

TED H. MILLER. *Mortal Gods: Science, Politics, and the Humanist Ambitions of Thomas Hobbes*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011. Pp. 338. \$74.95 (cloth). doi:10.1017/jbr.2013.140

This rigorously argued and thought-provoking book challenges various received views of Hobbes by means of a few deceptively simple, mutually reinforcing interpretive moves. Against the prevailing current of interdisciplinary borrowing between the humanities and social sciences, Miller, a political scientist, takes a broadly contextualist approach to Hobbes and a constructivist approach to his science. The methodological and historiographical influences of Quentin Skinner, whose *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996) is a major target here, and of Mario Biagioli in his *Galileo, Courtier* (Chicago, 1993) are particularly evident. More broadly, Miller draws on studies of seventeenth-century science, mathematics, and their relation to Renaissance humanism in his portrayal of a Hobbes—and a Hobbesian project—whose audience was, emphatically, *not us*.

Miller's chief contention with respect to Hobbes's career and its historiography is that, contrary to Skinner and others, it was not "phased." The celebrated moment in 1630 when Hobbes discovered Euclid and was converted did not in fact mark any fundamental break with an earlier "humanist" period, did not initiate a uniquely "mathematical" phase (represented by *De cive*), and was not ultimately undone by a "return" to rhetorical as opposed to rational means of persuasion (*Leviathan*). To the contrary, Hobbes inherited, maintained, and extended a particular humanist understanding of geometrical reasoning as "a possession manifest in practice" (233) that conferred on its possessor new and creative powers. It was this conception that led him to elevate geometry—a "creative" rather than merely "imitative" science—above both other forms of mathematics and every kind of natural philosophy. It motivated Hobbes's demand for the refashioning of the university curriculum, the principle engine for the reshaping of the state itself; it also underlay his later, ill-fated debate with John Wallis (explored in depth in an appendix, 221–237). The difference in presentation between *De cive* and *Leviathan* reflects no great shift in Hobbes's convictions but rather his adjustment to the different audiences the works addressed: students to be taught by the force of geometrical demonstration, in one case; a monarch to be swayed by a masque-text, in the other.

Geometry's capacity to *create* new truths, not to represent the world as it is, was Hobbes's answer to philosophical skepticism and political uncertainty. Pace Carl Schmitt (whose own reading of Hobbes is the object of an enlightening critique, 70–75), this made Hobbes's mathematics integral, not hostile, to his political theology; and pace nearly everyone, it was not the fruit of a quest for certainty but a frank assertion of human power in the face of uncertainty. As Miller puts it, with one eye on contemporary debates in political science and the other on seventeenth-century intellectual and political crises, "Protesting the ontological indeterminacy of either the world or politics . . . is no way to catch Hobbes unawares" (209). Predicating his projection of absolute power on just this indeterminacy, Hobbes's gift to the sovereign was the capacity not to identify stable foundations but to build them for himself: not to read God's mind but to emulate his power. Hobbes's concomitant challenge to the sovereign—a challenge few of his readers, then or since, could accept—was to do so on the basis not of divine right conferred from above but instead of a mortal divinity conferred by implied consent from below. Herein, Miller avers, lies a caution: even as we uncover the space between the actual practices and the burnished image of the state, we should realize that a critical response to the violence that bridges this gap is not the only one possible.

This is a highly original view of Hobbes, yet in certain respects it seems long overdue. If Miller's insistence that Hobbes be removed from the canon of would-be social scientists for the sake of examination sounds like old hat, his application of this rule yields a Hobbes at once more fully of the seventeenth century and yet also more informative for our own time.

Despite long-current methodological pieties, many scholars still write at times as if a certain subset of early modern thinkers engaged in social science *avant la lettre*, aspiring to accurate representations of society with predictive power in essentially the same fashion as later economists, sociologists, or political scientists—though yoking their efforts to archaic political or cultural ends. There is also a persistent tendency to lump together divergent mathematical approaches to society and politics under the general rubric of “quantification.” There is not a whiff of either tendency here, and in consequence, Miller’s work will be of considerable value not only in situating Hobbes’s arguments but also in elucidating the complex relationships between his political project and seventeenth-century alternatives. Miller briefly notes the various educational reforms put forward by the “circle” around Samuel Hartlib—equally though differently aimed at reshaping society and the state—but his account will also be helpful in thinking about later engagements with related questions, for example, by Hobbes’s erstwhile associate William Petty.

In this regard, it is unfortunate that Miller does not say more about these relationships and about Hobbes’s seventeenth- as opposed to his twentieth-century legacy. Given the breadth of scholarship on display and the number of disciplinary balls in the air, it is undeniably churlish to point out that little recent work on the Hartlib Circle or other heirs of Francis Bacon is cited. In light of Bacon’s role in Hobbes’s view of philosophy, however, it is hard not to wonder what might have been. More seriously, both the principled decommissioning of Hobbes as social scientist and the explanatory burden placed on his distinction between creative and imitative sciences raise the question of how unique he was and in what respects. If the expectations of predictive or prescriptive social science do not fit Hobbes, do they fit any of his contemporaries much better? If not, then might some of these contemporaries have understood their own efforts in terms comparable to Hobbes’s? One of the keynotes of recent scholarship on early modern science has been its transformative rather than representational ambitions. One thinks here of alchemy: couched as imitative or “perfective” of nature yet also envisioned—not least by some of Hartlib’s associates, and indeed some of Hobbes’s—as a possible key to remaking the world. If Hobbes is no longer talking directly to us, then what sort of company should he keep?

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Recent critics have frequently found, in the English representation of foreign tongues, anxieties about national identity or the feared superiority of continental learning. Marianne Montgomery instead argues, in her book on non-English languages and speakers on the English Renaissance stage, that the close proximity of multiple languages in plays can be productive of social cohesion and understanding of cultural difference through audience identification. This is a welcome intervention; despite extensively documented English concerns with otherness in the Renaissance, we should not assume that any evocation of difference is disruptive. Montgomery’s more optimistic approach gives us a fuller view of both the cosmopolitanism of London life and theatrical audiences’ capability for nuance.

The first of Montgomery’s four chapters, the only one primarily devoted to Shakespeare, draws interesting parallels between the references to Welsh in *Henry IV, Part 1* and the languages of *Henry V*, including characterizations (or caricatures) of Welsh dialect and large