not only provide tools for a science of certain things; it also treated contingent matters.⁵² The reform of scholastic logic effected what Lisa Jardine calls the “rhetoricisation of logic.”⁵³ Dialectic came to include, and sometimes privileged, the discussion of persuasive strategies alongside that of logical argumentation and syllogistic reasoning. Renaissance dialectic was “concerned both with scientific (that

Century Journal 12 (1981): 73–84. For Case, see Charles Schmitt, *John Case Aristotelianism in Renaissance England* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1983); Sophie Smith, *Nature, Knowledge and the City: John Case and the Aristotelian Tradition* (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2014).

⁵¹ John Case, *Sphaera civitatis* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1588), sig. ¶¶5r. My translations are indebted to, and often adopt phrases from, the hypertext critical edition by Dana Sutton, ed., *The Philological Museum, The Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham*, 13 March 2002, <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/sphaera>.

⁵² This account draws on Richard Serjeantson, “Proof and Persuasion,” in Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, eds., *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 132–75; Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric 1380–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); E. Jennifer Ashworth, “Logic in Late Sixteenth-Century England: Humanist Dialectic and the New Aristotelianism,” *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991), 224–36; Lodi Nauta, “Lorenzo Valla and the Rise of Humanist Dialectic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 193–210; William A. Wallace, “Aristotelian Science and Rhetoric in Transition: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” *Rhetorica* 7 (1989): 7–21.

⁵³ Lisa Jardine, “Humanism and the Teaching of Logic,” in Kretzmann et al, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, 797–807, at 797.

is, certain) demonstration and . . . with arguments that were merely probable.”⁵⁴ Somewhat confusingly, the shorthand most often used to refer to the latter mode was also “dialectic”; yet a textbook on logic in this period would have referred in its title to “dialectic” and would have included sections on demonstration. Indeed, Case wrote his own textbook on dialectic, the *Summa veterum interpretum in universam dialecticam Aristotelis* (1584), in which he defended dialectic as a discipline that inquired after things that are discussed (*discutere*) probably, but also employed a mode of inquiry that defined and demonstrated (*demonstrare*) truly.⁵⁵ The dialectician had to be able to deal with both demonstrative truths and probable conclusions, and it was dialectical training that enabled a student to proceed in other sciences.⁵⁶

Dialectic was also considered necessary for textual exegesis. It enabled readers to expose chains of reasoning so as to formulate works of their own appropriate to the subject.⁵⁷ To proceed as a dialectician on the humanist model meant to be able both to understand and to deliver clear arguments in good classical prose.⁵⁸ To proceed as a logician on the scholastic model meant to prepare yourself to read and produce arguments among the so-called higher disciplines—the “sciences” properly speaking—of natural philosophy, theology, and metaphysics.⁵⁹ By opening the *Sphaera* with the claim that he would proceed as a dialectician, Case was signaling his intent to expose Aristotle’s own reasoning—to order a famously chaotic text—while also showing readers that some political things could and should be treated with the demonstrable certainty of a science.

Case opens Book One of the *Sphaera* aware that questions concerning the nature and epistemic status of civil science were live ones. “The earlier commentators,” he notes, ask questions about political science’s author, kind, object, method, and end, as well as about whether it is a practical or speculative science and about the method of its instruction. Specifically, they ask “whether [its method] is derived from causes to effects according to the order of nature, or from effects to causes according to the order of

⁵⁴ Serjeantson, “Proof,” 135. See also Aristotle, *Topics*, in Barnes, *The Complete Works*, 1:100a25–101b4.

⁵⁵ Case, *Summa veterum interpretum in universam dialecticam Aristotelis* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1584), 6.

⁵⁶ Case, *Summa*, 2.

⁵⁷ Mack, *Renaissance Rhetoric*, 316; Nauta, “Valla,” 207.

⁵⁸ Lisa Jardine, “Humanist Logic,” in Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 188.

⁵⁹ Jardine, “Humanist Logic,” 188.

teaching,” which might suggest some familiarity with the debate going on in precisely these terms at the School of Padua concerning the nature of political science.⁶⁰ Case is adamant (with Aquinas) that its object should be the commonwealth itself, and not the individual citizen. One reason for this is striking: “because the properties of [the commonwealth] and of its subject are demonstrated.”⁶¹

This insistence on the demonstrative dimension of civil science continues when Case outlines Aristotle’s method. First, he says, Aristotle “examines the causes and parts of the commonwealth . . . [then] he *defines* the whole thing,” and “lastly he strives to *demonstrate* the powers and properties of the whole.”⁶² The terms Case uses here to describe Aristotle’s method—to “define” and to “demonstrate”—are telling in light of his aim to proceed dialectically. Recall the terms in which he described dialectic’s two aspects: for the probable we *discutere*, regarding certain things we should *definere et demonstrare*.⁶³ For Case, “making a beginning from a definition” is the act of a philosopher rather than an orator, and he frequently insists that political scientists must be able to give clear definitions of the categories that they use.⁶⁴ (This insistence that defining be associated with philosophy and not oratory is striking. Providing clear definitions of the matter at hand had always been central to the art of rhetoric; it is stressed in both Cicero’s *De interpretatione* and Quintillian’s *Institutio oratoria*, two texts central to Renaissance rhetorical learning.)

Case directly addresses the puzzle of a *science* of politics. Drawing on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Posterior Analytics* (the text in which Aristotle had outlined demonstration and the appropriate methods for proceeding scientifically), Case has his Objector argue that there can be no science of the *civitas* because—with Aristotle—“every object of a science should be necessary and eternal.” The commonwealth, however, is “subject to failure and chance.” Nations and empires devastated by war, and commonwealths with altered constitutions, prove the mutability and “transitory” nature of *civitates*. It is worth quoting Case’s response in full:

⁶⁰ “An sit a causis ad effecta per ordinem naturae, vel ab effectis per ordinem disciplinae,” Case, *Sphaera*, 8. Nicholas Jardine, “Keeping Order in the School of Padua: Jacopo Zabarella and Francesco Piccolomini on the Offices of Philosophy,” in *Method and Order in Renaissance Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Daniel A. Di Liscia, Eckhard Kessler, and Charlotte Methuen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 183–209.

⁶¹ “Quia proprietates de illo ut de suo subiecto demonstrantur,” Case, *Sphaera*, 9.

⁶² “Primum enim causas et partes civitatis discutit, hinc totum definit, postremo vires ac proprietates de illo toto demonstrare contendit,” Case, *Sphaera*, 8–9. My emphasis.

⁶³ The distinction is between the “rem quam discutit probabiliter” and the “modum, quem vere definit et demonstrat,” Case, *Summa*, 6.

⁶⁴ Case, *Sphaera*, 196; 198.

Two things are considered in political science: the demonstration of theorem and the action of citizens. With respect to the demonstration of theorem, the commonwealth is something necessary, eternal and immutable. For although the empires of the Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians and Romans may fall, nevertheless, the universal and formal commonwealth, under the demonstration of this science, remains. On account of which, although the commonwealth may frequently change with regard to the mutable will and action of men, nevertheless, with regard to form and demonstration, the commonwealth (which is contained in species rather than number, in precept rather than example) does not change.⁶⁵

The introduction of this vocabulary—demonstration, theorem, precepts—to a discussion of “political science” is, as far as I can tell, Case’s innovation within the Aristotelian commentary tradition. It is language that reoccurs: “Political science” he says later in the *Sphaera* “is considered in two ways, either with respect to its theorem and precepts that it teaches, and thus it is universal and demonstrative, or with respect to the action and use of the commonwealth, and thus it adapts universal precepts to the customs of citizens, as a doctor adapts medicines to men’s diseases.”⁶⁶ This language may have evoked, for contemporary readers, Euclid’s *Elements* wherein deductive argument proceeded from clearly fixed axioms. Such language also emphasizes that the end of this science is not simply prudential; it is true, certain, and formal knowledge of the city. This constitutes a significant deviation from Aristotle, who says explicitly that the *civitas* changes when the constitution changes; there is no room in the *Politics* for the idea of the commonwealth’s “universal form.”

At times, Case conflates the aim “to demonstrate with exactitude the powers, laws, properties, and all other things which pertain to *all* commonwealths” (as he puts it elsewhere) with a project to deduce the ideal commonwealth. Where the former suggests a set of attributes that all commonwealths share—what modern philosophers might call their necessary and sufficient conditions—the latter by definition must include attributes

⁶⁵ “Duo in politica scientia considerantur, demonstratio theorematum et actio civium. Quoad demonstrationem theorematum, civitas est quiddam necessarium, aeternum et incommutabile. Nam quamvis Assyriorum, Persarum, Macedonum et Romanorum imperia cadant; universalis tamen et formalis civitas sub demonstratione huius scientiae manet. Quare licet quoad flexibilem voluntatem et actionem hominum frequenter mutetur civitas, non tamen quoad formam et demonstrationem, quae specie non numero, praeecepto non exemplo continetur,” Case, *Sphaera*, 14–15.

⁶⁶ Case, *Sphaera*, 311.

not present in every commonwealth. This slide, and the attendant language of the ideal *form* of the commonwealth, makes the *Sphaera* look markedly Platonic in places. Now, it would seem, the two sides of political science involve both the delineation by the political scientist of the *ideal* form of the commonwealth and the ability to accommodate this ideal form to citizens as they actually are.

Whether as ideal form or general definition, Case regarded the demonstrative aspect of political science as necessary knowledge for citizens and governors. This is clear from how he conceptualized the *Sphaera* itself. In the “peroration” he calls it a *theoricum civitatis globum*—a theoretic globe of the city. The term “theoric” is striking. On the one hand it emphasizes the aim to provide an account of the nature of the *civitas*, a theoretical model of a (partially) natural phenomenon. Case uses the adjective *theoricus* elsewhere to distinguish between *scientia theorica* and *scientia practica* and, even more suggestively, between a *civitas theorica* and a *civitas practica*. Such language alludes to the distinction between what we might now really call a “theoretical” science and a practical science, the *civitas* as it is demonstrated and the *civitas* as it is made. On the other hand, Case’s early modern readers would have known the term “theoric” from its use in other disciplines: in geometry where “theorikes” signified abstract mathematical rules and definitions and were distinct from the practical applications to which geometry could be put.⁶⁷ In astronomy and cosmography “theoric” was used to designate any set of laws that governed some aspect of the natural world as well as mechanical devices that model the motions of the planets.⁶⁸ In this context, the “theoric globe of the city” implies a device like an armillary sphere, itself a kind of theoretic, which provided a planispheric projection of the heavens to teach astronomy, to determine the position of heavenly bodies, and to perform calculations in geometry.⁶⁹ The word *sphaera* implies not just, at its simplest, a designated zone of activity, but it also recalls the titles of textbooks on astronomy, as well as the actual, spherical tools of that discipline, and of geography and geometry.⁷⁰

Case explicitly offers his own book as another artificial sphere, a tool that can help readers understand the *corpus politicum*. Using instructive

⁶⁷ See the use of “theoricke” in Robert Record’s *The Pathway to Knowledge* (London: Reynold Wolfe, 1551), sig. Ar–v.

⁶⁸ See the thirteenth century *Theorica planetarum*, often attributed to Gerard of Cremona, which became the standard introductory text for astronomy in the late Middle Ages. See also Georg Peurbach, *Theoricae novae planetarum* (Nuremberg: Regiomontanus, 1472/3).

⁶⁹ Case, *Sphaera*, sig. ¶ 4r.

⁷⁰ Johannes Sacrobosco, *De sphaera mundi* (Ferrara: Andreas Belfortis, 1472).

language, and conjuring methods of ocular knowledge more often associated with astronomy or navigation, he appeals to readers to “gaze” upon the sphere he offers, to “turn this globe,” “inspect” its motion, and so to come to know what a commonwealth is. There may be no commonwealth that has achieved all of its prescriptions, but his sphere can act as a guide. Just as geometers need their tools to calculate, and just as explorers need astrolabes or armillary spheres to navigate, so too do politicians need Case’s *Sphaera* if they are to found and administer commonwealths, as do citizens if they are to live in them.⁷¹ (It is hard here not to relate this project to that of those Elizabethans, many of whom were in Case’s extended circle, whose minds were on the founding of commonwealths abroad while Case wrote.) Here, we might think, is another point at which the history of imperialism and the history of political science intersect.

Presenting his book as a tool was another way that Case tied his political science to contemporary mathematics and astronomy.⁷² The association of the *Sphaera* with such disciplines only advances (rhetorically if not explicitly) the thought that politics might be associated with the highest sciences: in the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle had named astronomy with natural philosophy and geometry as the three paradigmatic theoretical sciences. Just as geometers define and study circles, political scientists, on Case’s account, analyze the commonwealth. With this in mind I will offer some observations on the connection between this emergent language of political science and Thomas Hobbes’s political project.

III. THOMAS HOBBS AND ARISTOTELIAN CIVIL SCIENCE

Much of the best work on early modern civil science has been done in the service of interpreting Hobbes’s comments on the discipline. One of the most influential interpretations suggests that in his *Elements of Law* and *De cive* Hobbes rejected the vision of politics advanced by Renaissance rhetoricians in favor of a new appeal to a logical framework.⁷³ As we have

⁷¹ Case is clear that his book is for both “political men” and for “citizens.” Case, *Sphaera*, 311.

⁷² E.g. John Blagrove’s *The mathematicall Iewell* (London: Walter Venge, 1585), which contained within it a model for a universal astrolabe. Mordechai Feingold, *The Mathematicians’ Apprenticeship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁷³ Skinner, “‘*Scientia civilis*’ in Classical Rhetoric,” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67–93; Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

seen, however, the rhetoricians are not the sole representatives of pre-Hobbesian civil science. How might the recovery of this alternative language of political science affect how we interpret Hobbes?

Three of Hobbes’s claims are taken as signs of his engagement with the rhetorical language of civil science. First is his claim in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Elements of Law* that he will proceed as a logician. He notes that “the style” of the text “is therefore the worse, because I was forced to consult when I was writing, more with logic than with rhetoric.”⁷⁴ This notice has been read as subversive, and “contrary to common belief.”⁷⁵ Yet as we have seen, John Case’s widely read textbook opened with a similar announcement, meant to signal his dedication to the use of reason in pursuing the truth of the matter at hand, but also, in turn, his ambition to employ the tools of demonstrative logic. This, for Case, was a function of proceeding not as an orator, but as a logician and a philosopher.

Second is Hobbes’s insistence that civil science can be taught. This is often read as an explicit attack on the goals of rhetoric, as standing with the Socratic view that because rhetoric aims to persuade, it can never claim to teach.⁷⁶ This is no doubt correct. But as I have shown, the argument that science is paradigmatically something that can be taught was associated with Aristotle as much as with Plato, and it was central to the arguments of the commentary tradition that politics should be considered a science precisely because there were aspects of it that could be taught.

The claim that civil science could be *demonstrable* is the third of Hobbes’s claims that allegedly constitute a “rival” view to those of his contemporaries. By insisting on the ideals of certainty and demonstration from evident principles, it has been argued, Hobbes was offering a unique retort to those who maintained that “civil science can never hope *demonstrare*, to demonstrate its findings, but only *disserere*, to discuss and debate them.”⁷⁷ Hobbes’s insistence on demonstration over discussion is said to have “no connection with classical and humanist thought” about politics,⁷⁸ and his boast, that his was the only exercise in the history of civil science with a genuinely scientific character, is thus read as “a critical reaction to—and even a satirical commentary on—the classical and humanist orthodoxies.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

⁷⁵ Skinner, “Scientia,” 83–84.

⁷⁶ Skinner, “Scientia,” 87.

⁷⁷ Skinner, “Scientia,” 84.

⁷⁸ Skinner, “Scientia,” 85.

⁷⁹ Skinner, “Scientia,” 85; Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 299.

And yet Hobbes's language here is almost identical to that which was used by Case to draw a distinction between the probable things that dialectic discusses and the certain things that dialectic demonstrates, both of which, Case suggested, were central to political science. It was Case who insisted that the political philosopher's task was to demonstrate claims about the commonwealth, and Case who defended political science against doubts that the discipline deserved its name.

It has been argued that Hobbes's aim in each of his works of civil philosophy was to "convert" the study of politics into a scientific discipline.⁸⁰ It is my suggestion that this attempt at transformative conversion has a history in the Aristotelian commentary tradition. A representative of that history was also, perhaps, a particularly proximate source for Hobbes. While there is no definitive evidence that Hobbes had read Case, he was surely acquainted with the *Sphaera*: beyond its use in Hobbes's Oxford, we find it included in the catalogue of books in the Hardwick Hall library that Hobbes himself drew up.⁸¹ And it was Case's book that defended politics as a subject to be taught, that insisted logic was the tool by which it should proceed, and that characterized politics as, at least in some regards, a demonstrative science that investigated, to use a phrase that both authors deploy, the "nature of the body politic."

Discussions of Hobbes's civil science are not always clear about how to (or, indeed, whether to) distinguish between Hobbes's moral philosophy and his civil science. Thinking about the distinctions and the connections between moral and civil philosophy is made harder by Hobbes's own use of these categories. Hobbes and his interpreters sometimes equivocate over whether thinking about political bodies is the same enterprise as thinking about "moral vertues" or "the science of Justice and Policy." That civil science was classified as a species of moral philosophy in the Renaissance is no help precisely because this is the connection Hobbes sometimes resists. The famously recalcitrant table of the sciences in chapter nine of *Leviathan* posits "Ethics" and "The Science of the Just and Unjust" as distinct enterprises, two forms of natural philosophy which study consequences of natural bodies; "politiques and civill philosophy" are a completely distinct branch of inquiry and study "consequences from accidents of politic bodies."⁸² The question of where the boundary lies between moral and civil philosophy is important for both Case and Hobbes. Aristotelian authors

⁸⁰ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 1. My emphasis.

⁸¹ Richard Talaska, ed., *The Hardwick Library and Hobbes's Intellectual Development* (Charlottesville, VA: Philosophical Documentation Centre, 2013), entry 633.

⁸² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 130.

before Case, thinking about natural law and moral philosophy, certainly discussed the possibility of demonstrative certainty in ethics; but Case is striking for insisting that the commonwealth itself was something that could be “demonstrated.”⁸³ The connection between these two things—between thinking demonstratively about laws of nature and thinking demonstratively about the commonwealth—is ambiguous and thickety in both authors. But historians might wish to pay more attention to this connection. In the case of Hobbes, focusing on this connection emphasizes, for example, how much interpretative work remains to be done to account for how we get the commonwealth from our covenants.⁸⁴

None of this is to make Thomas Hobbes into John Case, nor to claim him as a clandestine Aristotelian. There are many contrasts. Case thought, for example, that the commonwealth could be demonstrated precisely because it is partially natural, while Hobbes argued the opposite—that it can be demonstrated because it is artificial, a thing that we make for ourselves.⁸⁵ Neither should we infer that Case’s work is the culmination of the Aristotelian tradition before Hobbes; there is much left to say about late Renaissance civil science.⁸⁶ My suggestion rather is that there was a developed philosophical language with which Hobbes engaged in his political writings and which can provide new insights into Hobbes’s intentions, and into the origins and possibilities of early modern political science itself. Might not, for example, Hobbes’s bold claim to offer, for the first time, a *demonstrable* political science be read as another co-opting strike on a different intimate foe: not the rhetoricians this time, but the Aristotelians? He was certainly deploying arguments found in the very Aristotelians he criticized, while also implying that they had failed to deliver on their claims: the Aristotelians may have tried to apply logic to politics, but their attempts, like their logic, were obfuscating rather than clarifying. We need, that is, to go beyond the question of the novelty of the language of “demonstration” in relation to the discipline of political science, and to seek instead accounts of how shifting understandings of demonstration affected political science. Debates about the epistemic status of politics were not new, much as Hobbes might have denied any precedents. Among Hobbes’s hopes was

⁸³ Sachiko Kusakawa, “*Vinculum Concordiae*: Lutheran Method by Philip Melancthon,” in Di Liscia, Kessler, and Methuen, *Method and Order*, 337–54.

⁸⁴ Smith, “The Nature of Politics” (Quentin Skinner Lecture, University of Cambridge, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=si9iG-093aY>.

⁸⁵ D. W. Hanson, “The Meaning of ‘Demonstration’ in Hobbes’s Science,” *History of Political Thought* 11 (1990): 587–626.

⁸⁶ Scattola, *Scienza*; Horst Dreitzel, “Reason of State and the Crisis of Political Aristotelianism,” *History of European Ideas* 28 (2002): 163–87.

that, in seeking to understand politics, his readers would stop consulting Aristotle and his followers; in seeking to understand Hobbes's political philosophy, we should perhaps be cautious to oblige.

IV. CONCLUSION

Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow's history of modern political science—*That Noble Science of Politics*—takes its name from a remark by Thomas Macaulay.⁸⁷ But it could just as well have come from the very first English translation of Aristotle's *Politics* of 1598 where "politikes" was declared that "noble science."⁸⁸ Their book is about the institutional origins of how we teach politics today; this article concerns how politics became something to be taught and how the nature of the commonwealth became the object of its investigation. It is also about the origins of the very language of "political *theory*" and the distinction between theory and practice in political philosophy that continues to animate political theorists.⁸⁹

One further implication of this account is historiographical. Many Anglophone scholars have argued that medieval and Renaissance Aristotelians thought political science synonymous with the virtue of prudence and "not a *scientia* to be learnt in a university, and demonstrated and taught to students."⁹⁰ There was a preoccupation with political prudence in this tradition—evidenced not least by Aquinas's own detailed discussions of that idea—but this should no longer occlude, nor be taken as exhaustive of, the history of political science in the Aristotelian tradition.⁹¹

Indeed, this history offers another perspective on an older historiographical dispute concerning the intellectual impact of the Latin translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*. Various historians—including Walter Ullmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Quentin Skinner, Brian Tierney, and Joe Canning—agree, despite other differences, that the translations of these texts were highly significant for the development of

⁸⁷ Collini et al, *Noble Science*, 4.

⁸⁸ Le Roy, *Politiques*, sig. Ciii^v.

⁸⁹ Stephen Salkever, *Finding the Mean* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), chaps. 5–6.

⁹⁰ Harro M. Höpfl, "Scholasticism in Quentin Skinner's Foundations," *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113–29, at 126. On political science as "prudence on a larger scale" see Hamilton-Bleakley, "The Art of Ruling in Aquinas' 'De Regimine Principum,'" *History of Political Thought* 20 (1999): 575–602.

⁹¹ Even scholars who acknowledge *scientia politica* as a meaningful concept for medieval Aristotelians, notably Viroli, often still focus on prudence. Viroli, *Politics*, chap. 1.

medieval moral and political thinking.⁹² More specifically, it was with the *Politics* that we find, in Quentin Skinner’s version of the claim, the “re-emergence of the idea that political philosophy constitutes an independent discipline”—a practical science—“worthy of study in its own right.”⁹³ The rival view, outlined by Cary Nederman in these pages, points out that *scientia politica* was an existing category in twelfth-century texts, as was a distinction between practical and speculative sciences. Authors considered politics a practical science long before the translation of Aristotle’s ethical and political works; direct access to Aristotle was not necessary for the circulation of a series of broadly “Aristotelian” claims about political life.⁹⁴ The reception of those texts did not raise new questions, let alone inaugurate a conceptual revolution; rather they reinforced a traditional worldview.⁹⁵

Both sides of this debate share the thought that one of the most pressing historical questions is whether or not the reception of these texts was causally responsible for the emergence of “political science” as a distinct area of inquiry. Another possibility is that these texts were significant precisely because they prompted new questions about the epistemic status of politics, about its scientific character and about how to resolve the puzzles intrinsic to Aristotle’s characterization of political science. The reception of Aristotle’s texts did not simply reinforce the status of politics as a practical science, they complicated it. Even as authors continued to classify politics as a practical science, this article has argued that they came to attribute to it features characteristic of “theoretical” science. The very negotiation of the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge with regard to politics is one of the most significant features of the post-reception discussion of political science.

This article is also a contribution to the history of the *politics* of political science, and, indeed, the politics of political philosophy.⁹⁶ Questions that characterize debates about political science—not least about the kinds

⁹² Walter Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1961), 231–43; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) 32–49, 128; Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1100–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29; Joseph Canning, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, ed. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 360.

⁹³ Skinner, *Foundations*, 2:349.

⁹⁴ Cary J. Nederman, “Aristotelianism and the Origins of ‘Political Science,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 179–94, at 182.

⁹⁵ Nederman, “Aristotelianism,” 194.

⁹⁶ Farr, “New Science”; Lassman, “Philosophy,” 437, 453.

of knowledge attainable—were as contested in early modernity as they are now, notwithstanding the comparatively new distinctions we draw between political science, political theory, and political philosophy. In this light, Hobbes's claim about his unique contribution to political science could be read with new force: we might think it a sign of the growing standing of political science that Hobbes bothered to make such a claim at all. "Political science" was, in some quarters, a prize worth fighting for, then as now.⁹⁷

Finally, this article is part of an ongoing attempt by scholars in different national contexts to better understand the nature and contributions of commentary on Aristotle's works to the practice and content of medieval and Renaissance moral and political thought.⁹⁸ This is too often neglected in Anglophone histories of political thought.⁹⁹ As I have suggested here, the commentary tradition is a legitimate, even central, source for thinking about civic philosophy in early modern Europe. Indeed, as for the nineteenth century, so too for the sixteenth: "The hypnotic, unshakeable spell cast by Aristotle's *Politics* is so clearly readable on the face of so much of [the political science] literature that one is in danger of failing to remark it at all"¹⁰⁰ In this period, political Aristotelianism amounts to far more than the sum of ubiquitous aphorisms that made their way from the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* into such a wide variety of other texts. The sheer number of these commentaries, in part a result of the presence of both texts on university curricula, suggests that many early modern ideas that modern scholars investigate—including those about "political science"—cannot be properly understood without some acquaintance with the conceptual vocabularies of both the *Politics* and the *Ethics*. Political Aristotelianism, in its various forms, was the philosophical discourse whose technical nuances governed so much sixteenth-century political reflection. The great representatives of European political philosophy in the seventeenth century—Grotius, Hobbes, and Locke—as well as Bodin in the century before—all knew this, even as they sought to reconfigure its categories. For this reason alone the Aristotelian commentary tradition deserves our further attention. The history of early modern "political science" is certainly incomplete without it.

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⁹⁷ I take this phrase from Collini et al, *Noble Science*, 274–75.

⁹⁸ See the work of Horst Dreitzel, Christoph Flüeler, Roberto Lambertini, Lidia Lanza, Merio Scattola, and Marco Toste.

⁹⁹ Exceptions include Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chaps. 1–2; Brett, *Changes of State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Anna Becker, "Gender in the History of Early Modern Political Thought," *Historical Journal* 60 (2017): 843–63.

¹⁰⁰ Collini et al, *Noble Science*, 376.

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