

Introduction

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This volume investigates the complex and rich intersections between Thomas Hobbes's political and religious thought. Hobbes is often credited with being one of the first great theorists of the modern state,¹ but the state he theorized, as the title of his most famous work announces, was a commonwealth ecclesiastical and civil. One of the main goals of *Leviathan* (1651) was to unite 'the two heads of the eagle', to use Jean-Jacques Rousseau's memorable phrase,² for '*Temporall and Spirituall Government, are but two words brought into the world, to make men see double, and mistake their Lawfull Sovereign*'.³

Religion is central to an understanding of seventeenth-century politics, and so too Hobbes's politics. Politics is, amongst other things, a response to problems of human conflict and disagreement, and the greatest conflicts and disagreements of Hobbes's day were of religious inspiration. As early as 1641 he wrote to William Cavendish, third Earl of Devonshire, that 'the dispute for precedence betwene the *spirituall* and *civill power*, has of late more than any other thing in the world, bene the cause of *civill warres*, in all *places of Christendome*'.⁴ The English Civil War soon served to confirm this, which Hobbes later diagnosed as arising from the conflicts between Catholicism and Anglicanism, and within Anglicanism between Episcopalians and Presbyterians.⁵ The kingdom of darkness, propagated chiefly by the Roman clergy and Presbyterian ministers, looms whenever people believe that the church has greater authority than the sovereign. Long-lasting peace could only ever be attained by overcoming the disputes between spiritual and civil powers, for which people would need to understand that the authority of any church derives from that of the sovereign.

¹ E.g. Quentin Skinner, 'A Genealogy of the Modern State', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2009), 325–70.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social; ou principes du droit politique* (Amsterdam, 1762), book 4, chapter 8.

³ L, 39, pp. 732–4.

⁴ C, p. 120. Cf. DCv, 6.11. Referring to religious views supporting the belief that citizens 'have the right and the duty to refuse obedience to the commonwealth', Hobbes wrote: 'What war ever broke out in the Christian world that did not spring from this root or was fed by it?'

⁵ LLA, p. 1226; B, pp. 181, 232.

In *The Elements of Law* (1640), the first instalment of his political philosophy, Hobbes had argued for the authority of the supreme magistrate over all doctrinal matters largely on the basis of secular premises. After the Civil War he became increasingly aware of the need to show that his position would also be acceptable from a theological point of view, giving rise to the two-pronged approach so characteristic of *Leviathan*: while the first two books develop a defence of absolutism on the basis of a naturalistic human psychology, the second two books do so on the basis of a study of Scripture and church history. This strategy does much to explain the complex relationship between his political and religious views.

In considering the appropriate place of religious institutions in society, Hobbes approached religion primarily as a political phenomenon of natural origins. Religious institutions, he recognized, serve to exercise power over others. This led him, on the one hand, to engage in notorious invectives against deceiving theologians who deny the supremacy of civil over religious authorities. He exposed them as envious and ambitious men who abuse Scripture and the ‘Vain philosophy’ of Aristotle for their own ‘worldly Benefits’—sovereign power first among them, but also the right to determine successions in hereditary kingdoms, and exemptions from taxation.⁶ He explained their motives from his conception of human nature, which reserved a prominent role for the pursuit of glory and power, while simultaneously drawing on his epistemology, most fully developed in *De Corpore* (1655), to denounce their teachings as meaningless canting.

On the other hand, Hobbes also recognized that religious institutions could be enlisted in support of social tranquillity. The seeds of religion are natural to humans and are cultivated in society ‘with a purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity, and civill Society.’⁷ While it is tempting to focus solely on Hobbes’s biting criticisms of certain religious doctrines and sects, it is also worth keeping in mind, as Sarah Mortimer has recently reminded us, that he appreciated the power of Christianity ‘not only to destroy commonwealths but to support them.’⁸ To this end, for instance, he proposed ambitious reforms of the universities, which he condemned as a hotbed of seditious teaching, and in *Behemoth* (1681) expressed his hope that ‘the Polyticks there taught be made to be (as true Polyticks should be) such as are fit to make men know that it is their duty to obey all Laws whatsoever shall by the Authority of the King be enacted.’⁹ Hobbes was a theorist of civil religion and many of his criticisms of specific religious ideas and practices are based on their failing to serve the ends of the state.¹⁰

⁶ L, 47, pp. 1104–10. ⁷ L, 12, p. 170.

⁸ Sarah Mortimer, ‘Christianity and Civil Religion in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, ed. A. P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 517.

⁹ B, p. 182.

¹⁰ L, 29, p. 517. On Hobbes’s civil religion see e.g. Richard Tuck, ‘The “Christian Atheism” of Thomas Hobbes’, in *Atheism from Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. M. Hunter and D. Wootton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 111–30; Tuck, ‘The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes’, in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University

To make his political doctrines acceptable to a religious audience Hobbes pursued an elaborate rereading of Scripture. He understood all too well that if one were to be required to obey a command 'as cannot be obeyed, without being damned to Eternall Death, then it were madness to obey it'.¹¹ That is why he sought to show the consistency of the near unlimited obedience he demanded from citizens of a well-ordered commonwealth with the requirements for their salvation. His engagement with Scripture, moreover, aimed to square the teachings of the Bible with the ontological and epistemological commitments that informed his conception of human nature and ultimately underpinned his politics. This led him, for example, to find scriptural evidence for the corporality of God and the soul, and for the temporary nature of the torments of Hell.¹² After writing *Leviathan* he increasingly turned to ecclesiastical history. In works such as *Behemoth* (his history of the Civil War), the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (1688), and *A Historical Narration Concerning Heresy* (1668), he further defended—and, as in the case of his highly inflammatory reading of the Trinity, revised—his theological positions. One of the persistent themes in these writings remained his critique of the clergy, 'for whom war was useful',¹³ and who attempted to undermine the authority of civil authorities with potentially grave consequences.

Hobbes's project, then, committed him to dangerously heterodox theological positions and it is unsurprising that, in his own day, his religious views courted at least as much controversy as his civil ones. Commentators expressed outrage over his materialistic metaphysics, which they regarded as coming dangerously close to denying the existence of God and rendering the grounds of religion and morality uncertain.¹⁴ Henry More, in *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659), worried that Hobbes held that 'there is no Religion, no Piety nor Impiety, no Vertue nor Vice, Justice nor Injustice, but what it pleases him that has the longest Sword to call so.'¹⁵ Hobbes's critics were equally concerned by his scriptural interpretations. Upon reading *Leviathan's* deflationary account of Hell and eternal suffering, Bishop John Bramhall remarked, quite accurately, that Hobbes 'hath killed the great infernal Devil, and all his black angels, and left no devils to be feared, but devils incarnate, that is, wicked men.'¹⁶ Hobbes's Erastianism

Press, 2010), 120–38; Patricia Springborg, 'Hobbes's Theory of Civil Religion', in *Pluralismo e religione civile*, ed. Gianni Paganini and Edoardo Tortarolo (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), 61–98; Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially chapters 5–6; Mortimer, 'Christianity and Civil Religion.'

¹¹ L, 43, pp. 928–30.

¹² EW 4, p. 313; L, 38, pp. 716–18; LLA, pp. 1128–30.

¹³ HE, line 29, p. 307.

¹⁴ Responding to Hobbes's materialism, John Wallis in *Elenchus Geometriae Hobbiana* wrote: 'Who does not see that thereby you not only deny . . . angels and immortal souls, but the great and good God himself', quoted in Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 152.

¹⁵ Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul, So farre forth as it is Demonstrable from the Knowledge of Nature and the Light of Reason* (London, 1659), 56.

¹⁶ John Bramhall, quoted in EW 4, p. 356. For evidence that these fears were better grounded than is often suspected, see Jon Parkin, 'Baiting the Bear: The Anglican Attack on Hobbes in the Later 1660s', *History of Political Thought* 34.3 (2013), 421–58.

was also attacked, with George Lawson maintaining that it is ‘as great an offence for the State to encroach upon the Church, as for the Church to encroach upon the State.’¹⁷ By the late 1660s, as John Aubrey famously reported, the opposition Hobbes’s views had generated apparently left him fearful of a motion proposed to Parliament by some of the bishops ‘to have the good old gentleman burn’t for a heretique.’¹⁸

If Hobbes’s seventeenth-century readers appreciated that questions of religion and politics are inextricably bound, this did not last. By the middle of the twentieth century Hobbes had been recast as a secular forefather of modernity. His lengthy discussions of religion and the Bible could thus be abridged with no great loss.¹⁹ Even John Rawls, who praised *Leviathan* as ‘the greatest single work of political thought in the English language’, taught his students that Hobbes’s ‘secular political and moral system is fully intelligible as regards its structure of ideas and the content of its principles when [its] theological assumptions are left aside.’²⁰ One of the most important developments of late twentieth-century Hobbes scholarship was the rediscovery of the importance of religion, but even in 1992, in what remains one of the most comprehensive studies of the relationship between Hobbes’s political and religious thought, A. P. Martinich could write that: ‘Most Hobbes scholars are secularists. One consequence is that they present a bowdlerized version of his philosophy from which all the religious elements have been expurgated.’²¹ Happily, things have continued to improve over the last twenty-five years and increased scholarly attention has been devoted to the religious dimensions of Hobbes’s thought. Yet it arguably remains the case, as Jeffrey Collins remarked in his landmark study of 2005, that ‘there has been a pronounced tendency to treat Hobbes’s religion and his political views as discrete subjects’, such that conventional scholarship ‘has failed to grasp the fundamentally religious nature of the Hobbesian project.’²²

This volume seeks to bring these two subjects together, exploring the relationship between Hobbes’s political and religious thought from various perspectives. The focus is principally on Hobbes’s religious politics, rather than his own religious beliefs, or lack thereof.²³ All chapters in this volume engage, in one way or another, with his treatment of religion as a political phenomenon or with the political dimensions of his

¹⁷ George Lawson, *An Examination of the Political Part of Mr. Hobbs his Leviathan* (London, 1657), 138.

¹⁸ John Aubrey, *Brief Lives, Chiefly of Contemporaries*, ed. A. Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), i, 339.

¹⁹ See Sterling P. Lamprecht’s edition of *De Cive* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), and Herbert W. Schneider’s edition of *Leviathan: Parts One and Two* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958). Thanks to Paul Davis for these references.

²⁰ John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 23, 26. Even if this view is less widely endorsed by Hobbes scholars today, it remains the impression that many undergraduate students encountering Hobbes for the first time, especially those studying philosophy or politics, will be left with.

²¹ A. P. Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14.

²² Jeffrey Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

²³ A contrast adopted from Glen Newey, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes’ Leviathan*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), 232.

engagement with Christian doctrines and their history. In particular, the volume seeks to move beyond questions that have attracted much scholarly attention in the past—most notably, ‘was Hobbes an atheist?’²⁴ or ‘should the laws of nature be understood as divine commands?’²⁵—to open up new directions for thinking about the relationship between politics and religion in Hobbes. Our aim is not to provide exhaustive coverage of this relationship, but rather to ask new questions and illuminate perspectives that have not previously received the attention they deserve.

In order to open up new directions of research it helps to take a pluralistic approach, which is reflected in the methodological diversity of the chapters in this volume. Some authors pursue mainly historical inquiries about the motives and circumstances of Hobbes’s political and religious writings. These contributions seek to unearth the pressures that led him to pursue certain lines of argument over others, allowing us to better understand the meaning of his ideas. Others test their philosophical coherence and examine their relevance for contemporary concerns. We, too, live in an age of religious diversity, which often manifests itself in disagreement and conflict. While Hobbes’s world was no doubt very different from ours, these authors show that we may profit from looking closely at his strategies to overcome religious disagreement in the pursuit of peace.

In Chapter 1, Johan Olsthoorn traces the development of Hobbes’s views on the relationship between civil and religious authority from *De Cive* (1642, 2nd edition 1647) to *Leviathan*. He shows that Hobbes defended a view that went beyond Erastianism—requiring that the church is subordinate to the state—arguing for the much stronger thesis that the church is identical with the state. Olsthoorn reveals that Hobbes’s arguments for this identity change in *Leviathan*, based on his new authorization and representation doctrine, and highlights that the work introduces a number of ‘theocratic’ elements, so substituting ‘a Priesthood of Kings’ for ‘a Kingdome of Priests’. Where Olsthoorn examines how Hobbes’s theory of civil sovereignty comes to encompass the church, in Chapter 2, A. P. Martinich focuses on Hobbes’s account of God’s

²⁴ E.g. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes’, in his *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 148–201; Willis B. Glover, ‘God and Thomas Hobbes’, in *Hobbes Studies*, ed. K. C. Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 141–68; Arrigo Pacchi, ‘Hobbes and the Problem of God’, in *Perspective on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 171–88; Martinich, *Two Gods*, especially chapter 1; Edwin Curley, “‘I durst not write so boldly’ or, How to Read Hobbes’ Theological-Political Treatise”, in *Hobbes and Spinoza: Science and Politics*, ed. D. Bostrenghi (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1992), 497–593; Curley, ‘Calvin and Hobbes, or Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34.2 (1996), 257–71; Douglas M. Jesseph, ‘Hobbes’s Atheism’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002), 140–66; Alan Cromartie, ‘The God of Thomas Hobbes’, *The Historical Journal* 51.4 (2008), 857–79.

²⁵ E.g. A. E. Taylor, ‘The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes’, *Philosophy* 13.52 (1938), 406–24; Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); John Plamenatz, ‘Mr. Warrender’s Hobbes’, *Political Studies* 5.3 (1957), 295–308; F. C. Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes: An Interpretation of Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Brian Barry, ‘Warrender and His Critics’, *Philosophy* 43.64 (1968), 117–37; Martinich, *Two Gods*, especially chapter 4; David Gauthier, ‘Hobbes: The Laws of Nature’, *Pacific Philosophy Quarterly* 82.3–4 (2001), 258–84; Perez Zagorin, *Hobbes and the Law of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

natural sovereignty and explores its implications for understanding civil sovereignty. Taking as his starting point the position that the rights of sovereignty derive directly from omnipotence, Martinich analyses the nature of divine sovereignty and argues that Hobbes may have been led to argue for this thesis in order to facilitate the comparison of the powers of earthly sovereigns—Hobbes called them ‘mortal Gods’—with those of the deity. He also shows that the comparison runs both ways and that Hobbes may have had in mind specific psalms and other biblical texts when he attributed properties to the earthly sovereign that were traditionally attributed to God.

The chapters by Teresa M. Bejan and Franck Lessay address the contentious problem of the place of private religious belief in a Hobbesian commonwealth and thereby offer original—and contrasting—perspectives on the ‘tolerant Hobbes?’ debate.²⁶ In Chapter 3, Bejan challenges the widely held assumption that Hobbesian sovereigns are unable to affect inward belief and instead reveals how, through education, they could shape the religious convictions of their subjects. She pursues this argument through an examination of Hobbes’s rich metaphor of imprinting and, in doing so, brings to light an aspect of his thought neglected by those who read him as an advocate of toleration or proponent of popular enlightenment. That position is evaluated further in Chapter 4, in which Franck Lessay argues that the secular justification Hobbes offers for the sovereign’s absolute power supports a tolerant approach towards religion, such that tolerance should be viewed as a dimension of Hobbesian absolutism. On Lessay’s reading, Hobbes’s doctrinal minimalism and focus on civil peace as the relevant criterion for assessing questions of tolerance led him to demarcate a private sphere for religious judgements, beyond the reach of the sovereign.

In Chapter 5, Alexandra Chadwick addresses Hobbes’s project of reconciling salvation and obedience from a very different angle, by assessing the apparent tension between his deterministic-materialist psychology and his explanation of the motives of martyrs who prioritize eternal salvation over bodily preservation. Chadwick shows not only that Hobbes’s materialist psychology is compatible with his discussion of martyrdom, but also that those who choose martyrdom are mistaken about the powers and purposes of human beings. Where Hobbes’s theology reveals that martyrs misunderstand what is required for salvation, Chadwick argues, his psychology reveals that they more fundamentally misunderstand their own nature as humans.

Chapter 6 plunges deeper into the historical context in which Hobbes developed the philosophical arguments for his deterministic-materialist psychology, by addressing his relation to Calvinism. Alan Cromartie charts the collapse of Calvinist doctrine in early seventeenth-century England and relates this to developments in Hobbes’s philosophical career up until his debates with Bishop John Bramhall on free will and determinism. Cromartie shows that Hobbes’s determinism was not an eccentric

²⁶ For an overview of the main contours of the debate, see Teresa M. Bejan, ‘Difference without Disagreement: Rethinking Hobbes on “Independency” and Toleration’, *The Review of Politics* 78.1 (2016), 1–6.

variant on well-established views, but very much at odds with standard Protestant assumptions. By setting Hobbes's determinism against this background, Cromartie helps us to appreciate its sheer novelty and, more speculatively, raises further questions about the place of religion in motivating Hobbes's philosophy—questions that are problematic for both those who read him as a loyal Calvinist and those who see his determinism as wholly secular.

Alison McQueen and Paul B. Davis both focus, in different respects, on the biblical context of Hobbes's political thought. In Chapter 7, McQueen discusses the place that biblical Israel occupied in seventeenth-century political and religious debates and, against this background, identifies a 'Mosaic turn' in *Leviathan*, where Moses is presented as the scriptural exemplar of a civil sovereign. McQueen shows how the Mosaic turn intervened in debates between defenders of monarchical rule and parliamentarians, who drew respectively on the period of Davidic kings and the polity of the Israelites under Moses in support of their political positions. She argues that this should be understood as a polemical move whereby Hobbes sought to appropriate and thereby subvert the parliamentarian appeal to the Mosaic polity. In Chapter 8, Davis advances our understanding of Hobbes's use of Scripture by documenting where and how his scriptural quotations diverged from contemporary translations of the Bible. While Hobbes usually relied on these translations, Davis reveals that on some points—especially regarding supernatural phenomena—he took considerable liberties to reconcile the Bible with the key tenets of his own political philosophy. Davis also shows that attending to Hobbes's translations both helps to locate some of the key sources for his biblical exegesis, such as work by the biblical scholar Joseph Mede, and provides further evidence confirming that a Latin text of *Leviathan* did not predate the English version.

The chapters by Patricia Springborg and Glen Newey turn to the explosive political environment facing Hobbes after the Restoration, when he became increasingly engrossed in questions of theology and church history. In Chapter 9, Springborg considers the dating and context of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which further develops material that Hobbes had added to the Latin *Leviathan* (1668), and argues that the poem aimed to appeal to humanist Christian historiographers, perhaps with the aim of responding to the accusations of heresy and atheism he was facing. In Chapter 10, Newey challenges the widespread view that the changes Hobbes made in the Latin *Leviathan* and its Appendix—in particular with regard to his radically deflationary conception of the Trinity—were occasioned by these accusations of heresy. If Hobbes was really set on avoiding prosecution for heretical views, then adducing further scriptural support for eccentric theological views unpersuasive to his Anglican audience was a needlessly risky strategy. It seems more likely, Newey argues, that he published these views in those later works simply because he thought they were correct.

In Chapter 11, Jon Parkin addresses the question of Hobbes's audience from a different perspective, by showing how Hobbes hoped to ensure that the legacy of his

religious ideas would be amenable to different readers who might take them forward. While Hobbes never articulated a clear vision of the future of religion, Parkin argues that he aimed to produce a deliberately ambiguous religious identity, precisely so that he could engage with the diversity of religious audiences of his day. This is not just reflected in his doctrinal minimalism, but also in the distinctive writing strategies he deployed to convey his religious ideas. Many of those ideas, Parkin argues, could be accommodated by multiple possible religious futures and, in each case, a Hobbesian version of that future would provide more stable foundations for a Christian commonwealth.

One such possible future is teased out in Chapter 12, in which Elad Carmel charts Hobbes's considerable influence on the development of early English deism. Hobbes's anticlericalism and criticisms of revelation proved especially attractive to the deists and Carmel argues that their and Hobbes's political projects, while different in crucial respects, were animated by similar concerns, which are obscured when Hobbes is straightforwardly read as an authoritarian and the deists as proponents of toleration. Foregrounding their anticlericalism, however, brings their common goal into view and, Carmel suggests, reveals deism to be one possible highway to Hobbesian enlightenment.

In Chapter 13, Jeffrey Collins addresses Hobbes's more long-lasting contribution to enlightenment, liberal, or secular narratives of modernity, by focusing on the problem of religious warfare. On the one hand, Collins argues that recruiting Hobbes as a secular theorist of sovereignty who helped to resolve this problem presupposes a generic account of religious violence in tension with Hobbes's own analysis of the English Civil War, which emphasized its historical specificity. On the other hand, Collins suggests that Hobbes actually contributed to this confusion by at times having offered psychological and proto-sociological accounts of religion that anticipated later enlightened or liberal narratives. Collins is thus able to explain why Hobbes has come to occupy such an important place in such narratives, while at the same time revealing their partiality.

In the final two chapters of the volume, Daniel Eggers and S. A. Lloyd each seek to evaluate whether Hobbes's political philosophy remains instructive for thinking about how to overcome problems of religious disagreement. In Chapter 14, Eggers pits Hobbes (and modern-day Hobbesians) against John Rawls by evaluating two different approaches for forming moral consensus in the face of religious diversity. Eggers argues that the Hobbesian approach should be understood as a form of extra-moral justification, derived from non-moral premises, whereas the Rawlsian approach is a form of intra-moral justification that takes certain moral principles for granted. Eggers assesses the merits of each approach and maintains that, on balance, the Rawlsian approach is better equipped to address religious disagreement. In Chapter 15, Lloyd focuses on Hobbes's controversial principle that we have a duty not to act on our conscience in cases where the demands of conscience conflict with the sovereign's commands. Lloyd argues that while this principle is widely considered suspect—having been repudiated at Nuremberg—there is nonetheless something defensible about it,

which any plausible theory of political obligation will have to accommodate. Lloyd also considers the extent to which Hobbes's reasoning relies on indispensable theological premises, and thus takes a stance on the vexed question of whether a purely secular interpretation of his political philosophy can adequately explain his central commitments.

As this brief overview indicates, the chapters in this volume provide wide-ranging and sometimes conflicting assessments of Hobbes's political and religious thought. As such, the volume does not advance any single overarching interpretative claim about precisely how the relationship between Hobbes's political and religious ideas should be understood, beyond showing how closely intertwined they are. In their different ways, however, the chapters all showcase how this perspective can help us to better understand his thought, lest we see double when we read Hobbes.