

Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes

Cases in the Law of Nature

S. A. LLOYD

University of Southern California



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Preface

[T]hey that have written of justice and policy in general, do all invade each other and themselves with contradictions. To reduce this doctrine to the rules and infallibility of reason, there is no way, but, first, put such principles down for a foundation, as passion, not mistrusting, may not seek to displace; and afterwards to build thereon the truth of *cases in the law of nature* (which hitherto have been built in the air) by degrees, till the whole have been inexpugnable.

(*Elements of Law*, Dedicatory Epistle, emphasis added)

This is a book about Hobbes's moral philosophy. It examines his "Laws of Nature" because Hobbes insisted that "the science of them is the true and onely moral philosophy".¹ Hobbes terms the conclusions of moral philosophizing once Laws of Nature have been brought to bear on specific practical questions "cases in the law of nature", hence the book's title. I used to think that Hobbes did not have any genuine moral philosophy. My reason for thinking so was not the reason offered by many commentators in support of the same conclusion, namely,

¹ *The Collected English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by Sir William Molesworth (11 vols., London 1839–1845), volume III, 146; T 110. References to the Molesworth collected edition will appear as EW, followed by volume number and page number. *Leviathan* appears in EW III. Richard Tuck's revised student edition of *Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1996) helpfully contains a concordance with the Molesworth edition to which I shall be referring and with the popular Macpherson edition (London, 1990). When referring to *Leviathan*, I cite the EW page followed by the Tuck edition (abbreviated T) page.

that Hobbes's egoistic psychology leaves no room for the possibility of genuinely moral motivation for action. That view rests, I believe, on an incorrect characterization of the psychology of Hobbesian men. Rather, I thought that Hobbes saw his political philosophy as needing no moral philosophy to undergird it. According to Hobbes's explicit chart of the sciences in chapter 9 of *Leviathan*, civil philosophy is a distinct science of political rights and duties derived from the concept of commonwealth – which is the concept of an artificial (man-made) entity – and thus not a branch of natural philosophy, while ethics – which Hobbes describes as a branch of science concerning consequences of the passions of men – is a part of natural philosophy.² Because I am not tempted to view political philosophy as merely a specific application of moral philosophy, I saw nothing problematic in Hobbes's treating civil philosophy as an autonomous science. More importantly, I thought the political philosophy I understood him to offer had an impressive coherence and sufficiency despite having no dependence on, nor contribution to make to, moral philosophy proper.

I interpreted Hobbes's political philosophy as intended to argue that recurrent social disorder results from people's resisting their government in pursuit of what I termed "transcendent interests" – interests for the sake of which they are willing to sacrifice their lives, if necessary.³ Many interests may be transcendent in this way: interests in securing the good of our children, in furthering the realization of substantive moral ideals such as liberty or justice or human rights, in defending one's country – even interests in defending our honor or reputation may be transcendent for any given person. Hobbes was primarily concerned with the social disorder that results from men's

² EW III, 72–73. Hobbes calls "natural" those creations that issue from God's art, characterizing nature as "the art whereby God hath made and governs the world". "Artificial" are those things made by the art of man, for instance, automata such as watches, as well as such things as poems, monetary systems, and universities. "Art", Hobbes writes in the introduction to *Leviathan*, "goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of nature, *man*. For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, in Latin CIVITAS, which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended" (EW III, ix; T 9).

³ S. A. Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan: The Power of Mind over Matter* (Cambridge, 1992); hereafter cited as *IAI*, followed by page number.

acting on transcendent religious interests in doing what they believe to be their religious duty, and in seeking to obtain the eternal reward promised to those faithful who fulfill their religious duties, and to avoid divine punishment for failing to fulfill them. Hobbes analyzed the English Civil War as largely the result of transcendent religious interests, in some cases manipulated by those ambitious of worldly power. Because subjects willing to risk death in the service of their religious or other interests cannot usually be compelled to civil obedience by the state's threats to punish them corporally or capitally, the instability generated by transcendent interests poses a particularly difficult problem for Hobbes's project of discovering the principles by which the commonwealth might be made to remain stable indefinitely. The idea of motivation by transcendent interests, which may have seemed to some who read my interpretation of Hobbes's political theory when it was first presented in 1992 a strange and unlikely explanation for socially disruptive behavior, has sadly become, after September 11th, 2001, and the suicide bombings of recent years a widely recognized and increasingly studied phenomenon.⁴ Although historians and dramatists have from ancient times forward documented the power of transcendent interests, I believe that Hobbes was the first philosopher to offer a systematic philosophical analysis

⁴ The notion has entered the realm of public and foreign policy debates. For instance, in his *New York Times* column of September 18, 2002, on U.S. policy toward Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Thomas L. Friedman called attention to the potential social disruption effected by those with what I call transcendent interests: "What worries Americans are not the deterrables like Saddam. What worries them are the 'undeterrables' – the kind of young Arab-Muslim men who hit us on 9/11, and are still lurking. Americans would pay virtually any price to eliminate the threat from the undeterrables – the terrorists *who hate us more than they love their own lives*, and therefore cannot be deterred" (emphasis added). Friedman's "undeterrables" act on a transcendent interest, although how precisely to characterize that interest is open to dispute.

David Braybrooke's notion of "interest-transcending motivations" as motives that lead people to act in disregard of their interests in the service of higher causes is a related but narrower notion than the notion of transcendent interests I attribute to Hobbes as interests for the sake of which one is willing to risk and if need be sacrifice one's natural life. These latter may (and Hobbes thinks typically do) include men's larger self-interests in procuring their own salvation, or honor, or reputation.

of civil disorder generated by transcendent interests. And I argued that Hobbes developed a powerful original political theory capable of addressing the problems to stability within one's society posed by the transcendent interests of one's fellow citizens. Hobbes addressed in particular the transcendent religious interests of his fellow subjects, but the method he pursued in doing so has much broader application, and makes Hobbes studies of perhaps greater importance today than ever before.⁵

I argued that Hobbes thought the disorders internal to civil societies generated by transcendent interests can be reliably avoided only if subjects are persuaded that they have, what they can see in their own terms to be, sufficient reason for political obedience. Hobbes aimed to offer a confluence of reasons – prudential, moral, and religious – for political obedience, in the hope that this confluence would motivate most of the people most of the time to obey, thus ensuring sufficient compliance for the perpetual maintenance of effective domestic social order. Such a solution requires a serious engagement with the beliefs that support and express disruptive transcendent interests, which Hobbes undertakes in the half of *Leviathan* devoted to discussion of Judeo-Christian religion, and the equivalent portions of his earlier works on civil philosophy.

Of course, no interpretation of Hobbes as addressing the recurrent social disorder that ensues from action on transcendent interests will make sense if men cannot be motivated to act in any way they recognize as threatening to their survival. Traditionally, interpretations of Hobbes's philosophy have attributed just such a narrowly prudential psychology to Hobbesian agents: The desire for bodily self-preservation systematically (some claim necessarily) overrides all other motives and desires in any nonpathologically functioning human being. Hence, healthy men are incapable of having or acting on transcendent interests. If true, this must defeat the sort of

⁵ One measure of Hobbes's philosophical importance is how often his work is used to address the most pressing concerns of the time during which his interpreter is writing. For instance, during the Cold War, Gregory Kavka saw in Hobbes's theory useful direction for designing a deterrence strategy that might avoid nuclear annihilation. See the essays collected in Kavka's *Moral Paradoxes of Nuclear Deterrence* (Cambridge, 1987).

interpretation I have proposed, depending as it does on motivations men cannot have. Those interpreters who believe Hobbes thought aversion to bodily death is the dominant motivation of human nature have adduced Hobbes's treatment of the Laws of Nature as a main support for their interpretation. They suppose that Hobbes considers the Laws of Nature to be normative precepts justified by their instrumental relation to the temporal self-preservation of the agent who follows them. Why, they ask, would Hobbes treat moral norms as mere strategies for securing self-preservation unless he thought their normativity depended upon their being so treated? And why would he think their normativity depended on their securing bodily self-preservation unless he believed that men will not act otherwise than their concern for temporal bodily self-preservation dictates? For instance, one interpreter writes that "there is only one way that it could be true that these laws of nature are exceptionlessly binding precepts: we must ascribe to Hobbes the standard view that all persons have the dominant desire for self-preservation. . . . Since the laws of nature are formulated with the aim of self-preservation in mind, it must be this end that is desired most powerfully by all Hobbesian agents", and concludes that "Hobbes' account of the moral law is the strongest evidence in Hobbes' texts in favor of the standard interpretation of Hobbes' view on the evil of death".⁶

By insisting on a narrowly prudential interpretation of Hobbes's Laws of Nature, these sorts of traditional interpretation merely beg the question against the transcendent interests interpretation. It is true that if the traditional interpretation of the Laws of Nature is correct, Hobbes was inconsistent to have acknowledged, as he unquestionably did, that men have transcendent interests; and he should not have been aiming to offer an account of civil disorder and its remedy in terms of transcendent interests, as I have argued he did. But it is equally true that if the transcendent interests interpretation is correct, Hobbes could not have held the account of the Laws of Nature traditionally attributed to him. Perhaps it has not occurred to many to question whether the traditional understanding of Hobbes's Laws of Nature as rules for the temporal preservation of the agent who follows

⁶ Mark C. Murphy, "Hobbes on the Evil of Death", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 82 (2000): 36–61, 44–46.

them is correct. Having pursued this question I have concluded that the traditional understanding of Hobbes's Laws of Nature is fundamentally flawed, and that this crucial misunderstanding reverberates throughout Hobbes interpretation, causing interpreters to attribute to Hobbes an overly simplistic psychology that cannot accommodate transcendent interests, and a correspondingly impoverished moral theory. So long as the traditional interpretation of Hobbes's Laws of Nature as mere precepts of personal preservation is allowed to stand, condescending interpretations of Hobbes as having offered a political theory threatened with insignificance by its reliance on a false human psychology will muster support from what they allege to be Hobbes's moral philosophy. Unless this understanding of the Laws of Nature is overturned, even those interpreters who are prepared to admit that Hobbes recognized transcendent interests and are persuaded that Hobbes was concerned to address those interests will find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to attribute to Hobbes a theory that is internally incoherent, or else ambivalent, confused, intentionally deceptive, or inadequately developed. I do not find any of these alternatives attractive. Showing why they are not compelling requires addressing the assumptions from which they spring at their source, in how we understand Hobbes's conception of the Laws of Nature.

Thus the main motivation for the present investigation of Hobbes's moral philosophy is to provide an alternative to the traditional interpretation of Hobbes's Laws of Nature that shows how those laws support, rather than undermine, the *transcendent interests interpretation* of Hobbes's political philosophy. But in the course of arguing the case for that thesis, I learned something that surprised me very much: Hobbes *does* have a distinctive, original, and philosophically attractive moral philosophy, a philosophy not only worth considering on its own merits, but one that helps us to think critically about our own contemporary dispute between reasonability and rationality accounts of morality. Time spent with Hobbes is never wasted, and having continued to study him, I now believe that just as he first articulated significant philosophical ideas for which Locke and Hume received credit, so did he offer an early articulation and defense of the idea Rawls has termed "the reasonable" and Scanlon "reasonableness" ordinarily traced to Kant.

So the present study is offered with two objectives in mind. The primary one is to defend the *transcendent interests interpretation* of Hobbes's political philosophy by showing the internal coherence and philosophical attractiveness of the broader theory comprised of Hobbes's moral and political philosophies. The second is to enable us to see that Hobbes did make an original contribution to moral philosophy, which, once we recognize it, provides a useful resource for thinking about the post-Kantian moral landscape that concerns us today.

Portions of the argument of Chapter 6 appeared in "Hobbes's Self-Effacing Natural Law Theory", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82, nos. 3 & 4 (September 2001): 285–308. A portion of the argument of Chapter 7 appeared in "Coercion, Ideology, and Education in Hobbes's *Leviathan*", in Andrews Reath, Barbara Herman, and Christine M. Korsgaard, eds., *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 36–65. And a portion of the argument of Chapter 8 appeared in "Contemporary Uses of Hobbes's Political Philosophy", in Jules L. Coleman and Christopher W. Morris, eds., *Rational Commitment and Social Justice: Essays for Gregory Kavka* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 122–149.

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Introduction

The *end* or *scope* of philosophy is, that we may make use to our benefit of effects formerly seen; or that, by application of bodies to one another, we may produce the like effects of those we conceive in our mind, as far forth as matter, strength, and industry will permit, for the commodity of human life. . . . [T]he utility of moral and civil philosophy is to be estimated, not so much by the commodities we have by knowing these sciences, as by the calamities we receive from not knowing them.

(EW I, 7–8; *Elements of Philosophy*, Sec. 6–7)

Civil philosophy, which Hobbes claimed to have invented, has its point and purpose in teaching humankind how to live in peace. While we cannot always control the actions of neighboring nations, we can, Hobbes taught, so organize our own society that we may maintain peace among ourselves, and best hope to defend against outsiders. The benefits of maintaining a bastion of domestic peace and stability are so many and so precious that one might hardly think they need advertising; but Hobbes lived in a time that called out for reminding men that learning, progress, arts and sciences, comfort and plenty, society, civilization, and the very preservation of humanity are worth the price we must pay for them. That price is significant, for it usually involves requiring us to do many things that we do not want to do. It requires us to obey laws that do not make exceptions for us, to squelch our impulse to demand that our private judgment order the common business; to defer to what we judge to be the inferior reasons of other

men; often to tolerate what we regard as the inefficiency, stupidity, offensiveness, and sometimes even the wrongful, sinful, or heretical actions of our compatriots. It requires us to swallow indignities and insults, and to accept less than we think we deserve. It requires us to obey our society's laws even though we see the ends we care most about promoting go unpromoted by our society, and to accept punishment for trying to promote those ends contrary to what we regard as the bad laws of our society. Peace requires that we treat our own judgment with a degree of detachment, as one judgment among many, to be discounted if need be for the sake of peace. Considering these costs, how can domestic peace be worth the price it demands from those who must sustain it?

Had men been simpler creatures, caring only for their survival and rudimentary comfort, the price to them of securing peace would be negligible. A simple showing that survival requires peace, and peace requires obedience to political authority, would suffice to maintain domestic stability because there would be no costs of peace to be weighed and balanced against the good it secures. Without concerns for religious causes and moral principles, for honor and achievement, and the myriad attachments and affections that affect our decisions about how we will act, a simple instrumental argument for political submission would be good enough. This fact explains, I suspect, the enduring appeal of those interpretations of Hobbes's civil philosophy that take it to have presupposed a simple, biologically based egoistic preoccupation with personal survival. For what simpler argument for political submission could there be than one purporting to demonstrate that the dominant end of human nature requires political submission?

For better or for worse, we are not such simple creatures, a fact Hobbes recognized and crafted his political philosophy to accommodate. Unlike bees and ants and other naturally sociable creatures who enjoy hard-wired consensus in judgment, we naturally exercise idiosyncratic private judgment, compete for honor and precedence, find fault in others, and strive to control their actions. We are tempests of swirling, altering, often warring allegiances and impulses, whose potentially destructive tendencies may be either moderated and contained or exacerbated, depending upon the social environment we impose on ourselves. As Hobbes thinks of it, the problem for

civil philosophy is to discover the principles that must be observed if domestic peace is to be achieved and maintained. The problem for moral philosophy is to show how such principles are properly normative for us, making claims on us that we ought to honor and can be motivated to honor. If men as we are have many interests that pull against or trump our interest in peace, how can the sacrifices required in order to secure peace be made normative for us? Hobbes develops a moral philosophy that successfully solves this problem.

The solution depends in the first instance upon a perceptive appreciation of the complex constellation of motives required in order to move men to resist the governments that could otherwise secure domestic peace. To motivate rebellion, men must be discontented with their lot in life, but that alone is not enough. They must further have hope of success in improving their lot by throwing off or replacing their government. Even together these motives will not suffice to raise rebellion. Because, as Hobbes plausibly insists, we will not rebel unless we believe that we are morally justified in doing so, a showing or “pretense” of right is a third necessary condition for rebellion.¹ Most people will live with an unsatisfactory political regime, even when they might be capable of overthrowing it, if they believe that insurrection would be *wrong*. This is an important insight, and it distinguishes the seditious or rebellious resister of concern to civil philosophy from the mere criminals who burden every society. Civil war generally requires persons of conscience on both sides, whose belief in the justness of their cause animates the risks and sacrifices they undergo. Hobbes’s recognition that we care so profoundly that our actions be justifiable has a seismic effect on the way he addresses the problem of social disorder, for it means that there is no hope to maintain a perpetual peace without finding a workable formula to address the thorniest questions of right and wrong. This puts moral philosophy front and center in the project of securing civil peace.

Religion, in particular, complicates this project enormously, by supplying a potentially independent source of normative claims that must be reconciled with morality if moral philosophy is to play the role Hobbes assigns it in decisively justifying compliance with

¹ *Elements of Law* II.8.1.

the conclusions of civil philosophy. Indeed, religion provides a rich resource for justificatory rationales for political insurrection capable of satisfying the “pretense of right” condition for motivating rebellion. Hobbes consistently presents the Laws of Nature, which he equates with “the true moral philosophy”, as articulating those of God’s requirements most certain to all of us who have not enjoyed the benefit of a direct revelation from God Himself. The pronouncements of revealed religion we take on hearsay evidence or mere authority from those who claim that God has spoken to them immediately; but God’s natural law is discoverable by each of us immediately through a mere exercise of our natural reason, allowing us to assure ourselves of its claim on our obedience. By attempting to confer God’s imprimatur on the conclusions of moral philosophy, Hobbes seeks to consolidate normative support for the principles of social stability uncovered by political philosophy. Political philosophy then completes the task of reconciliation by showing that Scripture, properly interpreted, confirms the conclusions of moral philosophy.

The point of departure of Hobbes’s moral philosophy is our shared conception of ourselves as rational agents. From our common definition of man as rational, Hobbes argues that we won’t count a person as rational unless he can formulate and is willing to offer, at least *post hoc*, what he regards as justifying reasons for his conduct (and beliefs). But to offer some consideration as justifying one’s action commits one to accepting that same consideration as justifying the like actions of others, *ceteris paribus*. (Nothing counts as a reason for doing a particular action unless it counts as a reason for doing actions of the same general type all else equal.) So one acts against reason when one does what one would judge another unjustified in doing.

From this reciprocity constraint, formally derived as a theorem of reason, Hobbes proceeds to argue that any rational agent ought to submit to government. Because we would judge it unreasonable of others to whom we have no special obligations to condemn us for directing our actions by our own private judgment rather than deferring to theirs, the reciprocity theorem requires us to grant a universal right of private judgment. Yet, if men disagree in their judgments, as we can see that they do, a condition of universal self-government by private judgment will be a condition of perpetual irresolvable contention and conflict. Such a condition thwarts men’s effective pursuit

of their ends (whatever those ends may be) and is, for this reason, something any rational agent must, *qua* rational agent, be concerned to avoid. Because the reciprocity theorem rules out asymmetrical solutions that would grant unequal rights to exercise private judgment, the only alternative to universal private judgment sanctioned by reason is joint submission to authoritative arbitration of disputes. Because such submission makes possible an environment in which agency may be effectively exercised, it accords with reason that we submit to authoritative arbitration. A sovereign is in its essence an authoritative arbitrator of disputes, with the associated rights necessary if arbitration is to eliminate contention. In this way the reciprocity theorem of reason conjoined with the requirements of effective agency (no matter the agent's ends) dictates that we submit to sovereign authority.

The theory Hobbes presents finds a crucial resource in our human desire to justify ourselves – our actions, motives, and beliefs – in the courts of private conscience and public opinion, and before God. We hold ourselves superior to lesser animals on account of our reason. When reason condemns our actions, we experience shame, and a sense of degradation. We care very much that our actions be, and be seen to be, justified. But that sort of justification by reason depends upon a willingness to offer, and also to accept, various considerations as generally justifying types of actions. Although we may disagree about which considerations justify which types of actions, no one who claims the respect due to a human being can refuse to grant that whatever sorts of actions he judges to be “against reason” (unreasonable) when done by others do not lose that character *simply* because done by himself, apart from any further reference to some germane distinguishing status or circumstance he may occupy.

The Laws of Nature articulate practical applications of Hobbes's moral philosophy, and these twenty or so rules detail the many things men are to do or refrain from doing, and the virtues they must cultivate, if they are to behave toward their fellows as reason requires, in a way that sustains human society and civil life. But it is striking that these rules, neither individually nor taken together, actually direct men to set up and submit to government. Considering that Hobbes's political philosophy argues that submission to an absolute political authority is necessary for the perpetual maintenance of peace, it is

nothing short of astonishing that the moral philosophy unfolds and terminates without directing submission to such an authority.

Commonly, interpretations of Hobbes wave hands at this apparent lapse, supposing that somehow the moral requirement that we give up our right to everything entails the political requirement that we give up our right to anything, that we submit to absolute sovereignty. The various Laws of Nature Hobbes articulates do require that we submit to arbitration of disputes, that we keep promises, be grateful, modest, fair, and the like. Hobbes offers no obvious argument to the effect that any of these are, or even collectively add up to, a submission to an absolute sovereign. Yet he evidently believes that they do. Thus there remains a mystery as to how the moral philosophy expressed in the Laws of Nature is meant to provide an argument for subjection to an absolute political authority.

Here again the reciprocity theorem provides the answer. It offers a resource for making simple arguments for complex conclusions that could not otherwise be defended. If we would fault our fellows for defecting from obedience to the political authority that protects us both, according to their own private preferences, then neither may we, in reason, do so. If we would fault others for not agreeing with us on equal terms to submit to a common law and a common arbitration of disputes, then we must so submit when others are also willing. If we would demand that others obey our sovereign in order to secure our safety, then we cannot in reason exempt ourselves from obedience. And similarly in many more cases, to be discussed, where Hobbes offers arguments to discharge the antecedents of these conditionals. Hobbes's achievement is to derive our common- (moral) sensical commitment to reciprocity as a requirement of reason, then to organize its implications into a comprehensive, defensible, and attractive moral philosophy through his discussion of "cases in the law of nature".

This book unfolds the interpretation just sketched in the following manner: Part One, entitled *Moral Philosophy, Method and Matter*, introduces the content and casuistry of Hobbes's Laws of Nature in [Chapter 1](#), then sets out Hobbes's complex conception of human nature in [Chapter 2](#), a psychology I defend as realistic. These provide the data that any plausible interpretation of Hobbes's moral philosophy must successfully reconcile. Part Two, on the movement

From Psychology to Moral Philosophy, considers how a moral philosophy of the content Hobbes lays down could prove properly normative for people having the psychology Hobbes describes, including ourselves. [Chapter 3](#) clarifies the definition and unifying function of the Laws of Nature, arguing, in opposition to consensus opinion among Hobbes scholars, that these are correctly conceived as rules for securing the common good of humanity generally in sustaining decent communities rather than merely rules for the personal profit of the agent who follows them. [Chapter 4](#) critically considers derivations of the Laws of Nature offered by the main schools of interpretation – which I classify as offering desire-based, duty-based, or definitional derivations. [Chapter 5](#) offers my own reconstruction of a definitional derivation, which I term the *reciprocity interpretation* of Hobbes’s moral philosophy, and argues that this interpretation secures the normativity of Hobbes’s Laws of Nature for ordinary people in a way consistent with his stated methodology, while incorporating the virtues of other approaches and avoiding some of their more significant failings. Part Three, *From Moral Philosophy to Civil Philosophy*, includes [Chapter 6](#) offering an explicit derivation of the duty to undertake political obligation under the Law of Nature, along with an analysis of the relation between civil law and natural law, and a reconciliation of the concepts of liberty, law, and obligation in Hobbes’s system. I argue that Hobbes espoused a *self-effacing* natural law theory, supported by an interesting conception of the *hierarchy of responsibility* among those in authority and those subject to their authority. [Chapter 7](#) considers how Hobbes addresses the sorts of characters unsuited to civil obedience – fools, hypocrites, zealots, and dupes – and assesses the success of his recommendations for minimizing the incidence and effectiveness of these problematic character-types. By showing that a society regulated by his recommended principles is likely to constrain the formation of problematic character-types, Hobbes makes the case that a society ordered by his principles would be self-sustaining and stable. [Chapter 8](#) seeks to display the unity of practical wisdom within Hobbes’s system on the reciprocity interpretation of his moral philosophy and the transcendent interests interpretation of his political philosophy, by indicating how his moral philosophy of cases in the Laws of Nature is connected with his interpretation of Christian religion and his civil philosophy. It concludes by assessing some

contemporary uses of Hobbes's political philosophy, and proposes a new research program drawing on Hobbes's insights and method.

The argument of the book employs a layered, fugue-like method of introducing interpretive elements, then returning in several successive chapters to provide new considerations in their support and development. Most of these elements are introduced in [Chapter 1](#) as claims (without defense yet) intended to outline a coherent framework for systematizing Hobbes's discussions of his many different cases in the Laws of Nature. But because Hobbes is offering a system involving many mutual dependencies, his justifications for particular components of that system cannot fully be argued in separate, linear segments one at a time. My exposition seeks to follow the spiraling method we see within and across Hobbes's many reworkings of the various elements of his moral philosophy, rather than imposing the neater, but ultimately hopeless, method of defending fully in isolation each component element. This approach necessarily involves repeated consideration of key texts through several chapters. [Chapter 8](#) orders all of these texts (as finally interpreted) in a unified system. Readers who wish to preview the overall shape of the system may prefer to skip from [Chapter 1](#) directly to [Chapter 8](#), then return to [Chapter 2](#) through [7](#) for the supporting arguments.

I should say something about the way I deploy Hobbes's earlier and later texts. I know of no Hobbes interpreter who both clearly articulates and faithfully adheres to a strict priority rule for which of Hobbes's texts trumps all others when they seem to conflict.² Because I take a holistic approach to the interpretation of Hobbes's moral and political philosophies, I consider evidence from across Hobbes's writings; but it would be fair to say that usually I look to the earlier works for clarification of his concern or impulse, and to the later works for refinement and correction of positions and arguments. Still

² Bernard Gert seems to come closest to doing so, but at the price of ascribing to Hobbes an enormous amount of inconsistency, and some quite implausible views. A. P. Martinich sees no need to prioritize Hobbes's texts, because, as he argues, it is a mistake to believe that Hobbes had a single consistent theory. See Bernard Gert, "Hobbes and Psychological Egoism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 503–520; "Hobbes's Psychology", in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), 157–174; and A. P. Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes* (London, 2005).

I recognize that Hobbes's conceptions of human motivation and the problem of social disorder alter with his own maturity and the historical disorders his writings span, and so the concerns of the earlier works cannot be taken as wholly authoritative. Conversely, in some instances Hobbes's efforts to improve his arguments in response to particular criticisms, events, or methodological considerations do more harm to his theory than good; and so the refinements of the later works cannot be taken as wholly authoritative. I take seriously his Latin *Leviathan* and use it as an aid in interpreting certain corresponding passages in his English *Leviathan*. Like all other interpreters, I seek to focus attention on the sets of passages that ground the interpretation I find most plausible. I do, however, attend particularly to the strongest passages that may seem to count against my preferred interpretation; and in [Chapter 4](#) I charitably reconstruct and then critique several of the most important competing schools of interpretation. But, of course, my primary intention in this work is to construct and make plausible the reciprocity interpretation of Hobbes's moral philosophy. Traditional desire-based interpretations have defenders enough to mount a response to my critique and positive alternative without my attempting to imagine anticipatorily what that might be.

The reciprocity interpretation of Hobbes's moral philosophy requires numerous adjustments in widely held prior assumptions about the meaning of Hobbes's particular doctrines and his specific intentions. Although this interpretation is built from all the same elements that figure into any interpretation of Hobbes's normative theory, the interpretive adjustments I urge in each case, taken together, require a "duck-rabbit" style shift in our perception of Hobbes's moral and political theories. Like now seeing a pair of human faces where before one saw only a classical vase, the familiar Hobbes is replaced by a more complex, but at the same time more human, picture. To some this may seem a shocking shift that would deprive Hobbes of his place in history as the principal protagonist of psychological and ethical egoism, as the first to mount a serious, although failed, argument to prove the narrow rationality of morality. Indeed it does, if correct. But it most certainly does not undermine his title to have initiated modern moral philosophy, and in a way that makes his work not just of continuing, but rather increasing, importance some 350 years later. Hobbes's analysis of social conflict, of the ineradicability of transcendent interests, of the

irresolubility of disagreement in private judgments, of the connection between reason and moral judgment, and of the centrality of our self-conceptions to our motivations, and his identification of a small but sturdy basis upon which social peace might nonetheless be forged – these are the contributions that earn Hobbes his proper place in our Pantheon.