HOBSES
A BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is now recognized as one of the fathers of modern philosophy and political theory. In his own time he was as famous for his work in physics, geometry, and religion. He associated with some of the greatest writers, scientists, and politicians of his age: Ben Jonson, Galileo, and Charles II. The list of his enemies is no less impressive: Robert Boyle, René Descartes, and Edward Hyde, the earl of Clarendon.

His life was a long, rich, and intensely controversial one. On the eve of the English Civil War he fled the king’s enemies and settled in France, where he wrote his masterpiece, Leviathan. Ten years later, fearing the French Catholic clergy, he returned to England, only to have Anglican bishops try to have him burned at the stake as an atheist fifteen years thereafter. The controversy surrounding his life never abated: the Catholic Church placed his books on the Index, and Oxford University dismissed faculty for being Hobbists.

A. P. Martinich has written the completest and most accessible biography of Hobbes available. The book takes full account of the historical and cultural context in which Hobbes lived, drawing on both published and unpublished sources. It will be a great resource for philosophers, political theorists, and historians of ideas. The clear, crisp prose style will also ensure that the book appeals to general readers with an interest in the history of philosophy, the rise of modern science, and the English Civil War.

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Hobbes
A Biography

A. P. Martinich
To Carol, John, and Mary, again
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Preface

Self-interest originally moved me to study Thomas Hobbes in a serious way. Shortly after I finished my doctoral dissertation, Isabel Hungerland, who was a member of my committee, asked whether I was willing to translate the first part of Hobbes’s *De Corpore*. Someone else was originally scheduled to do it as a companion to her commentary on Hobbes’s theory of meaning and signification. When that did not work out, Isabel turned to me because of my knowledge of Latin and work in the philosophy of language. As wide as my knowledge of the history of philosophy was, I knew very little about Hobbes. But she had a publisher lined up for the translation and I already anticipated the pressure on assistant professors to publish, so I accepted the offer. Eventually, my translation and a commentary on it was published (in 1981), with a long introduction by Hungerland and George Vick.

Because I considered Hobbes’s work on logic and the philosophy of language to be dull and not especially original or cogent, I thought that I had ended my involvement with him. Several years later, I was gently coerced into giving a graduate seminar on Hobbes because I was “supposed to be an expert on Hobbes since you published a book on him.” I was not thrilled by the prospect, but I knew that *Leviathan* was thought to be a great work and I had never read much of it. To my surprise, I enjoyed the book and the seminar went well. So I decided to incorporate Hobbes into my introduction to the philosophy of religion and to teach additional seminars on him. My reading of the standard secondary works on Hobbes’s philosophy bothered me. They did not seem to adequately fit the text or the historical context. The more I read the more excited I became about Hobbes’s thought and the more convinced I was that my interpretation of Hobbes was better than the standard ones. Eventually, this research resulted in the publication of *The Two Gods of Leviathan*:
Preface

Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics (1992). In addition to his theoretical aims in political philosophy, Hobbes, as I saw him, wanted to reconcile orthodox Christian doctrine with modern science, and to show that authentic Christianity was not politically destabilizing. His project was, as I think it was bound to be, a failure, but I believe that he never realized that. Nothing in the way he lived his life suggests anything other than that he was a devoted member of the Church of England.

Narrow self-interest has long since ceased to be my motive for studying Hobbes. It is now almost pure intellectual delight. The more I studied his philosophy, life, and his historical context, the more fascinated I became.

I am gratified that Hobbes is no longer the object of interest primarily for philosophers. Much of the best recent work on Hobbes has been done by historians of politics and science and political scientists. They have taught me a lot.

I want to thank Terence Moore, who invited me to take on this project in 1994. Dr. Andrew Thrush, an editor for the History of Parliament Project, allowed me to read drafts of the biographies of the first and second earls of Devonshire. Kay Walters, assistant librarian at the Athenaeum Club, London, allowed me to read Charles Blount’s copybook. Some or all of my manuscript was read by the following people at various stages of completion: Jo Ann Carson, Gregory Dickenson, Margaret Duerksen, Matthew Evans, Loyd Gattis III, Kinch Hoekstra, David Johnston, Cory Juhl, Fred Kronz, Brian Levack, Leslie Martinich, Max Rosenkrantz, and George Wright.
Introduction

The organization of every intellectual biography is a compromise between chronological and topical order. I have chosen to have a chronological organization dominate the topical. Consequently, the same general topic is sometimes treated in more than one place, for example, Hobbes's political philosophy and scientific views. My goal is to give the reader a sense of time; philosophers, and even historians, often tend to ignore it. I am interested in conveying when and where Hobbes first came up with certain ideas and how they relate to his other ideas. So I give The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic and his commentary on Thomas White’s De Mundo much more prominence than other writers do. My purpose also explains why his dispute with John Bramhall over the issue of free will is discussed in the chapter on the 1640s even though it did not begin to be published until the 1650s. I have also given more space than I otherwise would have to materials and topics that have recently come to light, are currently being hotly discussed, or are less well known even to those with some knowledge of Hobbes’s life and works. These include certain essays probably written by him in the late 1610s, his trip through the Peak District in 1626, his first major psychological and political treatise, The Elements of Law, and the translations he did of the Iliad and the Odyssey late in his life. Since information about Hobbes’s life before the age of forty is scarce, the first two chapters concentrate on the milieu within which he lived.

Although scholars now generally recognize that Hobbes’s own life was highly social and “commodious,” as he would say, most people still think that it was solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish, if not short. One goal of my book is to correct that misimpression. Although I disagree with much of what Hobbes taught, the man and his thought remain exceptionally fascinating. I hope my readers will come to share my fascination.
xii Introduction

This book is the result of scholarship, but it is not a work of scholarship, because it lacks the full apparatus and requisite jousting with opponents. I have provided fairly complete notes to Hobbes’s works and have acknowledged my secondary sources when this is appropriate or essential. I have not given page references to quotations taken from Hobbes’s autobiographies, “Vita Carmina Expressa” (written about 1672, when he was eighty-four) and “Prose Life” (dictated about 1676), nor to John Aubrey’s biography. With a couple of exceptions, I have not given references to unpublished sources, such as letters and manuscripts in archives. When it was convenient, references to closely occurring quotations have been gathered into one note. I have recorded my debts to various scholars in the Two Gods of Leviathan, A Hobbes Dictionary (Oxford, 1995), and Thomas Hobbes (London, 1997). In addition to my previous work in libraries, I have done additional research for this book in the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Athenaeum (London), and the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Spelling and punctuation in quotations have usually been modernized, but not Americanized. The few exceptions occur where the sense or flavor of the text demands the original. Book titles are almost always unchanged.

Double quotation marks are used when someone’s speech is being quoted; single quotation marks are used when words, phrases, or sentences are being mentioned and also as so-called scare-quotes.

I have occasionally supplied my own translation for some of the Latin texts, even when I refer the reader to a published translation.
A Note on Dates

In the seventeenth century, England followed the Julian calendar rather than the more accurate Gregorian calendar because it did not want to calculate time according to the Roman Catholics. The Julian calendar was ten days behind the Gregorian calendar, which was already in use in most countries on the Continent. Thus, December 10 in England would be December 20 in France. A date according to the Julian calendar is also known as Old Style in contrast with one of the Gregorian calendar, which is New Style. It is conventional to retain the Old Style dates for events that occurred in the British Isles. Dates for events that involve the Continent in a significant way will be given in the form: December 10/20.

There is one further complication. In England, the new year was taken to begin on March 25. The choice of this date is connected with the vernal equinox and also the fact that it was the mythic date of the Annunciation, that is, the day on which the Virgin Mary became pregnant with Jesus. (Christmas Day comes exactly nine months later.) It is the convention among historians to give the year in which an event occurred as if the year began, as it does now, on January 1. Here are two examples where being clear about what system of dating is involved will avoid confusion. Some books report that Hobbes graduated from Magdalen Hall in February 1607. By our convention, the correct date is February 1608. Also, Charles I was beheaded on January 30, 1648, according to seventeenth-century sources. But according to our convention, it occurred on January 30, 1649.
Chronology

1588: Hobbes born; Spanish Armada defeated
1603: Elizabeth I dies; James I becomes king
1608: Graduates from Madgalen Hall, Oxford
1614: First tour of the Continent, with William Cavendish
1618: Beginning of the Thirty Years War
1625: James I dies; Charles I becomes king
1626: William Cavendish, the second earl of Devonshire, dies
1628: William Cavendish, the third earl of Devonshire, dies
1629: Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War published; second tour of the Continent, with Gervase Clifton; returns 1630
1637: Briefe of the Art of Rhetorie published
1640: Elements of Law, Natural and Politic circulated late spring; Hobbes leaves England about December
1641: Wrote the third set of Objections to Descartes's Meditations
1642: De Gève published; second edition, 1647
1645: Debates with John Bramhall about free will and determinism
1647: Seriously ill; ministered to by John Cosin
1649: Charles I beheaded
1651: Leviathan published about May
1652: Returns from exile in late January or early February
1655: De Corpore published
1656: English translation of De Corpore published as Elements of Philosophy, the First Section, with Six Lessons to the Professors of the Mathematics . . . of the University of Oxford appended
1658: De Homine published
1660: Restoration
1666–68: Various writings: Behemoth (published 1679), Dialogue . . . of the Common Law (published 1681)
Chronology

1667: Fall of Clarendon; rise of Cabal
1668: Opera Philosophica published in Amsterdam; it includes the Latin version of Leviathan
1678: Popish Plot
1679: First Exclusion Parliament; Hobbes dies on December 4