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The Natural Laws of Good Manners: Hobbes, Glory, and Early Modern Civility

Clifton Mark

Abstract: According to Hobbes, glory causes conflict in two ways: by causing competition over comparative recognition, and by making men violently sensitive to insult. Interpreters have generally depicted the sensitivity to insult as a manifestation of the desire for comparative recognition. This reading raises two problems. First, the two ways in which Hobbes uses glory are inconsistent. Second, if the problem with glory is comparison, then the law of nature enjoining the acknowledgment of equality should lead to war rather than peace. This paper illuminates these obscurities by placing Hobbes in the context of the contemporary literature on honor and civility. These sources reveal two concepts of honor which correspond to the two ways in which Hobbes writes about glory. Hobbes draws heavily from these sources, but intentionally elides the two concepts of honor in order to undermine an ideology of honor that was used to justify disobedience and unlawful violence.

Glory was, for Hobbes, a serious cause of human conflict. Part of the reason for this is glory's comparative nature: each man's desire to think himself superior to the others combined with the desire for recognition of superiority pits men against each other. Explaining why humans cannot live together sociably, as do ants and bees, Hobbes wrote: "men are continually in competition for honour and dignity ... and consequently amongst men there ariseth on that ground, envy, and hatred, and finally war," adding that that "man, whose joy consisteth in comparing himself with other men, can relish nothing but what is eminent."¹

Clifton Mark is associate postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Ethics at the University of Toronto, 15 Devonshire Pl., Toronto, ON M5S 1H8 (cliftonmark@gmail.com).

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¹L 17.8, 108. Citations to Hobbes's works are abbreviated as follows: EL equals *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic: Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (1640), ed.

Hobbes also spoke of glory causing conflict in a second way. Glory makes men so sensitive to slights that most “prefer to lose their peace and even their lives rather than suffer an insult.”² Most interpretations of Hobbes emphasize the positional nature of glory as the main source of human conflict, interpreting sensitivity to insult as an angry reaction to losing in the universal race for precedence. Men wish to be acknowledged as superior, therefore any implication to the contrary can spark conflict.³

This reading is not wrong — it *is* Hobbes’s position. However, it obscures an important aspect of Hobbes’s analysis of glory that is illuminated by the context of the contemporary literature on honor and civility. Manuals aimed at teaching gentlemen to act with civility and honor were very popular in early modern England and, like Hobbes’s texts, they depict a world of competitive individuals deeply concerned with the opinions of others and violently averse to slights. Unlike Hobbes’s texts, they reveal an important distinction between two different kinds of honor. The first relates to comparative standing and distinction, and is related to the love of honors or glory. The second meaning of honor also has to do with status, but signifies membership in the class of honorable men rather than one’s position within that class. Honor in this sense can be rendered as “good name,” “reputation,” or personal honor. I refer to this kind of honor as “categorical” honor because it denotes membership in a certain social category. Having categorical honor entitled one to be treated as an equal; to lack it placed one in a different, lower, social class.

Hobbes’s contemporaries recognized honor as a major source of conflict, but *not* primarily from competition for honors. Quarrels arose from insults which violated the second kind of honor. These insults were not the results of comparisons of wisdom, strength, power, or any other particular characteristic, but implications that their target was outside of the circle of honorable

J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); DC equals *On the Citizen* (1642/1647), ed. Richard Tuck, trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); L equals *Leviathan* (1651), ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994); B equals *Behemoth; or, The Long Parliament* (1668/1681), ed. Stephen Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and C equals *The Correspondence*, ed. Noel Malcolm, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). Where possible, references are given by chapter and paragraph, with a page number following.

²DC 2.12, 49.

³Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 18; Gabriella Slomp, “Hobbes on Glory and Civil Strife,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s “Leviathan,”* ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181–98; Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), chap. 11; Phillip Pettit, *Made with Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Michael Oakshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1975), 87.

men and therefore unworthy of respect as an equal. According to the norms of civility, it was expected that gentlemen should be unequal in distinction of all kinds, but to be treated as a lower class of person altogether was intolerable. Offended categorial honor not only caused men to quarrel, it obliged them to. According to prevailing notions of honor, no self-respecting gentleman could suffer an insult in peace.

This article argues that reading Hobbes in the context of the contemporary literature of honor and civility can illuminate his view of the sources of human conflict and how the laws of nature can be thought to avoid such conflict. In the first section, I outline the distinction, prominent in the literature of civility, between two kinds of honor. In the second section I argue that Hobbes implicitly follows this distinction, and that reading him as doing so makes sense of some otherwise incoherent or contradictory aspects of his account of glory-related conflict. In the final section, I explain why Hobbes, despite implicitly making use of this distinction, nonetheless does not explicitly articulate it. A gentleman's intolerance to insult was a part of his sense of categorial honor, which was a transcendent ethical value that could be used to justify disobedience. Hobbes intentionally elides this sense of honor with its comparative sense, which could not justify disobedience, in order to strip it of its normative force.

I. Two Concepts of Honor

The idea of a social world of competitive individuals, hypersensitive to slights, was not Hobbes's invention. Such a world is vividly depicted in the manuals of civility popular in Hobbes's time. Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, Della Casa's *Galateo*, and Guazzo's *La Civile Conversazione* were published in Italy in the sixteenth century and were soon imported to England, translated, and published in successive editions.⁴ These spawned indigenous imitators such as Simon Robson's *The Courte of Civill Courtesie* (1578) and Henry Peacham's *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622). The manuals provide guidance to gentlemen on how to comport themselves in society, and they include advice regarding such subjects as appropriate topics of conversation, tone of voice, turns of phrase, gait, dress, physical carriage, table manners, and every other conceivable facet of self-presentation. Through the art of good manners or "civil conversation," argued the authors, one could be "better thought of" by all, and win their "love & good will."⁵

⁴Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes and the Social Control of Unsociability," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, ed. A. P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra, published online Dec. 2013, p. 6.

⁵Cited in Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25.

To these, we may add the dueling manuals. Again, many, such as Muzio's *Il Duello*, were Italian in origin. They were frequently translated, and inspired English-language treatises, such as *The Book of Honor and Armes*. Published in London in 1590, this volume treats "the causes of Quarrell, and the nature of Iniuries, with their repulses. Also the meanes of satisfaction and pacification; with divers other things necessarie to be knowne of all Gentlemen and others professing Armes and Honor."⁶ The most popular dueling manual was Vincent Saviolo's *His Practise*, which consisted of two books: "The first intreating of the vse of the rapier and dagger. The second, of honor and honorable quarrels."⁷

The gentleman addressed by the manuals bears a strong resemblance to Hobbesian man. The manuals assume that their readers desire distinction and admiration and are filled with advice about how to obtain it. Historians of the period concur. Examining early modern England, Anna Bryson notes an "obsession with relative rank among gentlemen."⁸ Johnathan Dewald, in a study of European nobility from 1400 to 1800, argues that everything from child rearing to amusements and social ideologies in this class reinforced the trait of competitiveness and the tendency to compare oneself to others.⁹ The aim was to produce individuals equipped to enter the fiercely competitive social contexts of court or city life.

Also like Hobbesian man, the gentleman of the manuals is extremely sensitive to slight. As Guazzo put it, it is "a greater offence to take awaie ones good name, which refresheth the soule, than to defraude one of foode, which sustaineth the bodie," and "we cannot abide to be il spoken of our selves, whether it be rightfullie or wrongfullie."¹⁰ In a 1614 pamphlet, the Earl of Northampton explained: "Blowes, Stripes, or Hurts in all degrees ... all scornefull lookes, actes, or figures, that implie contempt, all Libels published in any sort to the disgrace of any Gentleman; or any person, whom that Gentleman is bound in credite to defend, as himselfe" were intolerable.

⁶[Vincent Saviolo], *The Booke of Honor and Armes* (London: Richard Jones, 1590), frontispiece.

⁷Vincentio Saviolo, *His Practise* (London: John Wolfe, 1595), frontispiece.

⁸Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 136.

⁹Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 168. See also Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; Mervyn James, *English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485–1642* (Oxford: Past and Present Society, 1986); Kristen B. Neuschel, *Word of Honor: Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*; John Adamson, "The Kingdom of England and Great Britain: The Tudor and Stuart Courts, 1509–1714," in *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancien Régime, 1500–1750*, ed. John Adamson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 95–117.

¹⁰Cited in Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*, 41, emphasis mine.

They “trench as deeply into reputation, as the Stabbe it selfe doeth into a man that esteems Honour.”¹¹ These kinds of injuries to honor were a major cause of conflict between gentlemen. As the dedicatory epistle of *The Booke of Honor and Armes* states: “The cause of all Quarrell, is Iniurie and reproach.” Della Casa advised his readers never to “offend ... their senses, their mynds, and conceits.”¹² Robert Ashley wrote that “the fear also of offending any with our incivilitie and contempt ys of great moment vnto Honour: because as nothing ys more to be avoided then to have the evill will or hatred of any by our owne procurement.”¹³

One key element of the culture of honor and civility that is not explicitly formulated in Hobbes is a distinction, recognized by the authors of the manuals and their adherents, between two different concepts of honor. The first, which I shall call comparative honor, corresponds roughly to Hobbes’s idea of honor as the “manifestation of value we set on one another.”¹⁴ Guides to civility were also guides to distinguishing oneself among one’s peers. Gentlemen were presumed to desire admiration for a wide range of traits, including public service, physical and mental abilities, ancestry, wealth, and, of course, impeccable good manners. This kind of honor was expressed through formal and informal ceremonies and conventions. It was generally understood comparatively, and vigorous competition between gentlemen was assumed.

A second meaning of honor apparent in the manuals also has to do with status, but signifies membership in the class of honorable men rather than one’s relative position within that class. Honor in this sense can be rendered as “good name,” “reputation,” or personal honor. It is a binary concept: either one possesses it or one does not, and all those who possess it do so to the same degree. We may refer to this kind of honor as “categorical” honor because it denoted membership in a certain social category. Having categorical honor entitled one to a certain level of treatment by all other honorable individuals, to lack it placed one in a different, lower, social class.

Annibale Romei articulated this distinction in his 1585 *The Courtier’s Academie*, distinguishing “naturall and imperfect” honor from “acquired honour, and perfect.” Acquired honor is “the reward of virtue,” and is awarded differentially based on merit or achievement. It is the kind of honor that receives honors. Natural honor

is a common opinion, that he honored, hath never failed in justice, nor valor. I term it honor natural, because man bringeth it from his mothers

¹¹Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, *A Publication of His Majestie’s Edict, and Severe Censure against Priuate Combats and Combatants* (London, 1613), 42–43.

¹²John Della Casa, *Galateo* (London: Raufe Newbery, 1576), 101–2.

¹³Robert Ashley, *A Treatise of Honour* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1947), 70. The original manuscript is dated between 1596 and 1603.

¹⁴L 10.16, 51.

womhe, and preserveth it vnspotted, except through some greevous offence or suspicion, he loose this good opinion. ... This is that honour ... whereof there is so great fame, and wherein there is not any one, which profeseth not himselfe to have his part, as surely hee hath, though in no other respect, at least yet in his mouth, in that hee will neyther say nor doe anything wythout the license of honour, or except honour permit.¹⁵

All born gentlemen possess this honor by default, but they might lose it through dishonorable action.¹⁶ Romei's definition highlights some key elements of this kind of honor: it is reputational ("a common opinion") and linked to a code of honorable behaviour ("hee will neyther say nor doe anything wythout the license of honor"). Categorical honor also has an inward aspect, and was a central part of the early modern gentleman's identity and sense of self-respect. In order to respect oneself, it was necessary both to believe that one was honorable and to be recognized as such by one's peers. Categorical honor refers at the same time to character and to reputation, and both were tied to adherence to a behavioural code of honor. Moreover, this honor is not a matter of personal distinction, but belongs to all (gentle) men who have not dishonored themselves: "There is not any one, which profeseth not himselfe to have his part."

The conventions of civility were meant to express gentlemen's own honorable status and to acknowledge honor in others. Although the norms of civility only applied to a relatively constrained social group of elite men, relations *within* that group were conducted on the assumption of a basic equality. Men of honor were concerned with their comparative standing, but the underlying aim of civility was directed at categorical honor. Della Casa advised that one ought to indicate to one's company only the desire "to live in a familiar equalitie amongst them," and later Clement Ellis argued that "*Courtesy and Civility*" are chiefly for "*equals*."¹⁷ In Hobbes's time, the prevailing understanding of good manners was geared towards expressing the equal status of all gentlemen.¹⁸

Categorical honor implies equal status. Comparative honor, because it was a positional good, requires *inequalities*. However, both coexisted within civil conversation without contradiction, if not without friction. The gentlemanly social world was characterized by deep inequalities of wealth, power, rank, and achievement. Rich nobles could possess hundreds of times more

¹⁵Annibale Romei, *The Courtier's Academie*, trans. John Kepers (London: Valentine Sims, 1598), 79–80.

¹⁶In contemporary language, the two forms of honor map roughly onto respect and esteem or, in Stephen Darwall's terminology, recognition respect and appraisal respect. See Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88, no. 1 (1977): 36–49.

¹⁷Clement Ellis, *The Gentile Sinner; or, England's Brave Gentleman* (Oxford: E. & J. Forrest, 1660), 124.

¹⁸Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 67.

wealth than their economically troubled brethren, just as grand titles could eclipse the standing of the squire. Nobody maintained that people were in fact equal in these senses, and it was considered polite to acknowledge these differences with respect for the qualities and achievements of others. As Robert Ashley explained in his treatise *Of Honour*, “it is also the part of a prudent man to respect the desert of everyone’s virtue and also the dignitie of his person, and whatsoever else is of moment toward the attaining of honour.”¹⁹ However, the rivalry for comparative honor took place on a general plane of equal respect. The conventions of good manners discouraged gentlemen from claiming precedence in their social interactions. As Obadiah Walker argued in *Of Education*: “All men are in some sense disparata, and even those who are under the relations of superiority and inferiority, yet those obligations being satisfied as to all other matters, account themselves as equals.”²⁰ In her work on the different conceptions of equality in early modern England, Teresa Bejan frames the distinction in terms of rank and degree. All those who belong to the same rank are considered equals in the sense that they are peers, even though they may differ in degree, which is their relative standing *within* their rank.²¹ In this vocabulary it was proper to acknowledge differences in degree at the same time as equality in rank.

Within the world of civility and honor, it was specifically violations of categorical honor which were considered insulting, and therefore grounds for quarrel. For Romei, it was “natural” (categorical) honor and not comparative honor “*which giveth occasion euery day, of bralles, hatred, and rancours.*”²² Expressions of comparative honor, such as praise or even dispraise, were not in themselves considered offensive under the prevailing norms of civility. They could only become offensive if they were first interpreted as categorical violations. One way this might occur is if a gentlemen, displeased with the level of comparative recognition he received, interpreted this as a denial of *deserved* comparative honor. Della Casa wrote of the small ceremonies of respect and honor that patterned social interaction: “VVe must not leaue them vndone in any wise. For he that faileth to doe them, dothe not onely displease, but doth a wrong to him, to whome they be due.”²³ To fail to perform the ceremonies of civility, or to grant deserved comparative honor, wronged the person to whom they are due, and a man could take offense when denied the respect he rightly expected.²⁴ Comparative honor functioned according to something like a merit principle, even if many of the things

¹⁹Ashley, *A Treatise of Honour*, 69.

²⁰Obadiah Walker, *Of Education, Especially of Young Gentlemen in Two Parts* (Oxford, 1643), 211.

²¹Teresa M. Bejan, “Acknowledging Equality,” 7th Annual Balzan-Skinner Lecture, University of Cambridge, April 22, 2016.

²²Romei, *The Courtier’s Academie*, 80.

²³Della Casa, *Galateo*, 45. Cf. L 10.29, 52.

²⁴Cf. L 10.24, 52.

that called for this kind of recognition—birth, rank, etc.—would not count under most present-day conceptions of merit. Summarizing the courtesy manuals in 1609, Barnaby Rich wrote: “Iniuries are as well offered by wordes as by deedes; in wordes, by unseemely speeches, as in giving the lie, or such other like; in deedes no lesse by depriving men of their reputation and right, as in depraving them of their due by any other meane.”²⁵ Injuries could come in any form but consisted always in denying men the respect that they were due. Being granted less comparative honor than another was grounds for offense only if it seemed like the merit principle (which applies equally to all) had been violated.

A second way in which comparisons might ignite conflict is when superiority in some comparative dimension, such as birth or wisdom, appeared to ground a claim to categorial superiority. All should accept and acknowledge differences in comparative honor, and all could therefore expect to be rendered the respect they are due. However, demanding *more* respect than is appropriate or even insisting too fastidiously on the respect that one is owed could sometimes begin to seem like a claim to an overall superior status, violating the egalitarian principles of civility. To do so would be to treat a difference in degree as grounding a more serious difference in rank. As the anonymous author of the *Art of Compleasance* wrote, “there are few who will not take it as an affront, that any should presume to be better Gentlemen than themselves.”²⁶

Both kinds of honor were related to inequalities, but of different kinds. Because categorial honor was a binary concept, the only important distinction was between those who possessed honor and those who did not. This kind of honor inequality defined pyramidal class hierarchies: those on the upper level of the pyramid were entitled to a certain level of treatment that would not be appropriate for the lower levels. Within each level, equal respect was the norm. Comparative honor, on the other hand, could come in degrees, and revealed a unique standing vis-à-vis other individuals. Hierarchies of comparative honor were pecking orders rather than pyramids. Moreover, categorial equality was a condition of honor competition, which did not cross categorial boundaries. The comparisons that mattered were intragroup comparisons: aristocrats might vie to outdo one another in honorable deeds, but would never think to compare their exploits and virtues to those of commoners. According to the conventions of civility, there was a significant qualitative distinction between being treated as lower down on the intraclass pecking order and being treated as outside of that class altogether, belonging to a different level of the pyramid. Only expressions of categorial inequality were considered insulting—to fail to treat another gentlemen as an equal in this sense was to imply that he was a commoner rather than a peer.

²⁵Cited in Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*, 59.

²⁶Cited in Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 224.

For its adherents, honor did not just inspire violence; it also *legitimized* violence. Dueling flourished not because men of this period were innately irascible, but because they held a reflexive conception of honor, meaning that honor could be destroyed by an insult. “Amongst *persons of reputation*, honour is preferred before life”; therefore a true gentleman could not suffer an insult in peace: he must obtain satisfaction either by public apology or in a duel.²⁷ Suffering an insult *without* obtaining satisfaction violated the behavioral code of honor, and was therefore an accepted sign of a dishonorable character and grounds for withdrawing the respect normally owed to a gentleman. According to Romei, the gentleman who suffers an insult in peace demonstrates that he is “worthie of contempt, and consequently, vniust, and wicked; for only the wicked man is worthy to be ignominious.”²⁸ An insult, if unanswered, actually had the power to deprive a man of his social standing, resulting in effective ostracism. Even if a slighted man did not feel particularly angry about a given display of contempt, the culture of honor made the demand for satisfaction normative, and this norm was reinforced by powerful social incentives. Possessing a reflexive idea of honor obliged men to blot out any insults by obtaining satisfaction, and this sense of obligation was often strong enough to trump legal and religious prohibitions on dueling.

To summarize, the civility and dueling manuals depict a social world populated by competitive individual gentlemen who are deeply concerned with the opinions and recognition of others. Violent conflict over honor was endemic in this society, but only failures to recognize others as categorical equals could trigger and justify a duel challenge. According to the norms of civility, comparative honor was not in itself legitimate grounds for violence, but could become so if translated into a categorical violation.

II. Hobbes on Glory and Honor

The punctilious world of the civility manuals was Hobbes’s own. These books described the social world within which Hobbes moved, and outlined an ethic of honor to which many in his audience subscribed. Even men who had not perused the genre would have been familiar with the tenets of honor and civility, but we know that Hobbes was acquainted with many of the relevant volumes: as tutor to the Earl of Devonshire, he prepared a catalog of his library, which included copies of Castiglione, Della Casa, and Guazzo, among others.²⁹ Hobbes admired and was personally acquainted with Francis Bacon and John Selden, both of whom published works on the

²⁷Cited in Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*, 43, emphasis mine.

²⁸Romei, *The Courtier’s Academie*, 105–6.

²⁹Skinner, “Social Control of Unsociability.”

subject of the duel.³⁰ As Quentin Skinner argues, Hobbes was so much influenced by the idea of “civil conversation” as a model for social life that he adopted the vocabulary of the manuals in his own work.³¹ In *Elements, De Cive*, and *Leviathan* Hobbes described his moral philosophy or laws of nature as concerning “men’s manners and conversation one towards another.”³²

Hobbes and the manuals are describing and addressed to the same social world. For historians of civility and honor in early modern England, the connection is unmistakable. Anna Bryson, for instance, argues that the gentlemanly society described by the civility manuals provided the model upon which much early modern political philosophy was based.³³ Markku Peltonen describes *Leviathan* as “an important contribution to the 17th century debate on duelling,” and Bejan’s *Mere Civility* is devoted largely to the role played by civility in early modern political thought.³⁴ Reading Hobbes in this literary and ethical context not only provides background information for Hobbes’s life, but also illuminates key elements of his text. Although Hobbes uses key terms such as “honor” and “glory” in different ways than I have attributed to the manuals (about which more in the final section), understanding the prevailing conventions of honor and civility can help us to understand Hobbes’s diagnosis of the causes of conflict in human nature, as well as his attempted solutions to that problem. Conversely, reading Hobbes without the distinction between two kinds of honor in mind leads to incoherencies in his argument. To understand why, we turn now to Hobbes’s discussion of glory.

According to Hobbes, glory is the most serious cause of conflict in the nature of man. In his argument that the state of nature is a state of war, Hobbes listed three causes of conflict: competition, which causes men to invade for gain; diffidence, for security; and glory, for “reputation.”³⁵ Of these three, he exculpated two at the end of the chapter: “The passions that incline men to peace are fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary for commodious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them.”³⁶ When resources are scarce, men may come into conflict through competition. When another man’s intentions are unknown, and there is reason to suspect that his intentions are hostile, diffidence may ignite pre-emptive attacks. However,

³⁰Selden, *The Duello; or, Single Combat: From Antiquity Derived into This Kingdom of England* (London, 1711); Francis Bacon, *The Charge of Sir Francis Bacon Knight, His Maesties Attourney Generall, Touching Duells* (London, 1614).

³¹Quentin Skinner, “Social Control of Unsociability,” 432–52.

³²L 15.40, 100.

³³Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 223–24.

³⁴Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*, 15; Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

³⁵L 13.7, 76.

³⁶L 13.14, 78.

under most circumstances, and certainly within the bounds of an established commonwealth, the desire for gain and security do not typically prompt men to fight.³⁷ Glory alone remains a source of combustion.

In *Leviathan*, glorying is defined as the “joy arising from imagination of a man’s own power and ability,” where these include all of the faculties of body and mind (strength, prudence, eloquence, nobility, etc.) as well as instrumental goods such as riches, reputation, friends, and good luck.³⁸ On this expansive definition, we may say, glory is the desire that humans have to think well of themselves. Yet glory is not a private passion. Its satisfaction depends on honor, which is recognition by others of one’s high value.³⁹ Hobbesian man not only desires a good self-opinion, he also requires that others acknowledge his worth. It is this dependence on recognition from others that makes glory so dangerous.

Sometimes Hobbes spoke of glory causing conflict because it is comparative. Humans enjoy contemplating their own power, but understand their own power only by comparison with others. Explaining why humans cannot live together sociably, as do ants and bees, Hobbes wrote: “men are continually in competition for honor and dignity, which these creatures are not; and consequently amongst men there ariseth on that ground, envy, and hatred, and finally war; but amongst these not so.” He adds that private and public good are identical for the social animals, “but man, whose joy consisteth in comparing himself with other men, can relish nothing but what is eminent.”⁴⁰ According to the most common interpretation of Hobbes, shared by Strauss, Oakeshott, Walzer, Pettit, and many others, glory’s comparative nature is the main source of trouble. Each demands recognition of superiority from his fellows, and is willing to resort to violence to get it. The purpose of Hobbes’s philosophy, and of the sovereign itself, is to remind individuals of the dangers involved in this kind of struggle, and to bring them back to a rational fear of violent death.⁴¹

³⁷For an account of glory as an “organizing” cause of war, see Arash Abizadeh, “Hobbes on the Causes of War: A Disagreement Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 105 (2011): 300.

³⁸L 6.39, 31; L 10.2, 50. In Hobbes’s early *Elements of Law*, glory is defined in explicitly comparative terms: “GLORY, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind, is that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us.” Although Hobbes drops this part of the definition in *Leviathan*, there is plenty of evidence to conclude that he continued to see glory in comparative terms. Most prominent is the “ants and bees” argument in which he argues that men can “relish nothing but what is eminent.” For the continuing importance of comparison in Hobbes’s later work, see Slomp, “Hobbes on Glory and Civil Strife.”

³⁹L 10.17, 51. Cf. E 9.1, 50 and DC 1.2, 23.

⁴⁰L.17.8, 108.

⁴¹Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 18; Slomp, “Glory and Civil Strife,” 189.

Hobbes also described glory as causing conflict in a way that is not overtly about rivalry. In his description of the causes of war in the nature of man, glory causes men to invade: “for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.”⁴² Here, the cause of conflict is not so much positional striving as a revolt of wounded pride. Following Abizadeh, I will refer to the violent sensitivity to insult that Hobbes described throughout his works as “prickliness.”⁴³ Prickliness is more directly linked to violence and seems to have a special power to overcome the fear of death. In *Leviathan*, any sign of contempt can “provoke to fight; insomuch as most men choose rather to hazard their life than not to be revenged”;⁴⁴ and in *De Cive*, Hobbes wrote of contempt that “there is nothing more offensive than this, nothing that triggers a stronger impulse to hurt someone.”⁴⁵ Insult outrages Hobbesian man, making him neglect his own safety in his desire to hurt his antagonist.

Prickliness can be triggered by any sign of contempt or hatred “by deed, word, countenance, or gesture.”⁴⁶ These include “less to love or fear than he expects”; “to give little gifts”; “to distrust or not to believe”; “to sleep, or go forth, or talk” while another man speaks; “to do anything before him obscenely, slovenly, or impudently”; and many others.⁴⁷ Mere laughter was insulting, and even “a different opinion” can be experienced as contempt, because “not to agree with someone on an issue is tacitly to accuse him of error ... just as to dissent from him in a large number of points is tantamount to calling him a fool.”⁴⁸ Hobbes went so far as to explain religious conflict as being caused by the insult implied by intellectual disagreement.⁴⁹ Hobbes called these (and several others) “natural” ways of (dis)honoring. They are supplemented within commonwealths by conventional signs of honor. The result is that nearly any utterance, action, or omission might by nature or by convention be construed as an insult.

Not only did Hobbes follow the manuals in arguing that men are sensitive to insult, he also identified the same kinds of acts and expressions as insulting. All of the behaviors that Hobbes listed as dishonoring or offensive appeared

⁴²L 13.7, 76.

⁴³Abizadeh, “Causes of War,” 300.

⁴⁴L 15.20, 96.

⁴⁵DC 1.5, 27; EL 16.11, 86.

⁴⁶L 15.20, 96.

⁴⁷L 10.19–36, 52–53.

⁴⁸DC 1.2, 25–26. See also L 10.30, 52. For laughter as insult in Hobbes, see Skinner, “Social Control of Unsociability,” and Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter,” in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3, *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 142–76.

⁴⁹Abizadeh, “Causes of War,” 309; Teresa Bejan, “Difference without Disagreement: Rethinking Hobbes on ‘Independency’ and Toleration,” *Review of Politics* 78 (2016): 12.

also in the civility manuals. These include fairly straightforward things like slovenly self-presentation or not attending to someone's words, but also the more particular sources of offense singled out by Hobbes. Castiglione, Simon Robson, and Lodovic Bryskett all, for example, recognized that laughter can imply scorn, differing only on how to deal with its dangerous potential.⁵⁰ Disagreement was also a commonly cited source of social friction. Della Casa admonished his readers that "quareulous contentions, bee foule and ill favoured fashions for gentlemen to vse: and they get them ill will and displeasure of all men for it," and lead men to "reprooue, dispute, and bralle, to daggers drawing." William Ramesey, a contemporary of Hobbes's, advised his readers to "be not fond of fair words. ... Avoid contentious disputes."⁵¹

Why, then, did Hobbes think insults so inflammatory? What explains men's prickly reactions to slight? Many interpreters focus almost exclusively on the idea of competition and rivalry, and mention prickliness only in passing as the negative emotional reaction to losing the race for status. For example, Strauss writes, "Every man is ... the enemy of every other man, because each desires to surpass every other and thereby offends every other."⁵² Similarly, Walzer depicts a "Hobbesian race" for recognition with each person "reading their daily gains in the eyes of their fellows, like a stockbroker with his morning paper."⁵³ For Pettit, positional rivalry "serves as a hair trigger for violence."⁵⁴ More recent work on Hobbesian glory by Abizadeh and Bejan and Garsten has done a better job of showing the importance of insult to Hobbes. Ultimately, however, these authors too explain prickliness in terms of comparative glory: contempt provokes because it interferes with the contemplation of power.⁵⁵ Abizadeh's reconstruction of the argument, for example, is as follows: Glory is the joy based on the contemplation of one's own power; reputation for power is a source of power; and insults damage reputation, reducing actual power. Faced with this reduction in enjoyment, slighted men take to arms to extort a better opinion from their fellows.⁵⁶

This interpretation is, strictly speaking, correct. Hobbes *did* argue that the human sensitivity to insult is the result of disappointed glory, that glory arises from the contemplation of one's own (comparative) power, and that reputation for power is power. However, it is incomplete. Assimilating prickliness immediately to the logic of a race for precedence leads to serious

⁵⁰See Skinner, "Social Control of Unsociability" and "Classical Theory of Laughter."

⁵¹Cited in Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 71 and 79–80.

⁵²Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 12.

⁵³Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 253.

⁵⁴Pettit, *Made with Words*, 101.

⁵⁵E.g., Teresa Bejan and Bryan Garsten, "The Difficult Work of Liberal Civility," in *Civility, Legality, and Justice in America*, ed. Austin Sarat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 26.

⁵⁶Abizadeh, "Causes of War," 309.

interpretive problems. The distinction between a kind of comparative recognition which could recognize distinctions *between* equals and a categorical recognition which recognized others *as* equals is necessary to make good sense of what Hobbes says about glory.

The first problem is that this interpretation is subject to internal logical difficulties: the logic of comparative glory should not, without further qualification, lead to prickliness. The idea that prickliness is simply a manifestation of comparative glory relies on two dubious assumptions. The first is that an insult actually does affect power, reputation, or subjective belief in either. Suppose A calls B “rascal,” engages in intellectual disagreement with him, or smiles contumeliously. Why should that change B’s opinion of his own power? A may be a fool whose opinion should be discounted. Perhaps A is lying, and everyone knows it. In some circumstances, the very fact that A is paying enough attention to B to insult him could signal B’s power rather than his insignificance. Without a number of additional assumptions, it is not at all clear why anyone concerned with maximizing their opinion of their own power or relative standing should take slights as seriously as Hobbes thinks they will.

Even if slights *do* pose this threat, the argument assumes that people will resort to violence to restore their reputation, which seems like an unpromising strategy. People desire honor for, among many other things, their wisdom, eloquence, great actions, equity, ancestry, beauty, even “signs of natural heat.”⁵⁷ Nowhere did Hobbes indicate that all of these honorable qualities are proxies for ability in combat. For example, physical combat cannot settle the question of who is wiser or better looking, as Hobbes himself observes.⁵⁸ Worse still, the avenging target of contempt might lose the confrontation, risking further embarrassment or death, which would end all enjoyment of glory. Even a human being overwhelmingly motivated by comparative glory should not be as prickly as Hobbes implied that men usually are.

One obvious reply is that prickliness is unreasonable because glory is unreasonable, and that is precisely Hobbes’s point. Hobbes’s political philosophy aims to show that the rational pursuer of self-interest will always obey the sovereign and the laws of nature. The glory-driven individual is *irrational*, and this irrationality shows precisely through their willingness to hazard their lives over “phantastically” harms to honor or reputation.⁵⁹

This response is unsatisfying. Hobbes’s definition of glory implies a certain logic: that of maximizing the contemplation of one’s own power and ability. It may be irrational in the sense that it puts those interested in glory in conflict with one another, and in the sense that pursuing it at the expense of one’s life

⁵⁷L 10.37–52; EL 8.5, 48–49.

⁵⁸L 15.21, 96.

⁵⁹L 27.20, 196.

is irrational. However, my objection is not that prickliness fails to obey Hobbes's instrumentalist logic of self-preservation. It is that it does not even obey glory's own logic. On this interpretation, glory loses its integrity as a concept, and becomes simply a name for that which is irrational.

A second problem with the interpretation of insult as negative comparison is that Hobbes described instances in which comparisons do not offend, and even encouraged making use of them. The desire for comparative recognition is an integral part of human nature, and therefore the sovereign must find ways to channel it rather than attempt to suppress it: "Ambition and longing for honours cannot be removed from men's minds, and sovereigns have no duty to do so. They can however ensure by a consistent employment of rewards and punishments that the road to honours does not lie through criticism of the current regime nor through factions and popular favour, but through the opposite."⁶⁰ In other words, glory is ambivalent. It is good or bad depending on the ideology or values to which it is attached. It is dangerous when it drives the ambitious to spread seditious doctrines, and it has a tendency to put men into rivalry with one another. Yet Hobbes's works are also scattered with references to glory's positive contributions. Only those who are concerned with glory fully develop their intelligence, and it can support honest and magnanimous behavior.⁶¹ In the preface to *De Cive*, Hobbes quipped that "few except those who love praise do anything to deserve it."⁶² Because the desire is so prevalent, it is the sovereign's duty to provide constructive outlets for glory-thirsty individuals who might otherwise trouble the commonwealth. In a letter to the young Lord Cavendish, Hobbes warned the earl against any kind of offensive speech, and advises:

If a man could value himself moderately, & at the rate that other men hold him currant, examyning what true and iust title he hath to pretend to more respect & priviledge then others, and that done would not (as Children that crye for euey thing that is denyed them) expect more then is due, & when he cannot haue it fall into choller, I think it were not possible for that man either out of passion or in passion to be offensive.⁶³

Here Hobbes argued that an explicit claim to superiority ("more respect & priviledge then others") could not possibly be offensive. It could only become offensive if the claimant did not have "true and iust title." This is incomprehensible if what is offensive is defined simply in terms of unfavorable comparisons.

⁶⁰DC 12.13, 148. One of the ways that the sovereign does this is through the distribution of titles of honor: L 18.15, 115.

⁶¹EL 10.2; L 14.31, 87.

⁶²DC Pref. 20, 13.

⁶³C 28, 52.

The interpretation of prickliness as a reaction to any unfavorable comparison cannot separate instances of offensive comparisons from inoffensive ones. But if we read Hobbes as implicitly following the manuals, the distinction is straightforward. When he spoke of comparative glory and the contemplation of power, this corresponds to comparative honor, and these kinds of inequalities do not directly incite anger and violence. However, when he wrote of insult and contempt, he has in mind violations of categorial honor which construe their target as belonging to a lower class of person, not positional competition. This interpretation explains why Hobbes seems to think that some kinds of comparisons can be positive, whereas others (those which violate the idea of equality associated with categorial honor) lead to conflict.

The second major problem raised by assimilating prickliness to the logic of the race for status is that it cannot make sense of Hobbes's laws of nature. For Hobbes, a law of nature is "a precept or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same."⁶⁴ Because the state of nature promises a violent end to a short and brutish life, the laws of nature are designed to avoid this condition. The first two—to seek peace and to be willing to give up some of one's liberty provided others also will give up theirs—pertain to establishing peace. The remaining eighteen explain how to maintain it. Collectively, the science of the laws of nature "is the true and only moral philosophy."⁶⁵

Because prickliness is such an important cause of war, it also figures explicitly in Hobbes's plan for peace. The eighth law of nature reads: "because all signs of hatred, or contempt, provoke to fight; insomuch as most men choose rather to hazard their life than not to be revenged, we may in the eighth place, for a law of nature, set down this precept: that no man by deed, word, countenance, or gesture, declare hatred or contempt of another. The breach of which law is commonly called contumely." Human beings are so sensitive to any sign of disrespect that Hobbes made it a universal principle of morality that humans must avoid provoking each other. Since the possible sources of offense were legion, following this law of nature entails a relatively comprehensive practice of good manners. Each must know and avoid all of the ways that one might cause offense to others.

Here, the key question is what makes an expression offensive. While Hobbes offered a host of examples of contumely, he was not always clear how they are tied together. In *Leviathan*, undervalue is indexed to expectations—"every man looketh that his companion value him at the same rate he sets upon himself"—whereas in *Elements* and *De Cive*, the sparks of violence are the "words, and other signs of contempt and hatred, which are

⁶⁴L 14.3, 79.

⁶⁵L 15.40, 100.

incident to all comparison."⁶⁶ If *any* unfavorable comparison counts as a declaration of contempt, then the eighth law of nature will be extremely difficult to follow. The same is true if a man's expectations of value are understood in comparative terms.

The most serious problem with interpreting insult in comparative terms is that it runs headlong into the ninth law of nature, which demands men acknowledge all others as their equal. In *Leviathan*, the law reads: "If nature therefore have made men equal, that equality is to be acknowledged: or if nature have made men unequal, yet because men that think themselves equal will not enter into conditions of peace, but upon equal terms, such equality must be admitted. And therefore for the ninth law of nature, I put this: that every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature. The breach of this precept is pride."⁶⁷ When discussing this passage, Hobbes scholars often focus on some form of natural equality of men, for instance, their equal capacity to kill one another or, conversely, their equal fragility.⁶⁸ As Kinch Hoekstra has established, however, natural equality is irrelevant in this context. The eighth law of nature demands that all acknowledge each as equals whether or not they are "equal by nature," for they will accept peace on no other terms.⁶⁹

The natural law of equality is not simply an abstract assertion about the equal status of men, or a principle of reciprocity. It is a matter of honor and insult, and it runs through the entire set of natural laws. In *Elements*, Hobbes stated that the problem with those who break the law of equality is that they "arrogate to themselves more honour than they give to others."⁷⁰ In *De Cive*, he justified the law of equity explicitly in terms of insult and equality: "if you do not keep to natural equality but give more or less to one than to the other, you are *insulting* the person who is not favoured. And it has been shown above that *insult* is contrary to the *natural laws*."⁷¹ The implications of this explanation are sweeping. Hobbes often equated equity with natural

⁶⁶L 13.5, 75–76; EL 14.4, 78; DC 1.5, 26.

⁶⁷L 15.21, 96.

⁶⁸Abizadeh, "Causes of War," 303; Joel Kidder, "Acknowledgements of Equals: Hobbes's Ninth Law of Nature," *Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1983): 133–46; Gabriella Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), chap. 2; and Julie E. Cooper, "Vainglory, Modesty, and Political Agency in the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes," *Review of Politics* 72 (2010): 241–69.

⁶⁹For a more comprehensive treatment of Hobbesian equality, see Kinch Hoekstra, "Hobbesian Equality," in *Hobbes Today: Insights for the 21st Century*, ed. S. A. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 76–112, and Bejan, "Acknowledging Equality."

⁷⁰EL 17.1, 93. See also EL16.5, 89: "injury, which is the injustice of action, consisteth not in the inequality of things changed, or distributed, but in the inequality that men (contrary to nature and reason) assume unto themselves above their fellows."

⁷¹DC 3.15, 50.

law in its entirety or refers to it as the “principall” law of nature.⁷² Equity is the comprehensive natural law, and it itself is based on the need to acknowledge equality or, negatively formulated, to avoid insult. The same interpretation can therefore be extended to the other laws of nature. What makes arrogance, ingratitude, and even breaking one’s covenants wrong is that they express contempt. Just as glory is the organizing cause of conflict in the state of nature, Hobbes’s laws of nature are designed to avoid provoking its most violent manifestations by minimizing offense.

The traditional interpretation cannot make sense of Hobbes’s injunction to acknowledge equality. Attributing the logic of status competition to Hobbesian glory, Phillip Pettit draws the conclusion that Hobbes “helps himself to a crucial, unargued assumption ... that people can only be satisfied with superiority and the recognition of their superiority, and that they cannot settle for the positional good of equality in standing with others and the recognition of this equality. This is his most implausible move, I believe, for nothing in his argument precludes that possibility, and human experience testifies powerfully in its support.”⁷³ If Hobbes saw glory as strictly about vying for position in a pecking order, then Pettit would be correct: men could not be satisfied with equality. This would also mean that obeying the laws of nature would be disastrous; where each individual demands recognition of superiority, acknowledging equality would offend everyone. On this reading, the ninth law of nature ought to be something like “acknowledge every man as the best” or “acknowledge every man as you reckon he (over-) estimates himself.” Yet the laws of nature *do* insist on acknowledging equality and they are meant to produce peace. How?

Hobbes’s description of the causes of glory-related conflict and his remedies to such conflict make much more sense if we assume he is following the prevailing distinction between one kind of honor inequality which takes the form of intraclass distinction, and another which refers to categorical inequalities between classes of people. Civility entailed a balancing act between acknowledging comparative distinctions, without offending categorical equality: while anyone might be superior or inferior in some specific dimension such as prowess, wealth, or prestige, all are equals in (categorical) honor. The laws of nature are, like the conventions of civility, rules of good manners which direct men to avoid offending the honor of equals. Hobbes was consistently critical of offenses against categorical equality because faced with such insults, most men “choose rather to hazard their life than not to be revenged.”⁷⁴ Thus, when Hobbes spoke of the breach of the law of equality, which he called “pride,” he distinguished between the claim to greater wit,

⁷²L 26.17, 179; L 26.26, 183; DC 4.12,62; B 37; L 26.28, 184.

⁷³Pettit, *Made with Words*, 96.

⁷⁴L 15.20, 96.

which does not violate the law, and the further claim that differences in wit justify a relation of master and servant, which does.⁷⁵

Conversely, Hobbes never mentioned life-threatening combat directly in association with comparative glory. His attitude towards noncategorical distinctions of worth or value was ambivalent, depending on the kinds of qualities which are acknowledged.

When competition for honor and dignity *does* seem like a source of violence, it may be because the competitive context makes it easy for issues of comparative honor to tip over into perceived violations of categorical honor. People may be more ready to perceive insults and disrespect when they are involved in heated rivalry. Within the culture of civility, it was not comparison itself, but the failure to show the *deserved* degree of comparative honor that constituted an insult. Hobbes had this in mind when, in *Leviathan*, he tied the idea of insult to expectations, writing that “every man looketh that his companion value him at the same rate he sets upon himself.”⁷⁶ In *Elements* and *De Cive*, the sparks of violence are the “words, and other signs of contempt and hatred, which are incident to all comparison.”⁷⁷ Even here however, it is not the comparisons themselves that insult, but the signs of contempt that are *incidental* to comparison. For Hobbes, as for adherents to the culture of honor depicted in the manuals, violations of the egalitarian principle of honor were most inflammatory, and it is against these violations that both the laws of nature and the conventions of civility were primarily directed.

III. Hobbes’s Critique of Honor

I have argued that what Hobbes wrote about prickliness and about the laws of nature only makes sense if we read him as following a well-known distinction between honor as equal respect and honor as comparative standing. Yet I have also acknowledged that the traditional interpretation is technically accurate: Hobbes defined honor in terms of glory, and not as a kind of equal respect for those who abide by the ethical code of honor. If this is the case, why did he avoid explicitly drawing the distinction that makes sense of his arguments? Why did an author who is so careful with his definitions define prickliness in terms of comparative glory?

My answer is that Hobbes intentionally elided these two categories of honor as part of a critique of the gentlemanly honor ethic, and that in doing so he employs the same broad strategy he uses against his other ideological opponents. Hobbes’s overall aim was to justify absolute sovereignty by reference to the right of self-preservation. His argument from the state of

⁷⁵L 15.21, 96.

⁷⁶L 13.5, 75. See also L 10.24, 52.

⁷⁷E 14.4, 78; DC 1.5, 27.

nature is supposed to show that absolute sovereignty is necessary to peace and security. Yet this argument alone is insufficient because, even coupled with the coercive power of a sitting sovereign, it had failed to stop men from risking their lives and disturbing the commonwealth in the name of values such as religion or political liberty. Therefore, in addition to showing that everyone's basic security depends on obedience to the sovereign, Hobbes sought also to undermine the rival ideologies that legitimate disobedience.

Hobbes's general strategy for discrediting ideologies based on values which might justify disobedience has two essential steps: (1) redefine the transcendent value of an ideology or rival ethic in such a way that it can no longer justify disobedience; (2) slur the motives of its adherents as vanity so as to discredit these opponents to third-party observers. In a section titled "The Affront of Evangelism," Bejan explains how Hobbes used this strategy against evangelical Christians who pled for the liberty freely to preach their religion. The first step involves drastically lowering the stakes of the debate, which Hobbes did by arguing at length that the only dogma essential for salvation is that Jesus is the Christ. If this is the case, then salvation (that of one's own or of converts) can no longer justify proselytizing or dispute, much less open rebellion. Why does anyone bother with the enthusiastic preaching of different sects that characterized Hobbes's time? Hobbes's account of motivation is reductive: we are motivated by some material advantage related to bodily pleasure, or by glory, which encompasses all of the pleasures of the mind.⁷⁸ Since self-preservation and the desire of "commodious living" incline men to peace and obedience, all of the troublesome ideologies can ultimately be attributed to glory. All churches equally lead to salvation; therefore, those who engaged in evangelism could be driven only by a glory-driven desire to "persuade others of one's opinions."⁷⁹

Hobbes deployed the same strategy against proponents of republicanism. First, he defined freedom as the absence of constraint. Since the laws equally constrain in republics and in monarchies, the proud citizens of the republic of Lucca, where *LIBERTAS* is emblazoned on the city walls, enjoy the same freedom as the subjects of Constantinople.⁸⁰ The purported transcendent value which might legitimate republican insurgency is a sham; the true motive for promoting rebellion is glory. Similarly, Hobbes argued that the English civil war was stirred up by "ambitious ministers and ambitious gentlemen; the ministers envying the authority of the bishops, whom they thought less learned; and the gentlemen envying the privy-council and principal courtiers, whom they thought less wise than themselves."⁸¹

⁷⁸DC 1.2, 23.

⁷⁹Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 106.

⁸⁰L 21.8, 140.

⁸¹B 23.

The supposed values of political liberty or true religion were merely masks for glory-driven ambition.

To Hobbes, any ideology which offered normative justifications for action that transcended self-interest was potentially insurrectionary, and the ethos of honor which justified prickliness did just this. To take a prominent example, it underpinned the practice of dueling. Beyond the sheer carnage wrought by the institution, contemporary critics of the duel focused on honor's claim to quasi-moral authority as dangerous. Dueling was not just disobedience, it was defiance. In his *Charge against Duelling*, Francis Bacon wrote: "this offence expressly giues the Law an affront, as if there were two lawes, one a kind of Gowne-law, and the other a law of reputation ... so that ... the year books and statute books must giue place to some French and Italian pamphlets, which handle the doctrine of Duells."⁸² Duelists knew, and usually regretted, that dueling ran against the laws of state and morality. Nonetheless, they believed that honor gave them reasons to proceed with their quarrels that trumped the laws of nature, God, and sovereign. The gentleman was not simply thirsty for revenge; he was *obliged*, by a shared code of honor, to obtain satisfaction. Bacon warns that this practice of private justice "may grow from quarrells, to banding, and from banding to trooping, and so to tumulte and commotion, from perticuler persons to dissention of families and aliances, yea to nationall quarrels."⁸³ Dueling was always a crime, but its legitimating ideology made it a form of rebellion that could disturb the entire commonwealth.

Hobbes shared this worry. Human nature may simply be such that insults create aggressive and violent impulses, but how this impulse is framed ideologically matters a great deal. Hobbes wanted to dispel any notion that acting on these violent impulses could ever be justified, and his equivocation about glory was part of an attack on the normative claims of honor. With regard to quarrels, all of the legitimating power of honor came from its reflexive categorial version. For adherents of this ethic, violations of honor were deadly serious, and defending one's honor with one's life was considered an act of integrity. Comparative honor had different practical and normative implications: a gentleman could and should pursue glory in this sense, but it could never justify disobedience to the sovereign, nor generate acceptable grounds for dueling.

As is usual, Hobbes's critique of honor begins with his definitions. In the civility manuals, honor bore more than one meaning. One essential sense of the word was categorial or "natural" honor that connected the internal sense of honor to public acknowledgment of that honor, and was tied to an ethical code which could justify violence and disobedience. It enjoined men to risk their lives when their honor was at stake. "Glory," on the other

⁸²Bacon, *The Charge*, 10.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 9.

hand, was related to renown for prominent exploits. In Romei's words, "Glorie, the faithfull heire as it were, of Praise, is no other but a common and approued opinion, of another mans excellent vertue and Heroycall acts."⁸⁴ Glory was understood in distinction to natural honor, which was claimed by all men, and was the "common opinion, that he honored, hath never failed in justice," that is, has never dishonored himself. In Hobbes's text, glory becomes the internal side of comparative honor; it is the satisfaction that an individual takes from the contemplation of his own superiority. Hobbes defined honor as nothing more than the recognition by others of the same. The categorial meaning of honor, which carried the normative justification for violently confronting insults and for other forms of disobedience, is dropped. By conflating the two concepts of honor, Hobbes reframed principled quarrels of honor as vain spats, deflating the normative pretensions of the categorial variety, and denying any normative basis for disobedience and violence.

Interpreters impressed by Hobbes's critique of glory have often seen the issue in terms of class, depicting Hobbes as a great bourgeois ideologist drawing the curtains on an aristocratic worldview. Strauss writes that "Hobbes's political philosophy is directed against the aristocratic rules of life in the name of bourgeois rules of life. His morality is the morality of the bourgeois world."⁸⁵ On this interpretation, Hobbes was concerned specifically with an aristocratic tendency to seek *comparative* glory, which led to rivalry and thus to war. The aim was to tame the glory-seeking aristocrats in order to give free rein to the rational pursuit of self-interest by everyone else. If this reading is correct, then it might seem as though Hobbes's battle is long since won. The European aristocracies have fallen, and paragons of instrumental calculation—modern states and corporations—have taken their place. The children of pride tamed, we moderns face a new set of challenges, perhaps those of Weber's iron cage, or Nietzsche's last men.⁸⁶

There is a kernel of truth to this interpretation. Hobbes *was* critical of the ideology of honor that underpinned dueling, and that ideology was primarily an elite affair. He saw the ethos of reflexive honor as "a custom not many years since begun," thanks partly to the popularity of authors such as

⁸⁴Romei, *The Courtier's Academie*, 125. For Romei, glory is much closer to "perfect" or "acquired" honor, which I have been calling "comparative honor." Between these, the only distinction is that glory appears to require some public monument or recognition, whereas honor, "without any other signe or reward, may be preserved in the memory with men, through infinit ages."

⁸⁵Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 121.

⁸⁶Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). Laurie Johnson Bagby, *Thomas Hobbes: Turning Point for Honor* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), argues that Hobbes's philosophy has moved us into a world of instrumental calculation at the expense of honor.

Castiglione.⁸⁷ In *Behemoth*, he complains: “Fine cloaths, great feathers, civility toward men that will not swallow injuries, and injury toward them that will, is the present gallantry.”⁸⁸ For Hobbes, scruples about minor insults were a matter of young men showing off the fancy manners they learned on tours of the Continent or in the manuals. Perhaps optimistically, Hobbes believed that a determined sovereign might be able to stamp out dueling when “there shall be honor ordained for them that refuse, and ignominy for them that make the challenge.”⁸⁹

Yet to read Hobbes as *exclusively* concerned with aristocratic competition is doubly misleading. First, Hobbes thought that the violent sensitivity to insult is the most inflammatory source of conflict, *not* positional striving for honor. It is the manifold forms of contempt and failures to acknowledge equality, wherever they might occur, that are most destabilizing. Second, Hobbes intended his analysis to extend far beyond the aristocracy. The ideology that justified dueling was a temporary aberration but the prickly impulses that motivated them were rooted deep in human nature, posing a standing threat to public order. Hobbes himself was a commoner among gentlemen, and was apparently of prickly disposition. According to Aubrey, “if provoked, he was sharp and bitter.”⁹⁰ It should therefore be no surprise that Hobbes took notice of the arrogance shown by elites towards their social inferiors. To illustrate the law of contumely, Hobbes did not refer to paradigmatic attacks on aristocratic honor (“rascal,” giving the lie, etc.). He instead used cases of interclass contempt: “For what is more ordinary than reproaches of those that are rich, towards them that are not? or of those that sit in place of judicature, towards those that are accused at the bar?” This is why he considered equity to be such an important virtue for the sovereign.⁹¹ Favoring the mighty, especially in the administration of justice, inevitably stirs up hatred and insurrectionary feelings: “impunity [for the powerful] maketh insolence; insolence, hatred; and hatred, an endeavour to pull down all oppressing and contumelious greatness, though with the ruin of the commonwealth.”⁹² Here, it is less an elite class of glory-seeking aristocrats than populist anger at “contumelious greatness” that endangers the commonwealth. In practice, furthermore, the two could be combined to disastrous effect: ambitious antimonarchist leaders, after all, had in Hobbes’s view stoked the popular sense of oppression to win support for rebellion.⁹³ The manuals identify as insulting any behavior by one gentleman that implies that another was of a lower order of person. Within the logic of the manuals, this applied only

⁸⁷L 27.19, 196.

⁸⁸B 38.

⁸⁹L 10.49, 54.

⁹⁰John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark (London: Clarendon, 1898), 373.

⁹¹E 16.11. Cf. DC 3.12, 49; L 30.15, 226.

⁹²L 30.16, 227.

⁹³B 26.

between elite men. Hobbes extended the claim, arguing that no man likes to be so treated, and is likely to react aggressively when he is. The most serious problem to be solved is not rivalry between individuals, but the violent sense of offense provoked by claims to categorial superiority.

Hobbes's prescription for peace, like his diagnosis of the causes of war, is drawn from the culture of honor and civility in which he wrote. Since all men are as sensitive to insult as the gentlemen of the manuals, all must attend to their manners as fastidiously as Castiglione's courtier. Hobbes signaled the connection between civility and his laws of nature with overt references to "civil conversation,"⁹⁴ with his laws of contumely and equality, and with the underlying justification of avoiding offense that he provides for all his natural laws. Even his law of justice is framed in terms of the gentleman's first commandment: to keep one's word.⁹⁵ Hobbes believed that the failure to acknowledge equality could raise the hackles of any man, and therefore that glory is a problem in all societies. To establish peace, Hobbes elevated the principles of elite civility to universal moral philosophy; he writes a natural law of good manners.

⁹⁴L 15.40, 100.

⁹⁵L 15.1, 89.