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The European Hobbes Society

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Origins

In the summer of 2011, Adrian Blau and Dirk Brantl organised a three-day workshop on Thomas Hobbes as part of the MANCEPT Workshops in Political Theory. Although nobody anticipated it at the time, that meeting would set in motion a series of events that gradually led to the formation of the *European Hobbes Society* (EHS). Over the following three years, similar workshops were organised in Marburg, Amsterdam, Leuven and London—‘European’ refers to our origins, not our destination. These shared a common format, modelled on the initial workshop that had proven so successful: the papers were pre-circulated and read in advance, leaving plenty of time for detailed discussion and feedback during the meeting itself. The format of these meetings was crucial to their success, combining a relaxed atmosphere with constructive yet rigorous criticism. Perhaps more important still, was a sense of shared excitement about being fortunate enough to meet and learn from others with research interests closely aligned to our own. Rather than simply trying to poke holes in one another’s arguments, we were working together to improve our understanding of Hobbes. Indeed, the sessions would often diverge into a reading-group format with everyone poring over their copies of *Leviathan* trying to make sense of that passage we had all read a hundred times before but never really paused to think about.

We soon realised that we were onto something special and by 2014 we were starting to make plans for taking the EHS forward and turning it into something resembling an official scholarly society. These plans came to fruition the following year with two significant developments. The first was the inaugural

research project of the EHS, 'Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Religion'. Our aim was to direct our common energies to a subject that had been relatively neglected in recent Hobbes scholarship. Two workshops, at King's College London and the University of Leiden, exceeded our expectations by producing a large number of original and innovative papers by leading scholars working at the intersection of Hobbes's political and religious thought; many of these have now been collected in the volume *Hobbes on Politics and Religion*.¹ The second important development was the launch of our website in September 2015, which aims to provide a one-stop shop for the latest news on Hobbes scholarship. This allowed us to publicise the EHS more widely and immediately led to a dramatic increase in our membership. At the time of writing (July 2018), we have a remarkably diverse membership base with over 240 members from all over the world, working in a range of disciplines.²

Coinciding with the launch of the website we took steps to formalise the governance structure of the society. We agreed with Hobbes that, while it is true that when likeminded people congregate 'they are, almost by the very fact that they have met, a *Democracy*',³ more formal ties would better safeguard the society's continued existence. With this in mind, we established an Executive Committee and Advisory Board. The Executive Committee initially comprised all the (predominantly early-career) scholars who had been closely involved in the organisation of the EHS, while places on the Advisory Board were reserved for distinguished Hobbes scholars who have been very generous in their support for our activities.⁴ In September 2016, Johan Olsthoorn organised our first official Biennial Conference of the EHS at KU Leuven, where we welcomed many of our new members, ratified a constitution and elected a new Executive Committee. Most importantly, however, the conference retained the welcoming atmosphere and constructive workshop format that have characterised all our events to date.

1 Laurens van Apeldoorn and Robin Douglass (eds.), *Thomas Hobbes on Politics and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

2 Registration is free: <http://www.europeanhobbessociety.org/members/register/>.

3 Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, trans. and ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), VII.5, p. 94.

4 This is thus an opportune moment to thank everyone who helped to launch the EHS and get it to where we are today. Special thanks are due to the members of the Advisory Board, and the other members of the founding Executive Committee: Adrian Blau, Dirk Brantl, Alexandra Chadwick, Daniel Eggers, Signy Gutnick Allen, Johan Olsthoorn, Dietrich Schotte, Gabriella Slomp and Luciano Venezia.

Goals and Main Activities

The overarching goal of the EHS, as stated in our Constitution, is ‘to promote scholarship on the life and work of Thomas Hobbes across disciplines and traditions by providing a platform for scholars from across the world to share ideas and exchange research.’⁵ There are three main ways we hope to achieve this in the future. We recently held our second official Biennial Conference at the University of Amsterdam and over the last couple of years manuscript-in-progress workshops, a lecture series, and regular workshops have been organised in Cologne, Edinburgh, Erlangen, Florence, Leuven, London and Padova. All members are welcome to organise their own events under the aegis of the EHS.

Second, we aim to provide an active online community for Hobbes scholars. We update our website regularly with details of the latest Hobbes publications, events and news items, and we welcome our members writing discussion pieces of any sort for the website. After the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, we published exchanges between authors and critics on some of the chapters.⁶ We have recently hosted online colloquia on Michael Byron’s *Submission and Subjection in Leviathan* and on David Boucher’s *Appropriating Hobbes*,⁷ and we are lining up more to mark the publication of important monographs on Hobbes. Third, we will continue to provide a platform for coordinated research activities and projects. By drawing on the expertise of our members and by harnessing our strengths, we hope to facilitate collaborative

5 <http://www.europeanhobbsociety.org/about/constitution/>.

6 A.P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The first is between A.P. Martinich and John Deigh on law and the opening piece is available here: <http://www.europeanhobbsociety.org/newpublications/debate-martinich-deigh-on-law-1-martinich/>. The second is between Raffaella Santi and Ioannis Evrigenis on the state of nature and the opening piece is available here: <http://www.europeanhobbsociety.org/discussion/santi-comments-on-evrigenis/>.

7 Michael M. Byron, *Submission and Subjection in Leviathan: Good Subjects in the Hobbesian Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); David Boucher, *Appropriating Hobbes: Legacies in Political, Legal, and International Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). The introduction to the Byron colloquium is available here: <http://www.europeanhobbsociety.org/newpublications/online-colloquium-1-submission-and-subjection-in-leviathan-good-subjects-in-the-hobbesian-commonwealth/>. The colloquium includes responses by Michael Krom, Deborah Baumgold and Johan Olsthoorn, followed by a reply from Michael Byron. The introduction to the Boucher colloquium is here: <http://www.europeanhobbsociety.org/general/online-colloquium-1-appropriating-hobbes/>. The colloquium includes responses by Howard Williams, Eleanor Curran and David Dyzenhaus, followed by a reply from David Boucher.

work and propel Hobbes scholarship in exciting new directions. Currently, some of our members are working on an edited volume on *De Cive*—one of Hobbes’s most important and influential works that is still not always given the full attention it deserves—that should see the light of day in the next couple of years.

Our hopes are high for the future of the EHS, which can reach its full potential only with the active participation of its members. We therefore invite all members to contact the Executive Committee if they wish to become further involved in the EHS and contribute to its activities, whether by hosting a workshop or event, contributing a short piece to the website, or by coordinating a research activity.⁸ We are always open to new ideas for taking the EHS forward and would welcome collaborations with other likeminded scholarly societies.

We envisage the EHS continuing in the same spirit that has characterised all our events since that fateful workshop in the summer of 2011. In *De Cive*, Hobbes famously wrote that all ‘society, therefore, exists for the sake either of advantage or of glory, i.e. it is a product of love of self, not love of friends.’⁹ The EHS exists for the advantage and glory of all its members—and, of course, the glory of Hobbes. But, unlike Hobbes’s commonwealth, it is much more the product of love of friends than love of self, and long may that continue.¹⁰

8 For contact details see: <http://www.europeanhobbessociety.org/about/contact/>.

9 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 1.2, p. 24.

10 Adapted from <http://www.europeanhobbessociety.org/about/>.