

# Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Summer 2019

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# Interpretation

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Department of Political Science  
Baylor University  
1 Bear Place, 97276  
Waco, TX 76798

*email* [interpretation@baylor.edu](mailto:interpretation@baylor.edu)

## Symposium on Stauffer's Hobbes

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Devin Stauffer, *Hobbes's Kingdom of Light: A Study of the Foundations of Modern Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, xi + 295 pp., \$50 (cloth).

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DOUGLAS KRIES

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

*kries@gem.gonzaga.edu*

In the introduction to his valuable new book on Thomas Hobbes, Professor Devin Stauffer, of the University of Texas at Austin, says that he has taken “a comprehensive view of Hobbes by examining the main components of his thought and by trying to understand how they fit together and relate to one another” (6). By a comprehensive view, Stauffer means that he will not write about only a single aspect or doctrine of Hobbes’s philosophy, let alone try to use a single aspect or doctrine as a key to explain everything else in Hobbes’s thought. Nor will he write about only one of Hobbes’s several works. Nor will he focus on contemporary controversies among working Hobbes scholars.

The “main components” of Hobbes’s thought that fit together to form his “comprehensive view” are, in Stauffer’s understanding, fourfold: Hobbes’s critique of classical philosophy, Hobbes’s own natural philosophy, his critique of religion, and his own political philosophy. Stauffer’s explication of Hobbes’s critique of religion requires three chapters and his explication of Hobbes’s political philosophy requires two, so we are left with seven chapters total.

Given this list of components as well as Stauffer's ultimate claim that Hobbes is an advocate of "civilizational transformation" (182), it is not hard to see that Stauffer is working within the tradition of scholarship that stems from Leo Strauss's 1936 work *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*. Stauffer in no way follows Strauss slavishly, and he spends little space defending Strauss against his critics or in commenting on Strauss's book. Yet there is now a substantial body of scholarship by Strauss's followers that develops and qualifies Strauss's views, and Stauffer seems to know it all. He is also well read in the large quantity of non-Straussian Hobbes scholarship and is willing to borrow a good point wherever he finds one. If there is controversy among the commentators, he will address only the most important questions in the text, leaving a trail in the annotations for those who want to track down every subtlety. The result is that *Hobbes's Kingdom of Light* succeeds admirably in articulating the comprehensive view of Hobbes at which it aims. No book on Hobbes will ever be the last word, but this book seems destined to become the first book for serious scholars wanting to immerse themselves in Hobbes's thought.

The initial chapter, on the criticism of ancient philosophy, considers especially Hobbes's rejection of classical moral philosophy and his rejection of classical natural philosophy, including metaphysics. Stauffer suggests that at the basis of Hobbes's critique of the former is the concern that classical moral and political philosophy was based on the examination of opinions, and opinions in Hobbes's view are based in turn on passions and thus can never provide a foundation for science. Hobbes's critique of the latter is based on the coopting of especially Aristotelian natural philosophy by the Scholastics and particularly by the emphasis on metaphysics within the development of medieval Christian scholarship. Stauffer does not much question Hobbes's comments about Scholasticism or consider whether Hobbes has grasped its rich spectrum of Aristotelian scholarship. He does, however, question whether Hobbes understood Socrates's turn to opinions as the foundation of moral or political philosophy; in other words, Stauffer thinks Hobbes did not understand "the Socratic turn" (33–34).

The second chapter of *Hobbes's Kingdom of Light* takes up the question of Hobbes's natural philosophy. Having rejected the separated substances or separated forms that we would especially associate with Neoplatonism, as well as Aristotle's notion of substantial form, Hobbes instead begins his natural philosophy with the assertion that all that exists is bodies, and indeed moving bodies. Given such corporealism, and without access to universal

ideas whether separated or not, Hobbes attempts to ground all science in sensation, but sensation must itself consist of some process of moving bodies. He is therefore left with the seemingly unsolvable question whether it can actually be established that there are any bodies “behind” the sensations. Hobbes, Stauffer says, is honest enough to admit that sensation cannot truly ground knowledge, leaving Hobbes dealing with a hypothetical or methodological materialism, which is not that far from agnosticism. Stauffer does not go into it, but it is not hard to see why some philosophers today who emphasize epistemology find Hobbes’s *De Corpore* to be the foundation of the British empiricism that would eventually result in the skepticism of David Hume. In any case, Hobbes does save a sort of practical physics for modern science by arguing that physics knows at least possible causes. This means that practical physics can be pursued and the human situation with respect to the natural world manipulated even if the ultimate basis of physics is elusive (80).

In chapter 3, Stauffer turns to Hobbes’s critique of religion. In the first of these three chapters, he takes up the question of “the psychological origins of religion” (99), which means that he is especially concerned with *Leviathan*, chapter 12. In Hobbes’s view, religion arises from the combination of ignorance and anxiety. Stauffer describes what philosophers of religion today might call a “projection theory of religion”; in modern times we have seen a great many of these in the writings of Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, to name the most famous. Stauffer does not go into it, but there are striking similarities between the anxiety-driven theories of religion of Hobbes and Freud. Such theories can never be proved, of course, but they provide alternative accounts that may seem plausible to some human beings in certain situations. In this chapter, Stauffer also first articulates his understanding of a frequent practice whereby Hobbes indirectly criticizes Christianity by rhetorically mocking pagan religion and then leaving his reader to wonder whether the same criticisms of paganism would not apply to Christianity as well (90–92).

Since *Hobbes’s Kingdom of Light* is, as already noted, written within a broad tradition of Straussian scholarship, we may note that the middle chapter of Stauffer’s book is devoted to Hobbes’s natural theology and that this chapter is also the middle chapter of the three chapters devoted to Hobbes’s critique of religion. It is, moreover, unique in that it is by far the shortest of the volume’s seven chapters. This central chapter is especially concerned with chapter 31 of *Leviathan*, “Of the Kingdom of God by Nature.” Stauffer connects Hobbes’s view of natural theology to his view of natural philosophy

or physics, in that in both Hobbes emphasizes the limits of human knowing in order to undermine the arguments of his adversaries. Hobbes is not so foolish as to think he can simply disprove theistic claims about God, but rather asserts that the claims of the theists go beyond what their arguments can prove. Neither in natural philosophy nor in natural theology is human reason a very helpful guide it seems. Moreover, having asserted in his physics that everything that exists is body, Hobbes is left trying to defend the rather difficult position that God is body. It is outside the scope of Stauffer's book to pursue the question, but Hobbes's view reminds one of Augustine's interpretation of the Manichean assertions about God.

Chapter 5 is devoted to Hobbes's encounter with the Bible, especially as that is played out in part 3 of *Leviathan*. Stauffer's view is that Hobbes works on two levels at once in his statements on the Bible. The surface level is that Hobbes marshals evidence with the pretended goal of showing that the Bible supports his own view of political matters; the deeper level is that the Bible does not support his claims. Since the conflict in the two positions will be grasped only by the best of Hobbes's readers, only they will be able to see that in fact, for Hobbes, reason is opposed to biblical faith. Stauffer's work in this lengthy section (cf. 138–60 for starters) is rigorous, but perhaps overly so. One would have to be an inattentive reader not to notice that Hobbes's teachings are hardly standard Christian orthodoxy. Why would Hobbes hide his disagreement with the Bible in this part of *Leviathan* when it is on display throughout his other works and even in other chapters in this one? In the event, at least, few people at the time were fooled by Hobbes's method of writing; only certain modern interpreters have been taken in. At least to this reviewer, if Hobbes is trying to write esoterically, he is not very successful at hiding it.

Be that as it may, in chapter 6 Stauffer lays out Hobbes's position on the radical conventionality of political life as opposed to the state of nature. To this reviewer's mind, the most controversial aspect of this chapter is the intriguing notion that Hobbes had smuggled unwittingly a notion of right into the state of nature, which he elsewhere insists is amoral. It is the "unwitting" part of this thesis that is especially noteworthy (218–22). If Hobbes really is as sophisticated a writer as Stauffer suggests in chapter 5, one wonders why Hobbes overlooked such an inconsistency.

In the concluding chapter, which is the second of the chapters on political philosophy, Stauffer comes to the question of the relationship between religion and politics. By now it has become obvious to readers of *Hobbes's*

*Kingdom of Light* that Hobbes is antithetical to Christianity, but what is his solution? One might have thought that Hobbes would want Christianity to change and adapt and to be put in the service of supporting obedience to monarchical rule. Stauffer is clear, though, that Hobbes is unwilling to accept a religious sphere of any sort, even if it is only indirectly related to the state, as suggested by Robert Bellarmine. In Stauffer's interpretation, Hobbes wants religion simply to wither away; he is ultimately a secularist—not even an advocate of civil religion.

In looking back over the four components around which Stauffer organizes his comprehensive interpretation of Hobbes's thought, one is struck by the thought that Stauffer's Hobbes seems not to have been especially successful. His critique of the ancients is not all that accurate with respect to the ancients; his natural philosophy barely avoids agnosticism; his critique of religion does not demonstrate that religion is false; and his political philosophy unwittingly assumes a sort of natural justice in the state of nature. What is more, whereas Stauffer, following Strauss, insists that Hobbes is a visionary who offered human beings a whole new way to live, Hobbes seems to have had a hard time convincing very many people of the truth of his views—including Stauffer himself (275–77). Hobbes is extremely fortunate to have such an open and generous reader as Stauffer, who has articulated such a fine account of a position he appreciates but does not embrace. Most of Hobbes's readers have not been so kind or generous to him, and indeed one cannot help but wonder what would have become of Hobbesianism had it not been made far more subtle, delicate, and respectable under the watchful eye of “the wise Locke.”

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Devin Stauffer, *Hobbes's Kingdom of Light: A Study of the Foundations of Modern Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, xi + 295 pp., \$50 (cloth).

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WILLIAM MATHIE

BROCK UNIVERSITY

*wmathie@brocku.ca*

Why another book on Hobbes? Why this new book? Stauffer's explicit answer to the first question is that the immense success of modernity and almost universal confidence that modern Western civilization is superior to all past ways of life and to "all living alternatives" have been accompanied by the sense that our souls have lost something essential to their flourishing. Continued success and lingering doubt "give us reason to go back," to rethink for ourselves the critical arguments that established modernity, arguments that we ordinarily accept without thinking. Why Hobbes rather than, say, Machiavelli? Because, Stauffer says, he was the first great systematic builder on the new continent discovered by Machiavelli, and the first champion of the liberal understanding of the priority of individual rights. And his political philosophy was developed "in light of and in relation to the new natural science" associated with Galileo that had emerged in the century since Machiavelli wrote.

But why this book? What distinguishes the aims of Stauffer's book from the vast scholarship on Hobbes? What has Stauffer achieved in pursuit of his aims? How exactly has his exploration of Hobbes's thinking addressed the lingering doubts that have accompanied the advance of modernity? Stauffer's subtitle refers to "the foundations of modern political philosophy" but, in fact, only the last two of the seven chapters of his book focus explicitly on

Hobbes's political philosophy. Three address religion and theology, and the third of these, "Hobbes's Confrontation with the Bible," is the longest chapter in Stauffer's book. Another, almost as long, examines Hobbes's natural philosophy. Stauffer describes his approach as broad and exploratory; he does not hope to discover "the key that unlocks all the mysteries of Hobbes's thought," but to arrive at "a comprehensive view, by examining the main components of his thought and by trying to understand how they fit together and relate to one another" (6).

Stauffer's aim as just stated seems to resemble an approach questioned many years ago by another student of Hobbes, F. S. McNeilly. McNeilly objected to the assumption that it is the task of Hobbes's interpreter to reassemble the elements of a teaching "which has somehow come to pieces." To be sure, McNeilly made this comment in support of his own belief that Hobbes's *Leviathan* marked the culmination of a progress through the *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. The answer to this is, as Stauffer says, that Hobbes never indicated that his *Leviathan* (in English or Latin) superseded *De Cive* or the *Elements of Law* (9). Still, I think, McNeilly's point may carry some weight. Does Stauffer—do we—not doubt the integrity of the several works from which we extract the "components" of Hobbes's teaching? Stauffer does call *Leviathan* Hobbes's masterpiece, but he does not, I think, clearly tell us why he does so. If Hobbes's teaching on religion and theology is most fully developed in *Leviathan*, and his natural philosophy (as Stauffer certainly shows) in his *De Corpore*, and some important political arguments are best stated in *De Cive*, can we claim to arrive at a "comprehensive" statement of his teaching by seeing how these several components fit together? If we can, and there is some evidence for this in what Stauffer has accomplished, does this not diminish the claim that might be made for Hobbes's standing as a philosopher of the first rank? And so too force us to ask what we might learn from Hobbes in rethinking the project of modernity? A possible response to this line of thought would be that Stauffer's effort to think through and together Hobbes's natural and political philosophy and his understanding of biblical religion proceed in full awareness of the possibility that Hobbes may sometimes be mistaken. Our question would then become whether Stauffer admits this too soon.

To establish "the kingdom of light" it was necessary, and perhaps sufficient, to replace the vain philosophy responsible for the darkness that must be dispelled with true philosophy, though Stauffer admits that Hobbes says something a little different and even shocking in the "Preface to the Reader"

of his *De Cive*. There Hobbes speaks of a golden and peaceful age that prevailed before Socrates fell in love with civil philosophy and abandoned all other parts of philosophy for this one, and was imitated by later philosophers, and eventually by all who had the leisure to take this study up and were impressed by its dignity and apparent ease of learning. Here Hobbes attributes “all quarrels and killings” to what Socrates initiated. Stauffer is certain that Hobbes could not mean what he says here. If the state of nature is a state of war, how could there have been such a primordial condition of peace? And surely Hobbes expects something better than the pre-Socratic age he describes on the basis of his own true civil and natural philosophy (14). Stauffer thinks Hobbes must have had no understanding of, or interest in, “the Socratic turn” (33). Or Hobbes attributed to Socrates the same motivation that led so many to imitate him. Stauffer does not mention the tale Hobbes tells of the wise men of antiquity who insisted that the questions opened up by Socrates should rather have been handed on only wrapped up in poetic fables.

In any case, whatever we can make of what Hobbes says of the Socratic turn, the chief target in Hobbes’s account of “vain philosophy” is Aristotle. Hobbes condemns Aristotle for his political science and his natural philosophy: the former exacerbated the political problem by remaining at the level of men’s opinions, and/or failing to see that those opinions are rooted in conflicting human passions; and the latter—especially the doctrine of separated essences—prepared the way for a metaphysics that the Scholastics used to establish a “ghostly” rule over men’s consciences that rivaled, or exceeded, civil authority. Stauffer supposes that Aristotle would never have proposed the teaching of abstract essences had he foreseen its consequences for politics and philosophy (27). He notes Hobbes’s suspicion that Aristotle knew his doctrine “to be false philosophy but writ it as a thing consonant to and corroborative of their religion and fearing the fate of Socrates.” That Hobbes failed to pursue his suspicion that the Aristotelian doctrine was exoteric is one of the grounds on which Stauffer questions the adequacy of Hobbes’s understanding of the tradition he rejected (32).

Hobbes’s political philosophy does not depend on, or derive from, his natural philosophy. This, Stauffer insists upon. Hobbes says in *De Cive* that the principles upon which his political philosophy is based can be known by reflection upon our own experience. And, as Stauffer shows, this is confirmed by what Hobbes says elsewhere and often. Why then does Stauffer devote a long (and very fine) chapter to an analysis of Hobbes’s natural philosophy

as set out in his *De Corpore*? We could say that a complete materialist metaphysics establishing that the universe is nothing but imperishable bodies in unceasing, necessitated and meaningless motion would eradicate both constituents of the mix of Christianity and Aristotelian metaphysics that is “Aristotelity” and the primary cause of the darkness Hobbes means to end. But, as Stauffer shows, Hobbes could not establish the materialist metaphysics he intended, for the very deceptiveness of sense perception upon which he insists in order to preempt the naive and Aristotelian understanding of it means that we can have no confidence that the images or phantasms from which human thinking must proceed correspond to bodies in the external world. Nor can we even rule out the possibility of a creator God who could also miraculously disrupt the course of nature. What can be known of nature is what we construct, and it is known not because nature reveals itself to our investigation but because we make it.

“Is Hobbes’s deepest view...best described as atheism?” Stauffer asks this on the second page of the first of three chapters that constitute the section “Religion and Theology.” To be sure, my own students, when they first encounter *Leviathan*, find this question absurd. More than half the book focuses on religion, and Hobbes quotes the Bible more than anyone my students have ever met. And, as Stauffer observes, many of the few Hobbes scholars who even consider part 3 of *Leviathan* at all continue to think Hobbes a sincere Christian. Would he have written at such length of what he supposed nonsense (127)? Whether Stauffer will have persuaded the academic believers in Hobbes’s unbelief is doubtful. But for the rest of us, his shrewd, thoughtful, and balanced account is compelling.

In calling Stauffer’s commentary “balanced” I do not mean to suggest any uncertainty on his part as to Hobbes’s sincere unbelief, but rather to notice that Stauffer does not claim that Hobbes has proved that God does not exist, or even that Hobbes believes that he has done so. What we find, rather, with Stauffer’s help, is among other things a complex argument that at one level reconciles what the Bible teaches with what sound politics needs, albeit by means of a preposterous interpretation of the Bible, one that removes any possible conflict between the civil commonwealth and the kingdom of God, for example, by restricting the kingdom of God to the time before the election of Saul and after the second coming of Christ, but, at another level, one that radically undermines the authority of the very text to which it appeals.

In the final two chapters of *Hobbes’s Kingdom of Light*, Stauffer turns at last to Hobbes’s political philosophy and speaks once more of the relation

between Hobbes's natural and political philosophy. Though he speaks now of "a deep kinship" between the two, and remarks how Hobbes's mechanistic psychology "displays itself" or leaves "an imprint" in what he calls the "pivotal" sixth chapter of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes denies any notion of an absolute good, debunks the noble, and reduces the desire for the good to the pursuit of pleasure, he does not claim more than this. What he does say is this: "Hobbes must have remained dissatisfied with [the failure of] his direct efforts to settle the deepest theological question, which is at the same time the deepest question of natural philosophy," and may have supposed that his political philosophy "could contribute not just practically but theoretically to his battle against his most fundamental foe" (194). Here too Stauffer acknowledges that Hobbes's struggle with religion is the focus of his own study or, recalling his earlier account of what he hoped to find, the "thread" that ties together the several components of Hobbes's philosophy (242).

We turn then to the concluding chapters of Stauffer's "kingdom of light" expecting to learn how Hobbes's moral teaching and his commonwealth might indirectly assist Hobbes in the struggle against "his most formidable foe." Of course, biblical religion was not the only obstacle to establishing the kingdom of light. We find here too, as Stauffer shows clearly, the Hobbesian alternative to Aristotle: a political teaching guided not by reflection on political life and citizenship but by the discovery of a war of all against all that is man's natural condition and establishes the purpose of political life. (Stauffer refers to this discovery once as "a thought-experiment," but does not elaborate.) We see an account of honor as the recognition of another's power displayed in great actions and indifferent to whether those actions are just. We encounter Hobbes's "gleeful cynicism" in describing how men interact "when they congregate" even in civil society (196). How then does what we find in these chapters correspond to our initial expectation? As Stauffer points out, contrary to the academic believers in Hobbes's sincere Christianity, Hobbes's state of nature "shows as starkly as anything does his break with Christianity" (209). Life there is "nasty brutish and short" not because God is punishing man for his original or later sins but because "nature has made men" so. We see also that Hobbes's laws of nature are not laws at all until they become laws under the sovereign in a commonwealth. They need not—cannot—be understood as laws made laws by God. Further, the morality that is the content of those laws that are not true laws at all but only prudential maxims entails a great relaxing of the moral requirements associated with Christianity. Justice can be defended without "relying on the fear of God" and does not demand the kind of sacrifice that might engender piety. As

Stauffer observes: "Hobbesian moralists, moral though they may be, will not find in morality an inducement to believe" (236). Hobbes's commonwealth does not depend upon any religious claims, and Stauffer doubts that a sovereign counseled by Hobbes would even welcome some kind of neopagan religious support (271).

Has Stauffer's Hobbes established the "kingdom of light"? Stauffer admires Hobbes's "audacity and humanity" in struggling against the forces that had for him (and for Stauffer) been responsible for the kingdom of darkness. And he appreciates "the security, freedom and prosperity" largely achieved by the modern state which is at least partly a result of Hobbes's effort. Yet he concludes that it remains possible to reject Hobbes's claim "that he was leading men from the darkness to the light" (276). How can this be? Stauffer initially justified his study by pointing to the lingering dissatisfaction that has accompanied the advance of modernity, or what we might even call the Hobbesian project. His concluding reservations seem almost to repeat those initial misgivings (238–41, 275–77). This is not to say that his study has accomplished nothing. It has accomplished a great deal. If the issue with which he began remains an issue for us, we can be grateful for the new light he has brought to it.

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Devin Stauffer, *Hobbes's Kingdom of Light: A Study of the Foundations of Modern Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, xi + 295 pp., \$50 (cloth).

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CLIFFORD ORWIN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

*clifford.orwin@utoronto.ca*

If the purpose of a book review is to help the reader weigh whether to go to the much greater trouble of reading the book himself, I will begin by putting my thumb on the scale. This book is not to be missed. Even or precisely if you think that you know Hobbes well, *Hobbes's Kingdom of Light* will teach you otherwise. I did, and it did.

Devin Stauffer's book is a major and even a model contribution to Hobbes studies. It is both a reviewer's delight and his bane. On one hand, its clarity of organization and exposition makes it easy to summarize its main headings. On the other, the thoroughness and persuasiveness of Stauffer's exposition of these defy recapitulation. His arguments are rich, fine grained, and relentless: they wear you down. He thus rather resembles Hobbes's sovereign. You find you have no choice but to agree with him.

Among Stauffer's many virtues is that he avoids *Leviathan*-centrism. This makes his book particularly useful to those of us whose experience of Hobbes consists primarily of repeated teachings of that work. He divides his book into four sections: two of a chapter each on Hobbes's critique of the ancients and on his natural philosophy, a section of three chapters on religion and philosophy, and one of two chapters on Hobbes's political philosophy. All

take account of all of Hobbes's treatments of these subjects wherever in his works they are to be found.

One of the biggest questions in Hobbes studies has always been that of the relationship of these different aspects of his thought. Does Hobbes's political teaching follow from his scientific/materialistic presentation of the world, or is it independent of (and prior to) it? What is the relationship of his religious thought to his political thought? Of his natural theology to his lengthy interpretation of the Bible in the second half of *Leviathan*? Of his critique of classical thought to his formulation of his own?

Stauffer explores each of these questions thoroughly, and it may be that no one has ever done a better job of unpacking them. A sharp and sensitive analyst of particular passages, he also excels at synthesis. It is not the virtuosity but the clarity and care of Stauffer's treatment that most impresses: a steady drip of water wearing away a very large and complex stone, until all the nuances of Hobbes's thought are resolved to the extent possible. This always with due modesty and a clear awareness of the many uncertainties that remain. This is not a "gotcha" interpretation of Hobbes, but one that will encourage much further thought. Unique are Stauffer's recurrent speculations as to whether Hobbes himself was aware of the problems that Stauffer discerns in his thought.

Even if Stauffer is both always practicing patience and always reminding the reader to do so, his readings are anything but plodding. Can there be such a thing as an exegetical thriller? I found myself most entranced where I would least have expected to be, by Stauffer's account of Hobbes's natural science, based primarily on his careful reading of *De Corpore*. Stauffer conveys both the epic character of Hobbes's cosmic vision of the world as a vast nexus of matter and motion, every event in which is at the same time completely determined (i.e., fully necessitated) and entirely fortuitous (as there is neither will nor purpose behind all these crashings and bangings). As Stauffer traces the vicissitudes and ambiguities of Hobbesian natural science, he generates real suspense: where will Hobbes's arguments and their difficulties take us? According to Stauffer, to Hobbes's sincere concession of the possibility of a miraculous creation *ex nihilo* (75–77). (Some of us may continue to doubt this concession's sincerity.)

Stauffer's conclusions as to the relations of the parts of Hobbes's thought seem quite sensible, and his defense of them is both exhaustive and subtle. He firmly rejects the notion that any of Hobbes's three main bodies of argument

(on natural science, on religion and theology, and on morals and politics) is derived from any of the others. To that extent each remains an independent pillar of his thought, irreducible to any of the others. Yet “independent” overstates it, for each both provides support to the others and receives it from them in turn. There is, indeed, a complex web of relationships among them to which Stauffer returns throughout the book. His exposition of these is one of the most persuasive and satisfying aspects of the book.

The Hobbes that consistently emerges from Stauffer’s treatment is the founder of the radical Enlightenment. Not openly, of course, being too much ahead of his time and with too many vested interests of the *ancien régime* to placate, not only in their institutional embeddedness but in their hold on the souls of his readers. And with the odd twist, from the point of view of his successors, that the version of liberal modernity that he propounds is a monarchic and authoritarian one. Yet from Stauffer’s perspective this difference is relatively insignificant. In the first place he frames this authoritarianism as friendly to liberty in its private if not its public sense: his Hobbes crimps neither religious nor intellectual nor economic freedom beyond what is necessary for liberal good order. For another, Stauffer’s casting of subsequent liberal modernity is a thoroughly Hobbesian one. There really is no daylight between them: each stands or falls with the other. Hobbes’s many obfuscations notwithstanding, Stauffer presents him as having preached a dour and completely secular politics of self-interest rightly understood—and liberalism as having practiced that politics.

Which is to say, among other things, that republicanism plays no part in Stauffer’s account of liberalism. (Does the word even occur in the book? There is no index entry for it.) While Stauffer has nothing to say of leftist critiques of liberalism (Marx plays no part in the book) he does stage a confrontation between Hobbes and Nietzsche, from which neither emerges the clear winner (275–76). Again this reflects the view that the nineteenth-century reality flayed by Nietzsche was in its essence Hobbesian, as well as that nothing has happened since to relegate Hobbes to even qualified obsolescence as the champion of the liberal way of life. Indeed when in the final pages of the book Stauffer briefly but eloquently surveys the current scene (276–77), he sees nothing relevant that is not the legacy of Hobbes (or to put it another way, nothing that Hobbes could not or should not have foreseen).

Something is missing here, because the vision of politics that animated the republican revolutions of the late seventeenth through mid-nineteenth centuries was already no longer a Hobbesian one. Neither, a fortiori, were

those animating Lincoln's defense of the Union or the post-Lincolnian rhetorics of Teddy Roosevelt, Wilson, FDR, Churchill, or JFK. Their rousing and uplifting promotions of liberalism both at home and abroad had left Hobbes's dourness far behind. (For better and for worse, a Hobbesian grouch might comment—is Stauffer that grouch?—but the differences are clear.)

On the theoretical plane (with which the practical one has of course been intertwined) the brittle rationalism expounded by Stauffer fails to do justice even to Lockean liberalism (with its appeal to the centrality of political liberty as ambiguously an end and a means), to say nothing of the Kantian, Hegelian, and Millian versions of a liberal political order.

Or could it be that liberal modernity is more Hobbesian than might at first appear—because in a crucial respect Stauffer has miscast Hobbes? One of the very best aspects of Stauffer's argument (and one of the most careful, which is saying something) is his consideration of Hobbes's concealed moralism. True, Hobbes sometimes proclaims loudly that the state of nature is entirely devoid of justice or morality—which claim advances his crucial contention that the best things in life we owe not to God or nature but to our own contrivance the Sovereign. On the other hand, he contradicts himself on the question whether man in the state of nature has a right to all things or merely those things he deems necessary for his self-preservation, and refers with withering disparagement to those natural troublemakers bent on illegitimate gain or (worst of all) glory. Indeed, Stauffer persuasively argues, Hobbes's very use of the term *right* ultimately implies a hidden moralism in his presentation of the natural state, as it is only within an implicitly moral framework that the very notion of right makes sense (211–22).

So, concludes Stauffer, there is a hidden moral scaffolding supporting Hobbes's dour appeal to self-interest rightly understood. Here I will see Stauffer and raise him. In fact, Hobbes's appeal is a moral one from beginning to end, and that it is on this, much more than on his case from self-interest, that its lasting power has depended.

Stauffer insists on how little Hobbes's morality demands of us—no more than to go along to get along, to stay out of others' faces, certainly nothing in the way of nobility. Here I disagree. In the respect crucial for it Hobbes's morality demands more of us than any previous one. Hobbes founds (or borrows from Christianity or Montaigne: we won't quibble) the distinctively modern form of nobility: the frank confession of our unworthiness and hence the emptiness of our claims to superiority over others. Of course, Hobbes also

argues that self-interest requires us to abandon our pride. But that argument would be ineffectual in the absence of his demonstration that no such pride is warranted. (Or rather, to do justice to the subtlety of his psychology, that we can justly take pride only in our renunciation of pride.) It is only because he has reduced us in our own eyes to such low beings that he can require of us that we acquiesce in the pursuit of such low ends (while deriving moral satisfaction from the self-mastery on which such acquiescence depends). This is the crucial sense in which Hobbes's scientific (including his psychological) and religious arguments are necessary to the success of his political ones.

What Hobbes unleashed upon the world, then, was not only or primarily a morality of rational self-interest, but modern moral egalitarianism, in all its sometimes-destructive dynamism. Of course, he sought to keep the lid on this power by harnessing it to his peculiar version of submissive authoritarianism. Yet his failure at this was as utter as it was inevitable. It was not just that, as Stauffer notes, later modern thinkers would seek to restore to politics the nobility that Hobbes had expunged from it. It was also that Hobbes himself pointed the way to their doing so. By exposing the vanity and therefore the baseness of all claims to natural superiority, Hobbes laid the basis of a new version of morality following from the rejection of these as incumbent on and possible for all. The imputed dignity of all replaced the old nobility of some.

True, Hobbes's successors—like him moral realists all—sought as he did to demonstrate the congruence of morality and self-interest. Even so, modernity has never been only about arguments from self-interest alone—not even in its Hobbesian version.

## Response to Kries, Mathie, and Orwin

DEVIN STAUFFER

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

*dstauffer@austin.utexas.edu*

It is inevitable that a response to reviewers will focus on their questions and criticisms rather than on the positive things they say in their reviews. Before I submit to that necessity, let me express my gratitude to Douglas Kries, William Mathie, and Clifford Orwin for the time and care they obviously put into reading and reflecting on my book. I am pleased by their praise of my work, but more than that, I am gratified to have the opportunity to wrestle with such serious and thoughtful responses to it. I will not respond to every point, not even to every critical point, that Kries, Mathie, and Orwin raise in their reviews. I will limit my response to what seem to me their most important criticisms and questions, taking up the reviews one by one.

I begin with Douglas Kries's review. Although his review is generally positive, Kries suggests that in my fifth chapter, on Hobbes's confrontation with the Bible in part 3 of *Leviathan*, I go into too much detail, and he asks, "Why would Hobbes hide his disagreement with the Bible in this part of *Leviathan* when it is on display throughout his other works and even in other chapters in this one?" I share Kries's view that Hobbes's exotericism is a more transparent version of the art than most others. Nevertheless, it exists, and Kries goes too far when he says that "only certain modern interpreters have been taken in" by it. More important, however, than the degree of difficulty in penetrating what I think are at least somewhat denser rhetorical walls than Kries allows is that my aim in my fifth chapter was to go beyond the common suggestion that

Hobbes's "interpretation" of the Bible in part 3 of *Leviathan* is guided by the intention of turning an enemy into an ally by arguing that the Bible supports his own principles. Although I do not disagree entirely with that suggestion and even offer a variant of it in my fifth chapter, I do not think it tells the whole story, because the deeper purpose of part 3 of *Leviathan* is to sketch the outlines of a more radical critique of the Bible. This is not a common interpretation, nor is the case for it as obvious as Kries suggests. That is why I thought it necessary to go into considerable detail as I tried to uncover not just the presence but also the character of the more radical critique. I was concerned, too, to ponder that critique's strengths and weaknesses, which could be done well only on the basis of an adequate exposition of its main features.

Kries also raises a doubt about my suggestion, in chapter 6, that Hobbes retained a moral notion of right in his amoral conception of the state of nature. He remarks: "If Hobbes is really as sophisticated a writer as Stauffer suggests in chapter 5, one wonders why Hobbes overlooked such an inconsistency." My general answer to that question is that sophistication of writing and even of thought are compatible with some level of confusion regarding one's own deepest moral convictions. If Hobbes lacked full clarity in this regard, he would not be the first—or the last—highly sophisticated writer of whom that was true. As for the more specific reasons that Hobbes might have failed to understand his own views, I think there are two. First, the moral law in which Hobbes seems to have continued to believe is so undemanding, so permissive, that it is easy to miss the fact that it remains a moral law in a significant sense. Second, Hobbes's hopeful anticipation of another kind of "moral law," that is, of a rational morality of the sort that he thought could be built on what he regarded as an amoral foundation, may have kept him from dwelling on the question of the true character of that foundation. In the first instance, Hobbes's "sophistication" may have been so far from a reflection of his clarity that it was even an obstacle to it; in the second, his own hopes may have concealed from him an important feature of the harsher or more pessimistic side of his thinking. Admittedly, these are somewhat speculative suggestions.

William Mathie raises a question about my approach of drawing from works throughout Hobbes's corpus rather than focusing exclusively on *Leviathan*. Referring to an argument of F. S. McNeilly about the primacy of *Leviathan* in Hobbes's corpus, an argument with which he seems to have some sympathy, Mathie asks whether we should "doubt the integrity" of several of Hobbes's works. Judging by the context in which he poses that

question, he seems to be referring primarily to *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. Should we “doubt the integrity” of these works? For my part, I do not see any considerations that call into serious doubt what could plausibly be regarded as their “integrity.” It is true, as I acknowledge in my book, that the *Leviathan* surpasses *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive* in some obvious ways: in its rhetorical power, in the breadth of its treatment of many questions (especially concerning theological and ecclesiastical matters), and certainly in its influence. Still, it remains possible and even necessary to regard the earlier works, which Hobbes never indicated were superseded by *Leviathan*, as genuine expressions of Hobbes’s thought. Moreover, my aim in writing the book was to explore Hobbes’s thought in its full dimensions, not to offer a commentary on one of his works, not even his most polished and famous. Does the fact that some aspects of that thought are more clearly or fully expressed in works other than *Leviathan*, such that the pursuit of it leads one into those other works as well, call into question, as Mathie suggests, “Hobbes’s standing as a philosopher of the first rank”? I do not see why that would be so, because I do not regard it as an essential mark of “a philosopher of the first rank” that he have expressed every aspect of his thought most clearly and adequately in a single work. Did Plato or Aristotle or Rousseau do that? Is their status as philosophers of the first rank to be doubted because they wrote multiple works and expressed various aspects of their thinking in different ways in their many works?

Nor do I regard it as essential for inclusion among the philosophers of the first rank that a thinker never be mistaken. It is true that I suggest that Hobbes was sometimes mistaken, as Mathie points out. In response to Mathie’s further question as to whether I admit this possibility too soon, let me say this. It may well be the case that I criticize Hobbes in one or another instance too quickly; I do not deny that possibility. But I tried to protect against the risk by always making my best effort to understand and present Hobbes’s thinking before raising any objections to it. That is why my objections tend to come at the end of my chapters, after long analyses of Hobbes’s arguments. I did not intend my book primarily as a critique of Hobbes; my first and most important aim was simply to understand his thought. But a confrontation with a thinker such as Hobbes—especially one who played such a crucial role in shaping our own thinking as moderns—can and should, I believe, involve wrestling with his arguments in the sense of questioning them. If I do that prematurely in some instances, it was contrary to my intention. At some point, though, my own questions had to be raised and my own doubts expressed.

Finally, let me turn to the question Mathie raises about why I included a long analysis of Hobbes's natural philosophy in my book. Mathie rightly observes that I do not regard Hobbes's political philosophy as derivative from his natural philosophy. That leads him to ask: "Why then does Stauffer devote a long (and very fine) chapter to an analysis of Hobbes's natural philosophy as set out in his *De Corpore*?" Three reasons. First, Hobbes's natural philosophy is not confined to *De Corpore*; it makes at least a cameo appearance in some of his political works, including *Leviathan*. Second (and related to the first), Hobbes's natural philosophy is of some importance to his political philosophy, because, as I argue in my book, although Hobbes's political philosophy is not derivative from his natural philosophy, it is not wholly separate from it either. There are various connections between these two realms of Hobbes's thought, connections that I discuss at some length in my book. Since my account of those connections is too long and complicated to recapitulate here, I direct interested readers to the opening sections of my second and sixth chapters (35–39 and 184–94). Third, whatever connections it may or may not have to his political philosophy, Hobbes's natural philosophy is of interest in its own right. As I point out in my book, *De Corpore* is the work to which Hobbes devoted the most effort, and he even went so far in the penultimate sentence of *Leviathan* as to refer to his work on *Leviathan* as an interruption of his "speculation of bodies natural" (*Leviathan*, Review and Conclusion, 17; see my p. 38, especially n. 4). Hobbes is of course most famous and influential as a political philosopher; but he was more than a political philosopher. By the same token, those of us who are scholars of political philosophy understandably focus on political philosophy; but we need not confine ourselves to it. In fact, we run the risk of perpetuating a distorted impression of the character of philosophy itself when we do.

Let me begin my response to Clifford Orwin's review with a partial concession of one of his two main points of criticism of my book. This is his contention that I exaggerate the Hobbesianism of liberal modernity by suggesting that the latter is simply continuous with the former. I think he is right to say, especially of the sweeping statement on Hobbes's legacy with which I end my book, that I do not take adequate account of the modifications of Hobbesianism, both philosophic and political, that have shaped modern liberalism as we know it. So *mea culpa*, to some extent.

I say "to some extent," and my concession is only partial, for two reasons. First, Orwin oversimplifies what he rightly sees as my own oversimplification.

I do not quite argue that liberal modernity is “thoroughly Hobbesian” or that there is “no daylight between them,” since I frankly acknowledge at least one difference—regarding the expansive authority Hobbes is ready to give the sovereign—when I first address the matter (see 4–5; see also 265–68). Second and more important is that I think that I think—I would have to know more about Orwin’s own views to be sure—that the difference between Hobbesianism and modern liberalism is less profound than Orwin thinks it is. It is certainly true that Hobbesianism was modified as it turned into modern liberalism, and that modification involved, among other things, various efforts, some more conscious than others, to ennoble or elevate modern politics. Orwin refers to some of these efforts, philosophic (e.g., Locke, Kant, Hegel, and Mill) and political (e.g., Lincoln, FDR, Churchill, and JFK). Yet, as it seems to me, not only have these efforts retained the Hobbesian core of liberalism, insofar as they have not called into question the primacy of individual rights or the limited, secular aims of the state, but they have struggled to maintain the elevation they have at times managed to achieve. Is it not characteristic of modern liberalism that the glow that it can sometimes emit in times of crisis, especially when its principles are defended by leaders like Lincoln, Churchill, JFK, or even George Bush in the wake of 9/11, tends to fade with the resolution of the crisis? Is that not why even so ardent an advocate of modern liberalism as Francis Fukuyama expressed his worry that the victory of modern liberalism, were it to be cemented, would bring with it a sense of malaise and aimless drift, as people turned back to their economic pursuits and private lives? The tendency of liberalism to lose its sense of high purpose even or precisely when it prevails could be interpreted—I would interpret it—as due to the gravitational force of its Hobbesian core, pulling back to earth the various attempts at turning it into something transcendent.

But what about the principle of equality as the source of moral dignity in modern politics? Is that not, as Orwin suggests, a respect in which Hobbes’s legacy has had the opposite effect and given modern politics a moral purpose that is more dignified than the pursuit of self-interest? Can one not trace a path, by way of that principle, all the way from Hobbes to Lincoln at Gettysburg or to FDR’s New Deal, if also to more turbulent expressions of modern egalitarianism? Here, too, I find it impossible to deny that there is some truth to what Orwin says. Although Hobbes’s egalitarianism does not go undiscussed in my book, I may not have given it the prominence it deserves as an important part of the revolution in morality that Hobbes helped to initiate. Still, I do not think that equality is an especially demanding or lofty moral principle in Hobbes’s thought, if it is even much of a moral principle at all. It

is true that Hobbes attempts to knock down the pride of the arrogant, even with the indirect message of a natural philosophy that would allow no one to regard himself as the special darling of nature or God. But Hobbes's direct arguments for equality are either somewhat tongue-in-cheek—we are all equal by nature because even the weakest can kill the strongest, and if some men think themselves wiser than others, well, almost all men think that, and “there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of anything than that every man is contented with his share”—or they are aspects of his “laws of nature,” which are best understood as maxims of prudence aimed at keeping us alive. Hobbes even goes so far, in his ninth law of nature (“against pride”), as to urge upon his readers the calculation that should it be true (as it might be!) that “nature have made men unequal,” it is nevertheless the more prudent course to “admit” the equality of others because that makes it easier to live in peace with them (*Leviathan* 15.21). A commitment to or at any rate a prudent concession of equality is, for Hobbes, a source of safety, to be sure, but not of profound dignity or the deep moral satisfaction that arises from difficult self-mastery. I agree with Orwin that Hobbes calls for a renunciation (of sorts) of pride, but I do not see him taking the further step, which Orwin imputes to him, of urging men to take pride in their renunciation of pride. That such a step was taken in later generations, I do not deny; but it is not there in Hobbes, except in the most nascent sense that he attacks vanity and condemns aggression for the sake of glory. Nor even in the more robust and obviously moral forms of egalitarianism that emerged later does a commitment to equality seem to me to offer an alternative to older conceptions of moral duty and nobility that is powerful enough to rival them in its demands and capacity to elevate the soul. As the greatest analyst of modern egalitarianism has observed, the love of equality can coexist with a moral development in which “self-interest rightly understood” comes more and more to replace devotion; the two developments even tend to travel hand in hand, according to Tocqueville. Or, to look closer to home, how many people these days, as fervently committed as so many are to equality, are asking not what their country can do for them, but what they can do for their country?

## Replies to Devin Stauffer from Clifford Orwin and William Mathie

REPLY OF CLIFFORD ORWIN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

I am grateful to Tim Burns and Devin Stauffer for the opportunity to learn from Stauffer's thoughtful response to my review and to reply to it if I so wished. For reasons of principle as well as prudence, however, I hold that the author rather than the reviewer should have the last word in their exchange. I will therefore double down on one aspect of my earlier comments only: that no reader of this journal (as well as no scholar of Hobbes) should miss Stauffer's excellent book.

REPLY OF WILLIAM MATHIE

BROCK UNIVERSITY

I am grateful to Devin Stauffer for his thoughtful response to some of the points I made, or tried to make, in my review of his book. And I thank the editor of *Interpretation* for the opportunity to reply to Stauffer's response. For me, this is a welcome opportunity to state more clearly what was not clear enough in my review. Or even to clarify my own understanding of something that has long puzzled me as a reader of Hobbes. The question baldly stated is what to make of the fact that there are several "versions" of Hobbes's teaching and that Hobbes himself has never indicated that one supersedes the others. The scholar I quoted in my review objected to the assumption made by many

interpreters of Hobbes that their job was to reassemble a teaching that had somehow fallen apart. I disagree with that writer's solution to this problem, which was to argue that what distinguishes *Leviathan* from *De Cive* and the *Elements* is the superiority of *Leviathan*. And so, I think, does Stauffer. In my review, I went so far as to suggest that the danger in reassembling Hobbes's teaching is that it implicitly questions the integrity of the works from which the components of the new account of Hobbes's teaching are drawn. Stauffer objects to my suggestion as he understands it. For my part, I did not mean to question the integrity of *De Cive* or even the *Elements*, or to doubt that each is "a genuine expression of Hobbes' thought." What I want to propose is that Hobbes writes with a different purpose, perhaps for different readers, in each of his works, and that a full understanding of his fundamental intention as a political philosopher needs to see what distinguishes as well as what links those works. At the risk of exaggerating the point I want to make, I am suggesting that the interpreter of Hobbes should approach his *Leviathan* and *De Cive* as the interpreter of Plato would the *Gorgias* and *Republic*. Perhaps, then, my complaint is that Stauffer did not write the book that I wish someone had. But setting aside that complaint, I would repeat that I have learned much from the book Stauffer did write.