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Author(s): Teresa M. Bejan

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Teaching the *Leviathan*: Thomas Hobbes on education

Teresa M. Beian* Yale University, USA

This paper considers Thomas Hobbes's educational thought both in its historical context and in the context of his political philosophy as a whole. It begins with Hobbes's diagnosis of the English Civil War as the product of the miseducation of the commonwealth and shows that education was a central and consistent concern of his political theory from an early stage. For Hobbes, the consensus on civil matters required for peace could be secured only through rigorous and universal civic education overseen by the sovereign in the universities, the pulpit, and the family alike. While some scholars have condemned Hobbesian education as unacceptably authoritarian, others have cited it approvingly as evidence for a more liberal Hobbes. This essay argues that neither reading adequately grasps the subtle relationship between persuasion and authority that characterises Hobbes's conception of education and, indeed, his political philosophy more generally.

T

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is not primarily regarded as a philosopher of education; however, the only firm policy recommendation he made in his Leviathan (1651) was for the immediate reform of university teaching by the sovereign power. After initially coyly skirting the issue of who, in his view, might be competent to teach the universities—'any man that sees what I am doing may easily perceive what I think'—he subsequently declared his hope that, at 'one time or other this writing of mine may fall into the hands of a sovereign' who will ensure 'the public teaching of it' (30:14, p. 226; 31:41, pp. 243-244). The sovereign monarch or assembly should also see to it that other doctrine be censored and their teaching suppressed, so that none but true—that is, Hobbesian—doctrines might be put before the people (18:9, p. 113). Once taken, Hobbes thought these steps might enable him to surpass even Plato by successfully 'convert[ing] this truth of speculation into the utility of practice' (31:41, p. 244).

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^{*}Yale University, Department of Political Science, 115 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06520, USA. Email: teresa.bejan@yale.edu

At least one of Hobbes's contemporaries approved of his proposed curricular reform. In Academiarum examen, John Webster cited Hobbes favourably in his own case for reform and echoed the suggestion that the works of Aristotle (especially the Politics) might profitably be replaced, as 'our own Countreyman master Hobbs hath pieces of more exquisiteness, and profundity in that subject, than ever the Graecian was able to reach unto' (1654, p. 88). (Webster was a radical supporter of Cromwell, and an advocate of 'natural magic', so Hobbes would have agreed with him on little else (Jesseph, 1999, pp. 63-68).) Others, however, alternated between horror and incredulity. John Wallis (Savilian Professor of Geometry), Seth Ward (Savilian Professor of Astronomy) and John Wilkins (Warden of Wadham College, Oxford) took obvious pleasure in mocking Hobbes publicly for what they saw as his supreme arrogance. 'He doth not spare to professe, upon all occasions,' sneered Wallis, 'how incomparably he thinks Himself to have surpassed All, Ancient, Modern, Schools, Academies, Persons, [and] Societies ... and What Hopes he hath, That, by the soveraign command of some Absolute Prince ... his new Dictates should be peremptorily imposed, to be alone taught' (Wallis, 1662, p. 3). Of the so-called 'Hobbe-goblin', Ward and Wilkins declared it 'manifest, that the only thing which paines him is the desire that Aristotelity may be changed into Hobbeity, instead of the Stagyrite, the world may adore the great Malmesburian Phylosopher' (Ward & Wilkins, 1654, pp. 54, 58). (For background, Jesseph, 1999; Malcolm, 2002, pp. 317-335; Skinner, 2002, pp. 328-331.)

Hobbes did not quail in the face of such criticisms. In his response to the 'egregious professors', he argued that his proposed reforms followed necessarily from an analysis of England's late civil wars. In particular, 'the cause of my writing [Leviathan],' he explained, 'was the consideration of what the ministers ... by their preaching and writing did contribute thereunto'—namely, the dissemination by them and other gentlemen of false and seditious doctrines, received first from their studies in the universities and spread thereafter to the whole English people. Convinced, as he was, that such teaching had caused the war and, furthermore, that he had at last demonstrated true civil doctrine in Leviathan, how could he fail to recommend it? Thus, 'to me ... that never did write anything in philosophy to show my wit, but, as I thought at least, to benefit some part or other of mankind, it was very necessary to commend my doctrine to such men as should have the power and right to regulate the Universities' (Six lessons, 335).

Though the ensuing controversy focused on *Leviathan*, Hobbes had been arguing along similar lines since the very earliest version of his political philosophy, *The elements of law*, circulated privately in 1640. There, he confidently declared that 'if the true doctrine ... were perspicuously set down, and taught in the Universities,' young men 'would more easily receive the same, and afterward teach it to the people, both in books and otherwise, than now they do the contrary' (29:8, pp. 176–177). Two years later, in *De cive*, he again insisted that 'it is a duty of sovereigns to have ... the true Elements of civil doctrine written and to order that it be taught in all the Universities in the commonwealth' (13:9, p. 147). Neither regicide nor Restoration changed his mind; in *Behemoth*, finished in 1668, he described how 'the people were corrupted

generally' by erroneous opinions spread by the preachers and 'democratical gentlemen' educated in the universities—notwithstanding the fact that the 'rules of just and unjust sufficiently demonstrated, and from principles evident to the meanest capacity, [had] not been wanting' (pp. 2, 26, 39–40). Consequently, the common people were ignorant of their true civic duty, which consisted simply in obedience to their rightful sovereign, and were thereafter easily manipulated by their teachers into rebellion against him (p. 39). The universities, in educating the educators of the people, had thus been 'to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans' (p. 40).

Throughout, Hobbes maintained that although the educational situation was dire, the means to its amelioration remained straightforward. The disease itself suggested the cure:

For seeing the Universities are the fountains of civil and moral doctrine, from whence the preachers and the gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same ... upon the people, there ought certainly to be great care taken to have it pure ... and by that means, the most men, knowing their duties, will be the less subject to serve the ambition of a few discontented persons ... (Leviathan, 'Review & conclusion', p. 496)

The universities' very success in sowing rebellion offered hope for a peaceful future. Just as they had facilitated and exploited the people's ignorance, he argued, they could be made to serve the opposite end.

University reform for Hobbes did not concern higher education alone but rather the civic education of the entire commonwealth, and hence it was a matter of supreme political importance. As the recent civil wars had demonstrated, 'where the people are not well instructed in their duty', the peace of the commonwealth will be perpetually disturbed (*Leviathan*, 19:9, p. 122). In order to maintain peace, force was not enough; subjects must also be taught (*Behemoth*, p. 59). Sovereigns who failed to exercise their rights in overseeing the people's education were not only shortsighted, they were guilty of neglecting the very end for which sovereignty was instituted. 'The actions of men proceed from their opinions,' Hobbes explained, and 'in the well-governing of opinions consistent the well-governing of men's actions, in order to their peace and concord' (*Leviathan*, 18:9, p. 113). Hence education of the people in true civic doctrine was, he insisted, an essential duty of the sovereign power (30:6, p. 222).

The conclusion that popular education was of paramount political importance derived for Hobbes from his conviction that the sovereign's authority rested ultimately on the public opinion of his power and hence was 'grounded on the consent of the people and their promise to obey him' (Leviathan, 40:6, p. 319). Far from being merely a curious digression or megalomaniacal outburst, Hobbes's proposed reform of the universities in Leviathan was instead a central and urgent conclusion of his civil science, and despite the prominence of the universities in his discussion, his educational aspirations extended well beyond hopes for a trickle-down enlightenment. His writings reveal instead a programme for truly universal civic education, effected through a variety of channels. This comprehensive instruction of the commonwealth would require Hobbes's civil doctrine to be taught to people at all levels of society and at every stage of life. Not only the universities, but also the pulpit and the family must be made to serve the educational aims of the commonwealth,

and these must furthermore be supplemented with sovereign assiduity in suppressing dissent. Hobbes hoped that the sovereign might thereby educate a true 'public', characterised not only by consensus, but by 'a real unity of them all' (*Leviathan*, 17:13, p. 109).

II

Hobbes owed his own prominence to his education. Born into obscurity in Westport (near Malmesbury in Wiltshire) in 1588, his proficiency with classical languages saw him through to Oxford at the age of fourteen. He learned his languages under the tute-lage of Robert Latimer, a graduate of Oxford who ran a small school in Westport. After graduation, Hobbes went to work as a tutor to the Cavendish family. Such service in noble households was a common path for young men of talent and education but little means. Over the next 30 years, Hobbes was a tutor three times over, while also serving as a companion and personal secretary. In light of his aspirations in Leviathan to be a teacher of sovereigns in true civil doctrine, it is notable that he served as a tutor (if only in geometry) to the Prince of Wales and other members of the nobility in exile while in France during the 1640s (Skinner, 1996, pp. 19–26, 217–221).

At the time of the first civil war, England had reached the zenith of a remarkable educational expansion at all levels, from the ubiquitous petty schools responsible for teaching basic literacy, through the grammar schools, to the universities (Stone, 1964, pp. 42–44). It is likely that over half of the male population of London was literate, and in the 1630s enrollment at Oxford and Cambridge was at an historic high (Stone, 1964, pp. 68–69, 78). By 1642 the leaders in Parliament were an especially well-educated group, a fact that was not lost on Hobbes and undoubtedly contributed to his assessment of the universities as the very 'core of rebellion'. After all, 'it is a hard matter for men, who do all think highly of their own wits, when they have acquired the learning of the university, to be persuaded that they want any ability requisite for the government of a commonwealth' (Behemoth, p. 23).

Hobbes was not alone in blaming England's system of education for the problems of the day, and cries for educational reform were to be heard from many quarters. In 1644, John Milton called 'the reforming of Education ... one of the greatest and noblest designs that can be thought on, and for the want whereof this nation perishes' (1953, p. 363). Yet reform entailed very different things for different people. Milton favoured an elite education in (overtly republican) civic virtue (1953, pp. 413–414). For others, such as James Howell, the high level of education seemed itself to be the problem, leading to the conclusion that 'so many Free-Schools do rather hurt than good'. Bacon himself had written in 1611: 'Concerning the advancement of learning ... for grammar schools there are already too many, and therefore no providence to add where there is excess ... there being more scholars bred than the state can prefer and employ ... which fills the realm full of indigent, idle and wanton people which are but materia rerum novarum' (both quoted in Cressy, 1975, pp. 24–25, 27). Still others agreed with Hobbes that the problem was not an educated populace per se, but rather that their miseducation had left the people lacking in virtue; what was needed, then,

was closer attention by the government to the further expansion of education and its scrupulous regulation. Samuel Hartlib described the magistrate's 'Duty towards the Young ones' to 'Order the Meanes of their Education aright, to which effect he should see Schools opened, provided with teachers, endued with Maintenance, regulated with Constitutions, and hee should have Inspectors and Overseers to looke to the observance of good Orders in this businesse' (Considerations tending towards England's Reformation, 1647). Hartlib and his associates, including John Dury and Jan Comenius, argued for public provision of education with the intention of improving the people in (mostly Christian) virtue (Turnbull, 1947; Webster, 1970).

Nor was Hobbes alone in turning special attention to the universities. Figures as different politically as he and the republican Milton could agree with a radical Leveller like Gerrard Winstanley that the universities were, by and large, 'standing ponds of stinking water' (quoted in Solt, 1956, p. 310). In the Grand Remonstrance of 1641, the Long Parliament itself (in language echoed by Hobbes) declared the need 'to reform and purge the fountains of learning, the two Universities, that the streams flowing from thence may be clear and pure, and an honour and comfort to the whole land' (Gardiner, 1906, p. 230). Despite these good intentions, the state of education suffered because of the war, with many schools closing and university enrollment falling sharply. Yet even as the situation worsened and Parliament was forced to turn its attention elsewhere, educational reform movements in England flourished (Stone, 1964, p. 51; Cressy, 1975, pp. 10–11).

Although he had graduated from Oxford more than 40 years before the publication of Leviathan, Hobbes claimed to be well-qualified to criticise the university curriculum. Ward and Wilkins complained that his criticisms could hardly claim to be current given his advanced age, and despite its mean-spiritedness there was something to this assessment (pp. 58-59). It seems clear that at the time Aristotle and scholasticism were hardly the monolithic presences Hobbes described in Leviathan— Wilkins himself had openly attacked the authority of Aristotle from within the university in the 1630s (Curtis, 1959, pp. 241, 227-260; Malcolm, 2002, pp. 4-5). Still, Hobbes was joined by many of his younger contemporaries in deriding what they perceived as the lasting influence of scholasticism on university teaching. The virulent dislike of anything hinting of Roman 'Anti-Christianity' amounted to a kind of ecumenical anti-Catholicism, leading to a remarkable convergence between figures as different in politics and religion as Hobbes, Milton, Webster and the Comenians on this issue. Throughout Leviathan, Hobbes criticised the 'Schools' and the 'Schoolmen' and accused them of trafficking in 'vain philosophy' characterised by absurdities and 'insignificant speech' ('Review & conclusion', pp. 457-458; 1:5, p. 7). Instead of devoting themselves to preaching sound morals and civil obedience, the universitytrained divines bewildered the people with concepts like 'freedom of will, incorporeal substance, everlasting nows, ubiquities, [and] hypostases', all of which were unable to raise clear, corresponding concepts in the mind and so were, strictly speaking, nonsensical (Behemoth, p. 58). Hobbes suggested that this 'philosophy' was a kind of learned madness and likened its purveyors to 'beggars, when they say their paternoster, putting together such words and in such a manner, as in their education they have

learned from their nurses ... [yet] having no images or conceptions in their mind' (*Elements*, 10:9-10, p. 63; 5:14, p. 39). Such rote learning could not constitute knowledge for the same reason a parrot could not be considered to know the truth, though it recite true sentences perfectly (6:3, p. 41).

Such an education, Hobbes insisted, served only to stupefy and dull the wits of students. It was little wonder, then, that philosophy no longer resembled the scientific pursuit of truth but rather the parroting of certain authoritative authors. Chief among these, of course, was Aristotle—so much so that philosophy in the universities was, according to Hobbes, no more than 'Aristotelity' (Leviathan, 46:13, p. 458). Hobbes held the Stagyrite to be doubly guilty for England's educational woes: he blamed Aristotle not only for inspiring much scholastic absurdity, but also for the current vogue for Greek and Roman thought more generally, on account of which young men now subjugated their understandings to 'Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and others of like authority', accepting their definitions of 'right and wrong, [and] good and bad' unquestioningly (Elements of law, 27:13, pp. 170-171). Ward and Wilkins took these criticisms to mean that Hobbes thought the universities too hostile to free inquiry and expression, and so responded that those familiar with the universities 'do know that there is not to be wished a more generall liberty in point of judgment and debate, then what is here allowed' (1654, p. 2). Hobbes's objection, however, was not that the universities allowed insufficient freedom of expression. On the contrary, when it came to the expression of beliefs he thought that students were simply subjecting their understandings to the wrong authorities—i.e. not the sovereign.

For Hobbes, the uncritical embrace of anti-monarchical and 'democratical' notions by English republicans had plainly contributed to the recent revolution. 'In these western parts of the world,' he complained, 'we are made to receive our opinions concerning the institution and rights of commonwealth from ... Greeks and Romans', whose own judgments in favour of democracies or republics came from the security and honours that they had happened to enjoy within them. Those living under other regimes, however, mistook this preference for superiority in principle, and 'by [the] reading of these Greek and Latin authors ... from their childhood have gotten a habit (under a false show of liberty) of favoring tumults and licentious controlling of the actions of their sovereigns' (Leviathan, 21:9, pp. 140-141). Such political notions gratified the ambitions of certain men, who 'out of their readings of Tully, Seneca, or other anti-monarchics' came to 'think themselves sufficient politics, and show their discontent when they are not called to the management of the state' (Behemoth, pp. 155-156). For Hobbes, the self-interested embrace by 'democratical gentlemen' of republican ideals in politics and religion (such, he thought, was the appeal of Presbyterian church-government) directly caused 'the effusion of so much blood as I think I may truly say: there was never anything so dearly bought, as these western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latin tongues' (Leviathan, 21:9, p. 141).

England's late misfortunes thus stemmed from the dual influences of scholasticism and the ancients on the universities—and unfortunately their negative effects had not

been limited to those there educated. Dazzled by the 'subtile doctrines' preached by the university-educated clergy, the common people were led to turn against their lawful sovereign (Behemoth, p. 43). Hobbes argued that a number of specific seditious doctrines could be traced directly to scholastic or classical sources, including: (1) that sovereignty could be divided or limited; (2) that every private man could rightly judge good and evil for himself; (3) that to act against one's conscience is a sin; (4) that private men have an absolute right in their property; and (5) that citizens in a democracy or republic enjoy liberty, while subjects in a monarchy are slaves (Leviathan, 29:6-14, pp. 212-215). The people called for reform on the basis of these and other errors and so, 'like the foolish daughters of Peleus (in the fable) which, desiring to renew the youth of their decrepit father, did by the counsel of Medea cut him in pieces', they brought about the commonwealth's destruction (30:7, p. 222).

Hobbes was not alone in believing the teaching of classical authors to have vicious effects upon the populace. Comenius, for example, held that 'such a reformation of Schooles as is according to the rules of true Christianity' required such 'profane and heathen Authors ... [be] quite rejected' (quoted in Milton, 1953, p. 192). Hobbes was more moderate and argued that the sovereign must not allow 'such books to be publicly read without present applying such correctives of discreet masters as are fit to take away their venom' (Leviathan, 29:14, p. 215).2 Nor were his proposed reforms unusually extreme. Milton (one of the 'democratical' gentlemen in question) advocated that the universities be abolished altogether, a measure proposed in earnest in the Barebones Parliament of 1653 (Milton, 1953, p. 364; Malcolm, 2002, p. 326). Hobbes's argument was by contrast relatively mild. Despite their shortcomings the universities were 'not to be cast away, but to be better disciplined: that is to say, that the politics there taught be made to be (as true politics should be) such as are fit to make men know, that it is their duty to obey' (Behemoth, p. 58).3 These 'true politics' were, of course, to be found in his Leviathan, and so Hobbes seemed to suggest that by tweaking the curriculum, the universities might easily be made to undo the harm they had done and be turned instead to the maintenance of peace and order.

Ш

In his response to the 'egregious professors', Hobbes explained that his recommendation that Leviathan be taught in the universities did not mean necessarily the book itself, but rather its 'doctrine'—'for wiser men may so digest the same as to fit it better for public teaching' (pp. 335-336). This doctrine was no more than the existence of a 'mutual relation between protection and obedience', which required an 'inviolable observation' (Leviathan, 'Review & conclusion', p. 497). Hobbes claimed that his conclusions were truly universal. The requirements for peace in all commonwealths, regardless of regime, were first, the absolute right of sovereigns to command, and second, the absolute duty of the people to obey. The obligation of subjects to the sovereign is understood to last as long and no longer 'than the power lasteth by which he is able to protect them ... the end of obedience is protection' (Leviathan, 21:21, p. 144). Hobbes is clear that a subject can never alienate his right

to resistance should the sovereign directly threaten his life. A sovereign, of course, could treat his subjects so terribly that they had no choice but to rebel. However, until the point where he was no longer ensuring their protection, such action by subjects could be neither righteous nor just. Civic virtue, then, consisted simply of obedience to the commands of the sovereign and the civil laws. This proposed unity of virtue was a firm rejection of the idea that civic virtue was relative to regime—and that the most virtuous citizens belonged to the best (republican) commonwealths. For Hobbes, the best regime was always the present one, that is, the one currently ensuring the security of citizens.⁴

Hobbes drew these conclusions from the (as he thought it) universally acceptable premise 'that peace is good' (De cive, 3:31, p. 55). According to his civil science—and confirmed, as he thought, by experience—mankind is naturally inclined to disagreement and discord because individuals left to their private judgment will judge according to their different personal perspectives and interests. Under such conditions it is no wonder that men can scarcely agree as to the meanings of words, let alone in their evaluations of right or wrong or just and unjust. In the absence of laws and of a sovereign power to enforce them, this diversity of opinion would lead necessarily to a war of all against all, wherein individuals would live in a state of 'continual fear and danger of violent death' and in which 'the life of man, [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (Leviathan, 13:9, p. 76). Peace requires consensus and concord; thus, individuals must agree to foreswear their 'private reason' and submit to the unitary 'public reason' of the commonwealth—that is, the judgment of the sovereign alone (37:13, p. 300). Hobbes did not think that a perfect consensus (in the sense of genuine agreement) on controversial matters was possible, but rather that by submitting to the sovereign's judgment in matters of the expression of disagreement, the outward appearance of consensus might be achieved. 'There is virtually no dogma either in religion or the human sciences, from which disagreements may not arise and from them conflicts ... one cannot prevent such disagreements from occurring. However, by the use of sovereign power they can be kept from interfering with the public peace' (De cive, 6.11n, p. 81). This outward consensus, maintained through energetic regulation of education and public expression by the sovereign, would be sufficient for peace, though thought itself would necessarily remain free.⁵

Once this natural diversity in judgment is reduced to the unity of the sovereign's public reason, the civil laws will become the rule of all men's actions and the final authority in controversial matters, such as 'whether they be right or wrong, profitable or unprofitable, virtuous or vicious' or (especially) just or unjust. This sovereign right of authoritative determination, Hobbes insisted, would extend even unto the definitions of words, insofar as they tended to controversy. The definition of the term 'human being', for instance, cannot be decided ultimately by private men or philosophers, but only by the laws (*Elements*, 29:8, pp. 180–181). The subjection of individuals' judgment to the sovereign's was especially necessary in matters of religion. Individual claims of conscience were merely attempts by subjects to make themselves judges in matters that were properly the province of the sovereign. 'The law is the

public conscience', he argued, 'by which [the citizen] hath already undertaken to be guided' (*Leviathan*, 29:7, p. 212). Not only is the sovereign the supreme definer of words and judge in temporal matters, he must also be acknowledged as the sole interpreter of Scripture and of God's will on earth. Although Hobbes conceded that the sovereign could err and sin against the law of nature (which dictates peace), individuals could never claim the right to judge the matter for themselves.⁷

The doctrine of Leviathan emphasised above all the tenuousness of the peace secured by the commonwealth and the great risks attendant on any act of disobedience. Throughout his writings, Hobbes cast education in true civil doctrine as a necessary supplement to the 'coercive power to compel men to the performance of their covenants' exercised by the sovereign (Leviathan, 15:3, p. 89). In order to govern men's opinions, one must first recognise that 'opinions are sown in men's minds not by commanding but by teaching, not by threat of penalties but by perspicuity of reasons' (De cive, 13:9, p. 146).8 This is in keeping with Hobbes's assertion in Leviathan that the sovereign has a duty to teach the people 'the grounds and reasons' of the rights of sovereignty 'diligently and truly ... because they cannot be maintained by any civil law or terror of legal punishment' (30: 4, p. 220). Some contemporary readers have cited these statements alongside his appeals to 'public reason' as evidence against the traditional view that Hobbes relied entirely on selfinterest and the fear of violent death in ordering social life, in favour of a more liberal (even Rawlsian) interpretation. Such statements, they argue, reveal Hobbes's concern with justifying rule to the ruled and providing political stability for the 'right reasons', rather than on the sole basis of 'coercion and fear' (Button, p. 38; also Waldron, 1998, pp. 141–142; Lloyd, 1992, p. 2).

This view, however, mistakes the kind of 'reasons' Hobbes's civil doctrine can be understood to offer. The problem with punishments is not that they encourage obedience for the 'wrong' reasons, but rather that they cannot be relied upon consistently to provide the kind of constant, overwhelming inducement to obedience (namely fear) requisite to peace. Sovereigns are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and selfinterested subjects will seek out opportunities to break the law 'whensoever the hope of impunity appears' if they can hope to profit thereby (Leviathan, 27:18, p. 195). Teaching acts as a supplement to the 'terror' of punishments for Hobbes by constantly keeping men in mind of the terrible consequences (namely, the state of nature) that must result from the neglect of their duty of obedience (6:57, p. 34). The recognition, therefore, that punishments alone may not always suffice as incentives to obedience should not be taken as a revision of his basic contention that a person's 'will to do or not to do depends on the opinion [he] has formed of the good or evil, reward or penalty to follow' (De cive, 6:11, p. 80). Science for Hobbes is precisely 'the knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another' which can help men, who often struggle to reckon the consequences of their actions correctly, to foresee them and plan accordingly (Leviathan, 5:17, p. 25; 6:57, p. 34). Indeed, the civil wars alone would have 'instructed' men sufficiently as to the nature of their civic rights and duties, except for the fact that human memories are short and 'miseries' quickly forgotten (18:16, p. 116). It is precisely because every man's actions are governed by his opinion of the likely consequences to follow that his instruction in 'true' civic doctrine is so crucial.

The true civil science of just and unjust having been deduced, it was necessary still to bring it to the universities to be taught. Once this was done, however, 'there is no doubt ... that young men, who come thither void of prejudice, and whose minds are yet as white paper, capable of any instruction, would ... receive the same, and afterward teach it to the people' (*Elements*, 29:8, pp. 176–177). 'Teaching' here meant 'begetting in another the same conceptions that we have in ourselves', which might be done by leading the learner step-by-step through the same demonstration by which the teacher had reached his own conclusions (13:2, p. 73). If Hobbes had (as he thought) reasoned correctly, with conclusions confirmed by experience, then his proof should be easily taught and readily accepted by others, the sure sign of which would be consensus (13:2-2, pp. 73–74).

Yet if—as the contemporary reception of Leviathan soon revealed—the expected consensus was not forthcoming, how might Hobbes account for it? Namely, by the fact that men's minds were not 'as white paper', but rather hopelessly 'scribbled over' with prejudice, bad habits of reasoning, and false opinions. Hobbes referred to this problem as indocibility, or 'difficulty of being taught'. Once 'men have ... acquiesced in untrue opinions, and registered them as authentical records in their minds; it is no less impossible to speak intelligibly ... than to write legibly upon a paper already scribbled over' (Elements, 10:8, pp. 62–63). Such indocibility might be compounded further by a student's outright rejection of the definitions proffered by his master, which amounted to a simple refusal to be taught. In such cases, any subsequent demonstration (no matter how sound) would be entirely beside the point (De corpore, 6:15, p. 84).

Although Hobbes was under no delusions as to the seriousness of the problem of indocibility, he seemed to have considered it no great impediment to the ready teaching of his doctrine in the universities. 10 In order to understand why this is so, it is important to remember a particular feature of sovereignty on his account—namely, the right of the sovereign to define all words subject to controversy. For Hobbes, the ultimate master in the universities should be the sovereign, who would exercise total discretion in what is to be taught, who may teach it, and what doctrines must be suppressed. What distinguishes the sovereign from other schoolmasters is his right to punish those teachers and pupils who refuse to accept his definitions as the basis of their lessons, as well as those who insist on publicising unacceptable conclusions. 11 Although he thought that the sovereign's commands and punishments would be inadequate to give rise directly to genuine belief in any dissident intellect, by being able to mandate conformity in all external speech and action Hobbes bypassed entirely the problem of internal dissent in public teaching. 12 Regardless of what teachers and students in the university might actually think, they could teach others only in accordance with the doctrines and definitions approved by the sovereignteacher. 13 If the sovereign were assiduous in the regulation of doctrine, the punishment of (scandalous) heterodoxy, and the licensing of teachers so that 'solid reason backed with authority' reigned, Hobbes was certain that indocibility would present

no insuperable obstacle to the teaching of true civil doctrine in the universities (Behemoth, p. 56). Hobbes thought heterodoxy would be a problem only for geniuses (like himself), who would be clever enough to think and express themselves safely within the confines of whatever limits the sovereign put in place. He was, however, a poor judge of such matters in practice, and was forced to flee from England to France and back again to avoid the threat of persecution for his views. He proved altogether too clever by half when he became the target of proposed anti-heresy legislation in 1666. Leviathan was burned publicly in the Bodleian quadrangle long before it was 'publicly taught' in the universities (Ryan, 1983, p. 205).

IV

Given the considerable attention Hobbes devoted to university teaching in *Leviathan* and elsewhere, it is little wonder that scholars have taken that discussion to be representative of his views on education more generally. Yet he was careful throughout his writings to distinguish between the different forms of teaching appropriate to different sections of the population. These differences extended sometimes even to the content of the lessons to be learned (Hoekstra, 2006, p. 59). The vast majority of citizens would not attend university, but like many of his contemporaries Hobbes thought the safety and well-being of the commonwealth required universal civic education. Merely teaching elites aright and expecting their knowledge to trickle down would not be sufficient.

Once he considered the instruction of the 'vulgar', Hobbes abandoned his technical definition of teaching as evident demonstration productive of knowledge—and, thus, distinguished from persuasion, which produced only 'bare opinion' (Elements, 13:2, p. 73). Rather, teaching appeared in Leviathan most often in conjunction with 'preaching' and was directed explicitly towards cultivating opinion as such (e.g. Leviathan, 18:9, p. 113; 27:36, p. 201; 30:6, p. 221). After all, 'the power of the mighty has no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people' (Behemoth, 16). Although the Leviathan itself might be suitable for teaching in the universities, it would hardly be suitable for popular instruction.¹⁴ Hobbes acknowledged that the majority of men lacked the time, interest, or even sometimes the capacity to comprehend the whole; pithy summaries were therefore required. His favourite summary that of all natural and moral laws into a negative version of the Golden Rule—was hardly the only one to be found in his writings (Leviathan, 15:35, p. 99). Indeed, the most suggestive précis of his civil doctrine appeared in his discussion of what, precisely, sovereigns were to have their subjects taught, wherein he presented the central political conclusions of Leviathan as analogues to the Ten Commandments (30:7-13, pp. 222-225).

Bishop Bramhall accused Hobbes of writing in Leviathan a 'Rebells catechism' (1658, p. 515), and although Hobbes strongly rejected that characterisation of its conclusions, a civil catechism is exactly what Leviathan demanded for the instruction of the people. (Fittingly, Hobbes's father, a disgraced clergyman, had been censured among other things for failing to catechise the young (Malcolm, 2002, p. 3).) The

venue in which the bulk of popular instruction was to take place was the pulpit, and this civic education was modelled more or less explicitly on religious instruction. In order that the people be taught their duty and remember it, 'it is necessary that some such times be determined wherein they may assemble together ... hear those their duties told them ... and be put in mind of the authority that maketh' the civil laws (*Leviathan*, 30:10, p. 223). In this way, Hobbes hoped that the regular observance of the Sabbath might be turned to the end of peace and become a kind of civic Sunday school.

Thus, the form of popular instruction proposed by Hobbes depended not on his method for achieving scientific knowledge, which 'proceeds by cutting a proposition into small pieces, then chews it over and digests it slowly' by way of definitions and evident demonstration, but rather on that which he describes as the way to religious belief (De cive, 18:5, pp. 238–239). 'For it is with the mysteries of our religion as with wholesome pills for the sick, which, swallowed whole, have the virtue to cure, but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect' (Leviathan, 32:3, p. 246). The discussion of popular education is further illuminated by Hobbes's comment in a letter in 1636 that he 'long[ed] infinitely to see those Bookes of the Sabbaoth; & am of your Mind, they will put such thoughts into the Heads of vulgar People, as will conferre little to their good Life. For, when they see one of the Ten Commandments to be jus humanum merely (as it must be, if the Church can alter it) they will hope also that the other nine may be so too. For every man hitherto did believe that the ten Commandments were the Morall, that is, Eternal law' (Hobbes to Glen of 6/16 April 1636 in Correspondence, p. 30). The Ten Commandments were to serve as a mnemonic device to aid the vulgar in remembering their duty. Likewise, the memorable metaphoric images of the 'Mortal God', Leviathan, and the secular hell of the state of nature, sure to figure prominently in sermons based on Leviathan's civil doctrine, would capture the popular imagination. Hobbes often analogised education to a process of 'imprinting'. This metaphor recurs throughout his work, often in the context of the impressions made by religion and the arts upon the mind. He suggests that Numa, like other founders, took care to 'imprint in [the people's] minds a belief that those precepts which they gave concerning religion might not be thought to proceed from their own device' (e.g. Leviathan, 12:20, p. 69; also 8:25, p. 43). In remarking upon an epic poem written by a friend, Hobbes claimed that the virtues represented therein were thus 'so deeply imprinted, as to stay for ever [in my fancy], and govern all the rest of my thoughts and affections' (The answer of Mr. Hobbes to Sir William D'Avenant's preface before Gondibert, pp. 457–458)¹⁵

Hobbes treated the education of the people as a kind of sacrament of remembrance. The fountain metaphor used to describe the universities in *Leviathan* deliberately recalled a Baptismal font from whence 'the preachers and the gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle ... upon the people' ('Review & conclusion', p. 496). The end result of this kind of popular education would not be—as it was in the universities—simply the consequentialist embrace of civil society as always the lesser of two evils, but also a positive 'love of obedience' (*Behemoth*,

p. 59). A well-educated populace, according to Hobbes, would think of themselves as 'monks and friars, that are bound by vow to...simple obedience' (*Leviathan*, 46:32, p. 464). This praise of unreflective obedience weighs against those who find in Hobbesian education primarily a 'respect for individuals as reasoning beings ... determine[d] to analyze politics and get to the bottom of human affairs' (Waldron, 1998, p. 143). Such a reading becomes still more implausible when one considers the final site of education to which the sovereign must attend—namely, the family.

Hobbes raised no children of his own, but he was well aware of the importance of the 'first instruction of children' by their parents for their later development, and hence for the commonwealth as a whole (Leviathan, 30:11, p. 223). An individual's opinions and beliefs were not, for the most part, the result of considered reflection or evident teaching, but of this early instruction. This was most evident, again, in the case of religious belief, wherein 'the ordinary cause of believing ... [is] the hearing of those that ... teach us, as our parents in their houses, and our pastors in the churches' (43:8, p. 401). Parents, moreover, were responsible for the work of discipline through which children might first be habituated to obedience. Indeed, 'it is by the rod that boys' dispositions toward all things are shaped as parents and teachers wish' (De homine, 16:4, p. 65). In De cive, Hobbes claimed that 'all men (since all men are born infants) are born unfit for society and very many (perhaps the majority) remain so throughout their lives, because of mental illness or lack of discipline'. 'Man is made fit for Society not by nature, but by discipline [disciplina]', and this correction of children by their parents through the application of educative punishments was thus the cause of their sociability and a necessary precondition for the peaceful reproduction of society over generations (1:2n.1, pp. 24–25). 17

As for what, specifically, Hobbes would have the sovereign teach young children, he suggested that they 'be taught that originally the father of every man was also his sovereign lord, with power over him of life and death, and that the fathers of families, when ... instituting a commonwealth ... resigned that absolute power' (Leviathan, 30:11, pp. 223–224). By calling on children to analogise their fathers to the civil sovereign in this way (and vice versa), Hobbes made the family the first school of the commonwealth, wherein the relationship of rule between father and child served to model the later relationship of simple obedience to the sovereign. While he habituates his children to obedience, the father acts as a placeholder for the sovereign until their majority, whereupon their obedience is transferred to its primary object. The family is 'Leviathan writ small' (Chapman, 1975). Hobbes even went so far as to argue that parental power over children, as an example of sovereignty by acquisition, is derived not naturally by 'generation', 'but from the child's consent, either express or by other sufficient arguments declared' (Leviathan, 20:4, p. 126). Because every individual 'ought to obey him by whom [he] is preserved; because preservation of life [is] the end, for which one man becomes subject to another', the child can be presumed to have exchanged his obedience for his protection, like any adult citizen of the commonwealth (20:5, p. 130). In this way, the family represents the Hobbesian commonwealth to children and thereby schools them implicitly in (rational) subjection from infancy. Although the child, like the adult, never consented explicitly to being ruled, both will be taught to understand themselves as having done so. (For Hobbes's analogies between adults and children: *De cive*, 1:2n.1, p.25; *Leviathan*, 11.2,1 p. 61.)

On Hobbes's account, parents serve—just like the state-licensed teachers and pastors—as representatives of the sovereign power, and hence as public ministers in the home, 'allowed and appointed to teach' by the sovereign (*Leviathan*, 43:8, p. 401). Although the sovereign will generally leave subjects at liberty otherwise to 'institute their children as they themselves think fit', they do so only at his discretion (21:6, p. 138). In Hobbes's commonwealth, parents hold their children in trust until such time as the sovereign reclaims his right. This work of first instruction in the family prepares children for Hobbesian 'citizenship' and is meant to attach securely those 'artificial chains, called the civil laws', that run from the sovereign's lips to the people's ears (21:5, p. 138).

Far from neglecting early education, Hobbes's commonwealth stands or falls by it. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes suggests that 'the common people's minds, unless they be tainted by dependence on the potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their doctors, are fit to receive whatsoever by public authority shall be imprinted in them' (30:6, p. 221). Hobbesian education requires that the minds of *all* citizens, the vulgar as well as the wise, be prepared for such imprinting by their primary instruction in the family and the pulpit. But keeping the paper of the people's minds clean and white requires not only that they be kept free from dependence on the powerful, but also that 'the dependence of subjects on the sovereign power of their country' be emphasised and reinforced at every turn (46:18, p. 460). Thus, indocibility should be no impediment to Hobbesian 'imprinting' for the sovereign sufficiently attentive to the junior members of the commonwealth.

V

Hobbesian education is an education in civic virtue. By reformulating the doctrine of Leviathan for presentation to each of the different parts of the commonwealth it aims to produce obedient citizens capable of the kind of stable consensus requisite to peace. In his response to his Oxford critics, Hobbes claimed that Leviathan in its original form, even in the absence of 'digestion' by wiser men to better suit it for public teaching, 'hath framed the minds of a thousand gentlemen to a conscientious obedience to present government' (Six lessons, pp. 335–336). How much more might it accomplish if aptly summarised and systematically taught?

As we have seen, Hobbes's contention that public education was a duty of sover-eignty was not unique at the time—nor, for that matter, was government regulation of education. Nevertheless, the educational programme developed in *Leviathan* has struck Hobbes's readers, from his contemporaries down to the present day, as something unusual. Its distinctiveness is summed up nicely in the image of 'imprinting'. Hobbesian education—whether conducted in the university, from the pulpit, or in the family—aims always at uniformity; the virtuous citizen it produces is the same across all nations and regimes, which are themselves uniform with

respect to their common end, peace. Such an education does not seek to cultivate the student's individual capacities, for judgment or for anything else. ¹⁹ Imprinting is not the cultivation of personality, but rather conformity to true civil doctrine, designed and systematically imposed from without by the sovereign power upon the 'clean paper' of men's minds. Students come thereby to understand themselves as equal and atomistic, each tethered individually and so unified through their mutual relationship to the sovereign. The end result of this education would, Hobbes hoped, be a secure consensus and, at last, peace. The scope and character of the necessary consensus was, like most things, to be left to the sovereign's discretion. (Hobbes thought that a good sovereign would leave his subjects at liberty in many things, interfering with them only in those matters he deemed essential to peace.)

Modern students of Hobbes's educational thought have tended to focus on this argument—that is, that the comprehensive education of society (whether as 'popular enlightenment' or indoctrination) constitutes a necessary precondition to peace because it alone can fashion citizens capable of this kind of consensus. Whereas an earlier generation—much like those troublesome Oxford professors—recoiled from Hobbes's educational project, emphasising what they saw as its totalitarian aspirations, scholars in recent years have taken a decidedly more favourable view. For these authors, his educational thought reveals instead a more 'liberal' Hobbes, one who believed that political stability could be secured only by respecting individuals as reasoning beings.²⁰ I have sought to show that neither view is wholly sustainable.²¹ What is clear, however, is that Hobbes believed the only architect and agent capable of fashioning a consensus adequate to the preservation of peace would be an absolute sovereign—and this would require, in turn, a state that might be relatively minimal in practice, but must be utterly authoritarian in principle. Thus, the conscientious sovereign would vigilantly oversee the intellectual life of his subjects from the cradle to the universities, and from there to the grave.

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Notes

1. Hobbes's life in print began with his English translation of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* (1629) and ended with translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in 1676; *Behemoth*, finished in

- 1668, was published posthumously. Over this long period, Hobbes's interests, methods, and conclusions underwent significant changes, most notably with his storied 'discovery' of Euclidean Geometry in 1629. However, I find his treatment of educational matters to be reasonably consistent across his political philosophical writings, beginning with *The elements of law* (1640). For the purposes of this discussion I draw from a wide selection of works.
- 2. Lloyd cites this as evidence that Hobbes would not stifle all dissent (1997, p. 48); Nelson in his introduction to Hobbes's translations of Homer somewhat undercuts such optimism (pp. xxxiii-xl); see also Hoekstra, 2006, p. 45.
- 3. In Six lessons, Hobbes spoke favourably of the idea of a lay-university (pp. 345-346); this comment was intended as a provocation to Ward, not as a serious proposal, although Tuck (1998) argues that it should be taken as evidence of Hobbes's support for free inquiry in the universities; see also Garsten, 2006, p. 39.
- 4. This claim allowed Hobbes's critics to cast *Leviathan* as a work written expressly in defence of Cromwell's title. See Skinner's 'Hobbes and the engagement controversy' (2002, p. 307) for emphasis on the similarities between Hobbes and other *de facto* theories of the period.
- 5. On possible similarities to the 'Rawlsian' notion of public reason, see Garsten (2006, pp. 27, 116), Gauthier (1995), Lloyd (1992 and 1997), Button (2008).
- 6. This question of influence over meanings is a point of controversy in scholarly assessment of Hobbesian eduction; see Pettit, 2008, pp. 115–132; Hoekstra, 2006, esp. pp. 34–35.
- 7. Hobbes insisted that although the sovereign could be guilty of iniquity he could not, by definition, commit injustice (*Leviathan*, 18:6, p. 113). Whether Hobbes meant his claim that the sovereign could sin against the law of nature as a serious appeal to a power higher than the sovereign's self-interest is controversial. Supporters of the 'Taylor-Warrender' thesis argue that a belief in God is necessary to ground Hobbesian moral obligation (e.g. Warrender, 1957; Hood, 1964), while others argue that Hobbes's political theory is secular in form and secularising in purpose. Johnston (1986) and Strauss (1953), for example, have argued that Hobbes wanted to 'disenchant the world' through education. Lloyd (1992) and Vaughan (2002) emphasise the importance to Hobbesian education of shaping—but not necessarily eradicating—religious belief.
- 8. I substitute 'perspicuity of reasons' (from 'Philosophical rudiments concerning government and society' (Hobbes, 1991), the 1651 English translation of *De cive*) for Silverthorne's 'clarity of arguments'. Although the former was long thought to have been authorised and approved by Hobbes, this has since been disproved. See Tuck's introduction to *De cive* (Hobbes, 1998, pp. xxxiv-xxxvii). Malcolm (2002) argues that the translator was Charles Cotton. The Latin version runs: 'Quoniam autem opiniones non imperando, sed docendo; non terrore poenarum, sed perspicuitate rationum'.
- 9. Heaven and hell obviously complicate the picture; it is therefore especially important for the sovereign to regulate closely doctrines pertaining thereunto. Whereas in *Elements* and *De cive*, Hobbes seemed content to maintain more or less traditional versions of heaven and hell—so long as eternal punishments could be shown to be annexed (like all temporal ones) to violations of the civil law alone—in *Leviathan* he revised them so as to be consistent with his materialism and therefore denied the immortal soul (418–431). Johnston argues against those who read Hobbes as a sincere Christian that a belief in hell—or in the Christian God, for that matter—could not possibly withstand a Hobbesian education (Johnston, 1986, pp. 142–150). While Hobbes clearly intends to undermine hell for those taught the doctrine of *Leviathan* in the universities, it is less clear that he thought it desirable for this part of his doctrine to be publicized to the population as a whole via public preaching, although the full arguments would certainly be available to those who should inquire.
- 10. For brief treatments of this puzzle, see Tarcov (1999, pp. 48-49) and Chapman (1975, pp. 87-88). See also the growing literature on the role of rhetoric in Hobbes's thought, which considers directly the limits of reason to persuade (e.g. Kahn, 1985; Johnston, 1986; Skinner, 1996; Vaughan, 2002; Garsten, 2006).

- 11. Failure to appreciate this distinction between the rights of the sovereign as teacher versus those of the Church has led some scholars to draw a sharp distinction between teaching and coercion, thus neglecting the expansive role for educative punishments in Hobbes's thought (see Lloyd, 1997, pp. 51–52 and 1992, p. 140; and Waldron, 1998, p. 142). Button (2008) acknowledges that this distinction is overdrawn (p. 64), yet continues to employ it elsewhere in his discussion (pp. 38, 62–69). Hobbes is very clear that the distinction does not apply in the case of sovereign-teachers, or those who act as ministers of the sovereign power; the discussion of teaching as 'fishing' as opposed to 'hunting' is meant to delimit ecclesiastical power only, not civil (Leviathan, 42:8, p. 337).
- 12. An earlier generation of scholars treated Hobbes as straightforwardly advocating a programme of indoctrination and mind control; more recently scholars have made the case for 'a more tolerant' Hobbes—see Ryan (1983 and 1988), Tuck (1990 and 1998); Burgess (1996). Tuck goes so far as to suggest that Hobbes desired the universities to be places of protected free inquiry (1998, p. 155)—an interpretation I find implausible. I favour Murphy's characterisation (1997) of Hobbes's position as 'tolerant anti-toleration'.
- 13. Hobbes says as much in his discussion of Galileo (*Leviathan*, 46:42, p. 468). There, he argues that 'disobedience may lawfully be punished in them that against the laws teach even true philosophy'. This passage, along with his claim that truth is by definition consistent with peace and the sovereign's judgment of the same (18:9, pp. 113-114), has been a source of much scholarly contention. Arendt cited it as evidence that the sovereign can teach his subjects falsehoods in order to preserve the commonwealth (pp. 297-298); Waldron and Lloyd find it far less sinister (Waldron, 1998, pp. 142, 146 n.12; Lloyd, 1997, pp. 43-45).
- 14. I dissent from Johnston's suggestion that *Leviathan* was meant to be read by the public at large and attempted 'to shape public opinion directly' (1986, p. 89).
- 15. See also Malcolm's discussion of the role of such images in education in the context of the frontispiece of *Leviathan* (2002, p. 228).
- 16. Some of Hobbes's early critics accused him of fathering an illegitimate daughter and this claim has been accepted by some scholars, most recently Martinich (2005, p. 8).
- 17. Again, I depart from the Silverthorne translation which has 'training' in place of 'discipline'. Because the original English version translated disciplina here as 'education', many have assumed that this was Hobbes's preferred translation. The original translation appeals especially to those authors who want to maintain a hard distinction between education and coercion in Hobbes's thought; however, given that Hobbes refers to 'discipline' frequently in his writings, while also taking care at points to distinguish it from 'education' (e.g. Leviathan, 29:8, p. 213, 'Review and conclusion', p. 489), I believe this is to misrepresent his meaning in this passage.
- 18. Malcolm, following Johnston, describes Hobbesian education as the 'liberation' of the people's minds from both superstitious falsehoods and 'the power of those groups, elites, and confederacies that manipulate falsehood for their own ends' (2002, p. 544). However, in this passage Hobbes states explicitly that he aims to combat such doctrines and factions *because* they serve to lessen the dependence of individuals on the sovereign power. This is, at best, a peculiar sort of liberation.
- 19. Garsten (2006) argues that Hobbes's attempt to devalue judgment and seriously restrict its role in politics was a deliberate departure from classical political thought, and from his neorepublican contemporaries.
- 20. Although their specific arguments differ, Johnston (1986), Lloyd (1992 and 1997), Waldron (1998), Tuck (1998), Malcolm (2002), and Button (2008) can be seen alike as representatives of this trend, and all endorse Hobbes's educational project to a greater or lesser extent. These accounts depart significantly from that of Voegelin, who claimed in 1938 that Hobbes's system would be the envy of 'a modern minister of propaganda' (p. 55; see also Arendt, p. 290-1n.3). Ryan, while making the case for a more tolerant Hobbes, suggests that although 'Hobbes's sovereign cannot condition children as the Director in Brave New World can ... there is no

- evident reason of principle to stop him applying the techniques when they are discovered' (1983, p. 217). Vaughan (2002) and Hoekstra (2006) are notable exceptions to the recent trend.
- 21. Both groups treat Hobbesian education as though it were concerned with what people would be *like*; however, it is clear that Hobbes did not entertain high hopes that human nature could be changed (it was evidently quite stubborn) and so did not much care what people were like on the inside, so long as they were simply obedient in externals. Furthermore, when it comes to Hobbes the dichotomy between enlightenment and indoctrination is altogether inadequate. After all, the doctrine to be imprinted is, strictly speaking, 'true'—though what this means for Hobbes is (fittingly) subject to controversy. For a recent discussion, see Hoekstra (2006).

Notes on contributor

Teresa M. Bejan is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Yale University, and she holds degrees from the Universities of Chicago and Cambridge. Her principal research interests lie in early modern Anglo-American political and religious thought, with a particular focus on issues of toleration, education and civility.

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