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*When Self-Preservation Bids:
Approaching Milton, Hobbes, and Dissent*

Following John Aubrey, the story usually told of John Milton and Thomas Hobbes is that they were “diametrically opposite” on the topics of their day.¹ If one thought one thing, the other would have been opposed, and it falls to contemporary scholars to say how and why. Milton was a pious republican and an advocate for free speech and religious toleration. Hobbes therefore must have been all that Milton was not: an atheist, an absolutist, and a conformist. From Marjorie H. Nicolson in 1926 to Catherine Gimelli Martin in 1999, the contrasts have been drawn vividly and have even yielded some remarkably insightful scholarship: with Aubrey’s evaluation inevitably buttressing the argument, Hobbes and Milton have regularly proven useful foils for one another.² Yet unremarked upon in such studies is the fact that at some point, Aubrey, who returned to his *Lives* over many years, decided such language was too categorical, and so replaced the symbol editors have taken to mean “diametrically opposite” with something softer: “Their Interests and

1. John Aubrey, “Collections for the Life of Milton,” *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), p. 1023.

2. See, e.g., Marjorie Hope Nicolson, “Milton and Hobbes,” *Studies in Philology* 23.4 (1926); Don Marion Wolfe, “Milton and Hobbes: A Contrast in Social Temper,” *Studies in Philology* 41.3 (1944); Catherine Gimelli Martin, “The Phoenix and the Crocodile: Milton’s Natural Law Debate with Hobbes Retried in the Tragic Forum of *Samson Agonistes*,” *The English Civil Wars in the Literary Imagination*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia Mo., and London, 1999), and Johann P. Sommerville, “Hobbes and Independency,” *Rivista Di Storia Della Filosofia* (new series) 1.1 (2004), 171. See also R. S. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge Eng., 1996) for the argument that *Leviathan* “did more in the long run to eclipse Milton’s reputation and the traditional notion of Natural Law . . . than did any institution such as kingship,” p. 243. Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674* (Princeton, NJ, 2004) and E. M. Curley, “Introduction,” *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. E. M. Curley (Indianapolis, 1994), pp. xlv–xlv, are notable exceptions.

Tenets did run counter to each other.”³ Although Merritt Y. Hughes, for unknown reasons, prints in his much used Milton edition of 1957 “diametrically opposite,” all Aubrey editors since at least 1898 have considered it a “rejected alternative.”⁴ What provoked Aubrey’s change? Thinking about answers provides an opportunity to wonder if the heuristic device of divining one man’s position from the other’s may sometimes obscure what it seeks to clarify. Consider what happens, for example, when we reconfigure the usual categories to ask what each thought about the role of priests in civil affairs: Milton and Hobbes have unexpectedly similar positions, each finding the episcopacy corrosive and each even relying on a common source, John Selden.⁵ “It does not require much foreshortening of historical explanation,” Mark Goldie has remarked, “to say of Hobbes that, ecclesiologically, he was a Whig.”⁶ Or consider that Oxford University burned their books together at the Exam Schools after the Rye House Plot.⁷ Previous studies have paid insufficient attention to the reasons why their books were put to a common flame.

Addressing these questions requires a reconsideration of both Milton and Hobbes. I want to re-evaluate the story usually told of Hobbes and Milton, attending to one area particularly: religious toleration. I will examine the period from the mid-1660’s to the early 1670’s in order to ask whether in the Restoration moment of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* especially, the divisions usually drawn between Hobbes and Milton are far too stark. I do not wish to claim that Milton and Hobbes were friendly or partial to one another (they were not), but instead that, as Aubrey at some point recognized, their interests overlapped during the Restoration and that, when pressed by circumstances, they were not “too impolitic els and too crude”—Milton’s charge in the *Digression*

3. Aubrey’s “*Brief Lives*,” *Chiefly of Contemporaries*, ed. Andrew Clark, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1898), II, 72. Aubrey inserted “did run counter” with a carrot. See John Aubrey, *Lives Manuscript*, Bodleian Library, Aubrey MSS 8, fo. 63v.

4. Aubrey’s “*Brief Lives*,” ed. Clark I, 7. Nicolson and Martin both miss or disregard Aubrey’s emendation and quote “diametrically opposite.” Nicolson italicizes it for emphasis, p. 413.

5. For Milton and Selden, see Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in “Paradise Lost”* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 85–137 and Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England’s Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford, 2006). For Hobbes and Selden, see Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651*, (Cambridge, Eng., 1993), pp. 205–21. See also *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), p. xxviii.

6. Mark Goldie, “Priestcraft and the Birth of Whiggism,” *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Philippson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, Eng., 1993).

7. *The Judgment and Decree of the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1683), p. 7.

against the English people—to find tolerable or even admirable qualities in the other's aims and methods.⁸ Rather than uncritically projecting Civil War divisions onto the Restoration, I hope to tell a story that involves, for complicated reasons, the surprisingly welcome reception Hobbes's notion of self-preservation found among dissenters in the Restoration, a reception demonstrated in *Samson Agonistes* that challenges many of the ways scholars have considered Hobbes and Milton. *Samson Agonistes* offers a potent example of the important modifications to notions of sovereignty and subjectivity underway in the 1660's and 1670's as a result of Parliament's persecution of dissenters.⁹

To begin with, I hope to paint a diptych with a central vanishing point, portraying, on the one hand, "a more tolerant Hobbes" and, on the other, more Hobbesian tolerationists.¹⁰ In order to complicate the persistent impression of Hobbes as an absolutist, I will highlight some scholarship on Hobbes's activities in the 1660's that has yet to be integrated into Milton studies, and I will bring to view some evidence of his tolerationist thought in that period. Sometimes in spite of *Leviathan's* argument for sovereign authority over religious questions and sometimes because of it, a number of religious and political dissenters were attracted to and employed Hobbes's claims—particularly those radical elements for which Hobbes was considered dangerous by the Restoration state and the Anglican clergy. My reading of *Samson Agonistes* then takes into consideration the Restoration's shifting alliances and dissenters' tenuous relationship with particular facets of Hobbes's thought. My conclusion will suggest that in its confrontation with, consideration of, and ultimately, cooption of certain facets of Hobbesian thought, *Samson Agonistes* represents a critical turn in the history of political philosophy.

II

It is not the case that Hobbes, as a good monarchist, reveled in the Restoration of Charles II. Richard Tuck is right to describe the Restoration as an "ambiguous event" for Hobbes, not the "unmixt blessing" for Hobbes that reductive Civil War divisions between monarchist and

8. *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, 1953–1980), V, 451.

9. As will become clear, I thus concur with the present scholarly consensus that Milton wrote *Samson* during the Restoration.

10. The felicitous phrase belongs to Ryan. See Alan Ryan, "A More Tolerant Hobbes?," *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus (Cambridge, Eng., 1988).

parliamentarian might seem to yield.¹¹ Among many problems with that account, at least two should give us significant pause: the first is the evidence of Hobbes's connection with Interregnum Oxford, especially John Owen's tutor and the future tolerationist, Thomas Barlow.¹² The second is that Hobbes was still at loggerheads with royalist Presbyterians and Anglicans, most notably Clarendon, the man who had opposed Hobbes ever since the original publication of *Leviathan* in 1651, having bragged that he had "had . . . some hand in the discountenancing" of Hobbes that precipitated Hobbes's departure from Charles II's court in exile in Paris in 1652.¹³ Such was the weariness with which the Restoration court viewed Hobbes that Hobbes ultimately had to publish his 1668 *Opera* and 1670 Latin edition of *Leviathan* in Amsterdam because the English register refused to license them.¹⁴

In fact, there is considerable reason to think, as Hobbes did, that more than just his books were in danger. Twice in the 1660's, Parliament proposed to charge Hobbes with heresy, which occasioned Hobbes to churn out eight works in four years, a prodigious output for anyone, let alone a man who turned eighty in 1668.¹⁵ Among those eight works composed between 1666 and 1670 was a work denying Parliament's authority over matters of belief, *Historical Narration Concerning Heresy, and the Punishment thereof*, which Hobbes proposed (unsuccessfully) to publish in 1668 to defend himself against Parliament's actions against him. But his self-preservationist polemic, while an important part of the story (and one to which I will return), is only a part, for as Tuck also points out, the proposals to try Hobbes for heresy and atheism came within a larger milieu of Parliamentary debate on measures for dealing with religious nonconformity, debates Milton had entered in *Of Civil Power* and would enter again in *Of True Religion* in 1673. The following context indeed may be familiar to Milton critics, but historians and Hobbes scholars have only recently attempted to understand its

11. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651*, p. 336, Wolfe, "Milton and Hobbes," p. 421.

12. See Barlow's letter to Hobbes in Thomas Hobbes, *Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Noel Malcolm, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1994), I, 420–21.

13. Tuck, p. 326.

14. This despite Hobbes's close connections with Lord Arlington. See Tuck, p. 341. For an alternative account of this period, see Philip Milton, "Hobbes, Heresy and Lord Arlington," *History of Political Thought* 14.4 (1993).

15. Tuck, p. 342.

importance to Hobbes. When Parliament was debating whether and how to renew the first Conventicles Act, which had lapsed on the very day *Paradise Lost* was entered into the Stationers' Register—August 20th, 1667—Hobbes found himself aligned with Independents in wishing that Parliament would take no new measures.¹⁶ Whenever nonconformity came up in Parliament (which in these years was all too often), so apparently did his *Leviathan*—and not for commendation.¹⁷ With one group, composed mostly of Anglicans, talking of strengthening the lapsed Conventicles Act, and another group of moderate Anglicans and some Presbyterians calling for limited religious “comprehension,” Hobbes’s interests lay with the Independents, who saw little call for enforcement of religious belief. In the summer of 1668, Parliament was adjourned. On May 4, just before adjournment, the Commons had passed and sent to the Lords a stringent new conventicles bill; the Lords would debate it in August.¹⁸ Hobbes sprang to action, sending off his *Historical Narration* to Lord Arlington’s under-secretary on June 9, and then on June 30, knowing the Lords would convene on August 11, he urgently requested to “have [it] . . . licensed or not licensed by Sunday night.”¹⁹ In the *Narration*, Hobbes notes with barely restrained discontent how Charles had “restored the bishops, and pardoned the Presbyterians,” and attempts to dissuade them from “fierceness.”²⁰ This position made sense for a man fearing persecution, yet it also accorded with his persistent campaign against Anglican and Presbyterian prelacy and, surprisingly, even previous pleas for toleration.

16. That *Paradise Lost* was entered into the Stationers' Register in August despite its having been contracted since April suggests that the lapsing of the Conventicles Act may have been the reason for registry on this date. For the date of the lapsing, see Tuck, p. 337. For a good recent discussion of the publication of the first edition of *Paradise Lost*, which does not, however, note the importance of the lapsing of the Conventicles Act, see Hugh Wilson, “The Publication of *Paradise Lost*, the Occasion of the First Edition: Censorship and Resistance,” *Milton Studies* 37 (1999).

17. On October 16 and 17, 1666, for example, a House of Commons committee that requested *Leviathan* be scrutinized linked it to improper “observation of the Lord’s day.” Parliament, *Journals of the House of Commons* (1803), VIII, 636.

18. As it turned out, Parliament would not meet again for nine more months, allowing dissenters relative freedom even after Parliament returned in October 1669 and until the Lords’ passed the bill in 1670.

19. For his letters to Joseph Williamson, Lord Arlington’s under-secretary, see Hobbes, *Correspondence*, II, 692, 699.

20. Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. William Molesworth, 11 vols. (1839), IV, 407–08.

It may seem ironic that Hobbes became one of uniformity's targets since it is often claimed that religious uniformity was one of *Leviathan's* central desires. The inferences are drawn easily enough from comparisons that Restoration opponents made between Hobbes and the Anglican clergyman Samuel Parker, Gilbert Sheldon's chaplain, whose vituperative conformist tract *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Polity* drew a firestorm of criticism from latitudinarians and nonconformists for its argument that "it was necessary there should be one supreme and public judgment to whose determination the private judgment of every single person should be obliged to submit himself."²¹ A careful look at *Leviathan*, however, shows an argument with different emphases. Hobbes is less intent to demand a sovereign determination on religious matters than he is to emphasize that the authority to do so belongs to the sovereign, not to presbyters or bishops. A sovereign could rule and punish on matters of religion, but Hobbes presses this to show that priests could not.²² Before presbyters, bishops, and popes came along to tie "knot[s] upon [believers'] liberty," according to Hobbes, peoples' "Consciences were free, and their Words and Actions subject to none but the Civill Power."²³ Consequently, the admirable state that dissolves "the praeterpolitically Church Government" is one in which

We are reduced to the Independency of the Primative Christians to follow Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos, every man as he liketh best: Which, if it be without contention, and without measuring the Doctrine of Christ, by our affection to the Person of his Minister, (the fault which the Apostle reprehended in the Corinthians,) is perhaps the best: First because there ought to be no Power over the Consciences of men, but of the Word it selfe, working Faith in every one, not always according to the purpose of them that Plant and Water, but of God himself, that giveth the Increase; and secondly, because it is unreasonable in them, who teach there is such danger in every little Errour, to require of a man endued with Reason

21. Samuel Parker, *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1669), pp. 28–29. On dissenters' responses linking Parker and Hobbes, see Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 39–74.

22. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 521–608. On sovereign authority over matters of belief, it is important to distinguish between "could" and "should." For a discussion of the problems of deducing "ought" from "is" in Hobbes, see Perez Zagorin, "Cudworth and Hobbes on Is and Ought," *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640–1700*, ed. Richard W. F. Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Zagorin (Cambridge, Eng., 1992).

23. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 710.

of his own, to follow the Reason of any other man, of the voices of many other men; Which is little better, then to venture his Salvation at crosse and pile.²⁴

A passage such as this castigating a "Power over the Consciences of men" makes it difficult to maintain either that "Hobbes does not believe in freedom of conscience," or that Hobbes "render[s] conscience null and void."²⁵ In granting religious authority to the sovereign and at the same time praising a state where each man follows "as he liketh best," *Leviathan* called ultimately for sovereigns to intervene only as much as was required to maintain peace. This was Erastianism, to be sure, but it accorded more with Selden's argument that the state could order religion only "so farr that [disputants] should not cutt one anothers throotes" than with Parker's absolutism.²⁶ Goldie captures the gradations of the period with the observation that "Hobbes was taken to lean towards religious toleration. But his ecclesiastical reputation remained ambivalent, for Erastianism could also justify the repression of religious nonconformity."²⁷ Hobbes doubted that peaceful coexistence could be assured without a sovereign's authority to declare doctrine, as Shapin and Schaffer point out, but he did not require sovereign declarations in every possible instance.²⁸ "[I]f it be without contention," diversity was acceptable. That *Leviathan* came to occupy something of a no man's land in the Restoration debates over toleration, as likely to be mined for arguments as castigated, is testament to Hobbes's moderation more than to his absolutism.²⁹

24. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 711. Perhaps defending himself against the bishops, Hobbes attempted to retreat from this passage by omitting it from his Latin editions, but the three separate English editions circulating with this passage meant Hobbes's reputation was difficult to dislodge.

25. The first statement appears in Norberto Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, tr. Daniela Gobetti (Chicago and London, 1993), p. 70, and reappears without qualification in White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, p. 244. The second appears in Martin, "The Phoenix and the Crocodile," p. 257.

26. John Selden, *Table Talk of John Selden*, ed. Frederick Pollock (London, 1927), p. 120.

27. Mark Goldie, "The Reception of Hobbes," *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), p. 614.

28. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 283–331.

29. See Derek Hirst, "Making All Religion Ridiculous: Of Culture High and Low: The Polemics of Toleration, 1667–1673," *Renaissance Forum* 1.1 (1996). A revised version of this online essay appears in "Samuel Parker, Andrew Marvell, and Political Culture, 1667–73," in *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. Hirst and Richard Strier (Cambridge, Eng., 1999). See also Gordon J. Schochet, "Between Lambeth and Leviathan: Samuel Parker on the Church of England and Political Order," *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Philipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1993).

Hobbes's concern with heresy in the summer of 1668 continues *Leviathan's* disapproval of the "Power over the Consciences of men." Defining heresy as "no more than a private opinion, without reference to truth and falsehood," *Historical Narration Concerning Heresy* concludes with an anticlerical appeal to "what St. Paul (2 Tim. ii. 24, 25) saith even in case of obstinate holding of an error: *the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves . . . of which counsel, such fierceness as hath appeared in the disputation of divines . . . is a violation.*"³⁰ What is more, the 1668 and 1670 Latin editions of *Leviathan* included extended discussions critical of laws against heresy that had not been part of the 1651 edition—all of which suggests the extent to which state enforcement of belief troubled the later Hobbes both as a matter of personal safety and as a theoretical matter, if the two might even be distinguished, either under the auspices of Hobbesian "self-preservation" or otherwise.³¹

Given that most of Hobbes's writing from the Restoration period was suppressed from publication during his lifetime (in a way Milton's was not), it is unclear whether Hobbes appeared to his contemporaries as a "radical tolerationist," as Tuck has claimed—Philip Milton has taken issue with this characterization—but Hobbes's activities in the late 1660's indicate his sympathies with tolerant factions of Restoration politics.³² One of the few pieces of writing Hobbes was able to get past press controls was a commendatory letter introducing Edward Howard's 1669 poem *The British Princes*.³³ Noting that critics disagreed with his previous recommendation of Davenant's *Gondibert*, whose royalist author Milton had once helped to free from prison and who probably returned the favor when Milton was imprisoned after the Restoration, Hobbes says that he will nevertheless "take my liberty to praise what

30. Hobbes, *Works*, IV, 388, 408. Cf. Milton in *On Civil Power* (1659): "heresie . . . is no word of evil note; meaning only the choice or following of any opinion good or bad in religion or any other learning." *CPW*, ed. Wolfe, VII, 247.

31. Ryan, "A More Tolerant Hobbes?," p. 50.

32. Richard Tuck, "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration," *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence, Kan., 1990). Philip Milton attributes Hobbes's fears to "an over-active imagination working on an unduly fearful temperament," an account that is unsatisfactory in its failure to consider how prevalent—and justified—dissenters' fears of persecution were. Milton, "Hobbes, Heresy and Lord Arlington," p. 503.

33. Since Hobbes understood the book was already licensed when he wrote his letter, the epistle might be seen as a conscious attempt to bypass press controls. See Hobbes, *Correspondence*, II, 704–05.

I like as well as they do to reprehend what they do not like.”³⁴ The phrase might not raise any eyebrows were it not for the volume in which it appears. Howard’s poem was dedicated to a Catholic, and Edward Howard was the brother of Sir Robert Howard, the Dryden opponent who had spearheaded Parliament’s charge against Clarendon in 1667, managing the impeachment conference with the House of Lords. In his pursuit of Clarendon, “Nothing but impeachment . . . would satisfy Howard,” Oliver reports.³⁵ When *The British Princes* was published, Sir Robert Howard was collaborating with the future Cabal minister and outspoken tolerationist Buckingham.³⁶ It was Buckingham, whom Sir Robert Howard considered “a great man,” who had introduced the tolerationist legislation that Parliament considered in 1668.³⁷ For Hobbes to lend his name to such a volume indicates something of a common cause, and his swipe at those who “reprehend what they do not like” therefore takes on a decidedly tolerationist coloring. Yet even more significant is what gets left out of Hobbes’s October 24, 1668 manuscript letter when the volume goes to print in 1669. In both the manuscript and the printed version, Hobbes guardedly recommends the poem, but in print the following is omitted: “I have told you my judgment and you may make use of it as you please. But I remember a line or two in your poem that touched upon divinity, wherein we differed in opinion. But since you say the book is licensed, I shall think no more upon it, but only reserve my liberty of dissenting, which I know you will allow me.”³⁸ With Parliament scheduled to reconvene on November 10th and non-conformity near the top of its agenda, the phrase “liberty of dissenting” could hardly be used lightly. Nor, apparently, could it be used publicly. Yet privately—we do not know who omitted the passage—Hobbes is willing to both claim and grant religious liberty, cordially agreeing—in stark contrast to Parliament’s treatment of dissenters—to “think no more upon it.”

Hobbes’s willingness to claim “my liberty of dissenting” brings into question his own religious beliefs, about which little is known and much

34. See *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London, 1932), pp. 272–74, Edward Howard, *The Brittish Princes: An Heroick Poem* (1669), sig. [A8].

35. H. J. Oliver, *Sir Robert Howard, 1626–1698: A Critical Biography* (Durham, N.C., 1963), p. 134.

36. J. P. Vander Motten, “Howard, Sir Robert (1626–1698),” DNB.

37. Oliver, *Sir Robert Howard, 1626–1698: A Critical Biography*, p. 134.

38. Hobbes, *Correspondence*, II, 704–05.

is speculated. His opponents, of course, often charged him with atheism, but the fact, often ignored, that the latter third of *Leviathan* is given over to spiritual concerns militates against that charge.³⁹ More plausible is Tuck's suggestion that Hobbes, like Milton perhaps, held heretical Socinian beliefs. Hobbes's continued antagonism toward the harshest elements of Anglican uniformity certainly buttresses that argument.⁴⁰ In any case, as John Pocock has shown, the fact that Samuel Parker could allude to *Leviathan*'s frontispiece as an example of gnosticism underscores how slim the distinction could be between religious "enthusiasm," a charge leveled at Milton, and the "atheism" with which Hobbes was most often accused.⁴¹

Emerging from this account of Hobbes's activities in the 1660s is one answer to the question of why Aubrey revised his description of Hobbes's and Milton's relationship. Judging from *Behemoth*, where Hobbes blamed the Civil War on rebels' reading "the books written by famous men of the ancient Grecian and Roman commonwealths concerning their polity and great actions," Aubrey was right that Milton and Hobbes had differing interests.⁴² Yet in the same work could be found Hobbes's critique of "the power to determine points of faith, and to be judges in the inner court of conscience of moral duties, and a power to punish those men, that obey not their precepts, by ecclesiastical censure."⁴³ Keeping both strains in view, we can imagine why Milton, a man who married Katherine Woodcock in a civil ceremony because he denied clerical authority over marriage, "would acknowledge [Hobbes] to be a man of great parts, and a learned man" even as he "did not like

39. Richard Tuck, "The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes," *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, Eng., 1993). Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, 2005) argues Hobbes's treatment of religion is consistently "instrumental," pp. 37–52.

40. On Hobbes and Socinianism, see Tuck, "The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes," p. 131. On Milton, see Michael Lieb, "Milton and the Socinian Heresy," *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb, and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh, 2003), William Kolbrener, "The Charge of Socinianism: Charles Leslie's High Church Defense of 'True Religion,'" *The Journal of the Historical Society* 3.1 (2003).

41. J. G. A. Pocock, "Thomas Hobbes, Atheist or Enthusiast? His Place in a Restoration Debate," *History of Political Thought* 11.4 (1990). On "enthusiasm" as a disparaging term used by defenders of uniformity, see Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003), pp. 154–81.

42. Hobbes, *Works*, VI, 168.

43. Hobbes, *Works*, VI, 171.

him at all.”⁴⁴ Hobbes was notoriously prickly, and he was clearly disgusted at the “rebellion.” Yet his iconoclasm led Waller to observe, in terms the author of *Samson Agonistes* would have appreciated, that Hobbes, although “a private person, pulled down all the churches, dispelled the mists of ignorance, and laid open their priestcraft.”⁴⁵ In a work written in the mid-1670’s, Albertus Warren included Hobbes in the tolerationist pantheon with Milton, Erasmus, Baxter, and Grotius, among others, as those who “have unanimously approv’d of Reason as the best Guide, and favour’d, or coolly advis’d, a circumscrib’d Toleration.”⁴⁶ As Collins remarks, “If we focus on [the] ecclesiological axis, running between Erastians and clericalists, Hobbes was much closer to the Cromwellian Independents than to the Presbyterians (or Episcopalians) loyal to the Stuart dynasty.”⁴⁷ To be sure, focus on the “ecclesiological axis” runs the risk of eclipsing important areas of disagreement between Hobbes and Milton. However, for many writers in the late 1660’s and early 1670’s, especially those persecuted by the state, the question of most immediate concern was the question of religious toleration.

III

Having attempted to coax out a “more tolerant Hobbes,” I want now to illuminate the welcome reception particular elements of Hobbes’s work found among a number of religious dissenters—my attempt, that is, to show more Hobbesian tolerationists. This is a story best told by tracking the use of a phrase that in the 1660’s had become the shibboleth of “Hobbism,” “self-preservation.” In sentiments that were already famous and were circulating with new vigor in the late 1660’s, Hobbes had written in *Leviathan*: “And because the condition of Man . . . is a

44. Aubrey, “Collections for the Life of Milton,” p. 1023. On Milton’s marriage to Katherine Woodcock in a civil ceremony, and his views on marriage more generally, see Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in Paradise Lost*, esp. pp. 87–93.

45. Aubrey’s “Brief Lives,” ed. Clark, I, 358.

46. Albertus Warren, *An Apology for the Discourse of Humane Reason*, Early English Books, 1641–1700 / 1135:10 (1680), p. 142. Martin Dzelzainis has recently brought this important allusion to our attention. See his “Albertus Warren on Milton and Toleration: An Unnoticed Allusion,” *Notes and Queries* 46:244 (1999), p. 3.

47. Jeffrey Collins, “Silencing Thomas Hobbes: The Presbyterians and Their Printers,” 2004, a paper presented at The History of Books and Intellectual History Conference at Princeton University, December 3–5, 2004. Available: <http://csb.princeton.edu/index.php?app=download&id=11>, 25 January 2005. I am grateful to Dr. Collins for his permission to quote from a then unpublished work. But see now Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*.

condition of Warre of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies; It followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body. And therefore, as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be,) of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live.”⁴⁸ These were provocative notions with Grotian undertones.⁴⁹ Attempting to take the sting from them but indicating also what made Hobbes *sui generis*, one Restoration opponent accused Hobbes of simply dressing up commonplaces with the unique vocabulary of self-preservation: “it is an easie matter,” he wrote, to take old ideas and “scatter up and down some little insinuations of the state of nature, self preservation, and such like fundamental phrases.”⁵⁰

Before attending to Hobbes’s “fundamental phrase” “self-preservation,” it is worth remarking on the general renaissance Hobbes’s *Leviathan* found in the late 1660’s and early 1670’s, coinciding with the debates over toleration. The renaissance would be the envy of contemporary marketing executives and entailed all the elements of a contemporary cultural controversy—the emergence of a provocative work, followed by denunciations and defenses, and ultimately huge sales. Pepys’s *Diary* for September 3, 1668 records that Pepys went “To my bookseller’s for ‘Hobbes’s Leviathan’, which is now mightily called for: and what was heretofore sold for 8s. I now give for 24s. at the second hand, and is sold for 30s.”⁵¹ *Leviathan* was first published in Latin that same year in Amsterdam as part of Hobbes’s collected works, and must have been in high demand, for it was published again in 1670, when Hobbes published the Latin edition alone, also in Amsterdam. One or both of the two illicit editions of *Leviathan* bearing a 1651 date—known for their publishers’

48. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 189–90.

49. It is useful to compare this passage to Grotius: “Among the first Impressions of Nature there is nothing repugnant to War; nay, all Things rather favour it: For both the End of War (being the Preservation of Life or Limbs, and either the securing or getting Things useful to Life) is very agreeable to those first Motions of Nature; and to make use of Force, in case of Necessity, is in no wise disagreeable thereunto.” See Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed., Richard Tuck, tr. J. Barbeyrac (Indianapolis, 2005), pp. 182–83.

50. John Eachard, *Mr. Hobbs’s State of Nature Considered in a Dialogue*, Early English Books, 1641–1700 / 1258:18 (1672), pp. 13–14.

51. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (London, 1970), IX, 298.

marks as “the Bear” and “the 25-ornaments”—may have been published during this period as well, the former having probably been printed by a Dutchman who between 1665 and 1674 was responsible for eighteen controversial Quaker publications.⁵² The publication of the collected works in 1668, three years before Milton’s 1671 publication of the “two-edged sword” volume that would contain *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*,⁵³ coincided with Hobbes’s limited return to English court favor in November of the previous year with the fall of Clarendon and the rise of the Cabal. “I love our *Nation*, and all men in it so well,” John Eachard wrote, “that I wish they had given [Hobbes] less entertainment; it had been more for their *honour* and *credit*; and the good of this *Realm*.”⁵⁴ That *Leviathan* was heavily sought after is not a surefire indicator that it was heavily read, but it suggests that in some London circles, at least, there was what Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital” to be gained by the appearance of having read it.

In the summer of 1669 the demand for that capital was revved up by an unlikely source, whose origin shows one of the craftiest reactions to the Hobbes revival then underway, and also offers an important context for Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*. *Leviathan*’s republication had been met by fresh scorn from the Anglican bishops, who took issue most loudly with Hobbes’s supposed moral relativism, although they understood too that his Erastianism eliminated an independent clergy.⁵⁵ In 1668, a promising Cambridge fellow named Daniel Scargill found himself at the center of a university show-trial for advancing a series of theses in academic disputations judged to be too close to Hobbes’s for the university’s tastes.⁵⁶

52. *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London, 1968), pp. 67–68, Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 379, 370–82. Malcolm speculates that “the Bear” was printed somewhat later, between 1675–1680, but notes in any case that Christoffel Cunradus, who also printed a Socinian tract and a host of other dissenting works, could have been attracted to Hobbes’s “ideas about religious toleration [which], although ambiguous where the role of the state was concerned, were set firmly against ecclesiastical jurisdiction and persecution,” p. 380.

53. David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge, Eng., 2001), p. 295.

54. Eachard, *Mr. Hobbs’s State of Nature Considered*, p. 10.

55. The most complete account of Anglicans’ responses to Hobbes can still be found in Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge, Eng., 1962).

56. Daniel Scargill, *The Recantation of Daniel Scargill, Publicly Made before the University of Cambridge; in Great St. Marie, July 25, 1669* (Cambridge, 1669), p. 1. Jon Parkin gives the best existing account of this affair, in “Hobbism in the Later 1660s: Daniel Scargill and Samuel Parker,” *The Historical Journal* 42.1 (1999).

Historians have tended to overlook the show-trial aspect of the Scargill affair, emphasizing it as an indicator of the extremity of Hobbes's thought. I hope to synthesize these two views. In an academic community flirting, in many places, with officially illicit mechanism and neo-Epicurean materialism, Scargill was singled out for defending the increasingly troublesome theses that the origin of the world could be explained mechanically, that the system of the universe does not prove that God exists, and most controversially, that civil law is what defines categories of good and evil.⁵⁷ Talk of Scargill's theses, and his 1669 recantation of his "Hobbist" beliefs, "fill[ed] all mouths" in Cambridge.⁵⁸ Yet the audience for Scargill's public censure went beyond Cambridge. Tellingly, the university issued Scargill's (likely forced) *Recantation* in pamphlet form the very day he recanted to the congregation at Great St. Mary's, July 25, 1669. As might have been expected, the text quickly made its way to London. According to a contemporary report, Scargill became "infamous throughout the University if not the whole nation."⁵⁹

What readers soon had in hand was a textual apparatus obviously designed to halt the spread of Hobbism, for in it readers found a cartoonish summary of Hobbes's thought ("if the Devil were omnipotent he ought to be obeyed"⁶⁰) that was superintended by authoritative reproach and whose folly was made evident by the dazzlingly debauched lifestyle to which Scargill seemingly confessed. It made such a splash that Hobbes himself allegedly responded to it.⁶¹ The *Recantation* illuminates the chasm between the official line on Hobbism and the reality: Scargill is depicted as an errant apostate whose wildly radical subscription to Hobbism is consistent with a wildly libertine lifestyle. Scargill admits to living "in great licentiousness, swearing rashly, drinking intemperately, boasting my self insolently, corrupting others by my pernicious principles and example, to the high Dishonour of God."⁶² Yet such a figure of Scargill inadvertently tells a different story too. It seemed necessary because precisely the opposite was true: elements of Hobbes's thought were gaining hold in unexpected quarters, and the Anglican establishment

57. Scargill, p. 1.

58. Parkin, p. 94, fn. 37, p. 102, fn. 59.

59. Parkin, p. 94, fn. 37.

60. Scargill, p. 1.

61. The response has been lost. Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Clark, I, 360.

62. Scargill, *Recantation*, pp. 3–4. Hobbes and libertinism were commonly linked in Restoration discourse. See Warren L. Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge, Eng., 1995), "Hobbes and the Libertines," pp. 22–51.

intent on uniformity judged that characterizing a Hobbit as a dissolute renegade (when in fact many in London were reading Hobbes) might be an effective countermeasure.

Anglicans saw and sought to limit the way persecuted dissenters were keying into one facet of Hobbes's thought: the primacy of self-preservation.⁶³ The *Recantation* reads "I beleeeve also, and openly avouch, That no power upon earth; no perswasion or imagination about natural Right; no opinion in pretended Philosophie concerning self-preservation, can free me from the obligation that is now upon me, in this my open profession of Repentance for my accursed errors and grievous sins, to speak the truth in sincerity before God and man" (p. 6). It was Hobbes's advancement of self-preservation as natural law that made the Cambridge authorities require that Scargill explicitly attest to the sincerity of his turnabout, "lest any one should mistake or suspect this confession and unfeigned renunciation of my sinful and accused errors, for an act of civil obedience or submission in me, performed according to my former principles" (p. 5). Sincerity had been called into question by the law of self-preservation because those taking oaths could no longer safely be assumed to mean what they said, or so the *Recantation* sought to convey. It was apparently feared that an allegiance to self-preservation would lead to actions at variance with inward beliefs. Those submitting to authorities now, apparently, not only had to recant but positively to affirm they meant it. Scargill therefore had to deny his turnabout was "at the command of my Superiors, in outward expression of words, although contrary to my judgment and inward thoughts of my heart" (p. 5).

We can see how common a version of Scargill's dilemma was in the late 1660's when we consider the problem of occasional conformity, in which Puritans, Baptists, Congregationalists and other sectaries had to decide whether to attend Anglican church services and what to do when they were there.⁶⁴ The growing primacy of self-preservation as a fundamental motivator helped to stage what Sharon Achinstein calls "the drama of dissent" (p. 133). Therefore, sometimes to the exclusion of much else Hobbes had written, "self-preservation" re-emerged in the late 1660's as a battleground on which debates over toleration were

63. On radical plots in the Restoration, see Richard L. Greaves, *Enemies under His Feet: Radicals and Nonconformists in Britain, 1664–1677* (Stanford, Calif., 1990). See also Melinda S. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics* (University Park, Penn., 1999).

64. Sharon Achinstein, "Samson Agonistes and the Drama of Dissent," *Milton Studies*, 33, ed. Albert C. Labriola and Michael Lieb (Pittsburgh, 1997).

pitched, informing interpretations of the state's repression and the political subject's obligations to the state. In the course of a work claiming sovereign prerogative, Hobbes in *Leviathan* had called the individual's natural "right" to self-preservation inalienable; "no man can be understood by any words, or other signes, to have abandoned, or transferred" it (p. 192). In the 1660s we can see dissenters latching onto the utility of this claim and powerful Anglicans and Presbyterians, who in some cases were admirers of *Leviathan's* strong claims for de facto rule, attempting to discredit what they instinctively felt was the work's subversion.

Perhaps one reason so few critics have noticed the link between Hobbes and dissenters is that dissenters almost never state their debts to Hobbes. This was for obvious reasons: many found enormous swaths of his thought repugnant—particularly those dissenters, like Milton, who held an abiding republicanism. For the more pragmatic, citing Hobbes would have alienated the polite society they hoped to win over.⁶⁵ The exception that proves the rule is the Quaker Robert Rich, who wrote admiringly of "Brave Mr. Hobbs" in his *Love Without Dissimulation* (1666).⁶⁶ Yet if dissenters rarely invoked Hobbes explicitly, their opponents nevertheless would not allow them to co-opt Hobbes without reproach, and so shone the light on their opponents' strategy. We can therefore start with John Shafte, who in 1670 defended uniformity with a tract entitled, *The Great Law of nature; or, self-preservation examined, asserted and vindicated from Mr Hobbes his abuses*.⁶⁷ Shafte despairs that dissenters have been employing Hobbesian arguments for their cases of conscience, arguments "grounded upon the same Principles of Self-preservation." He writes, "the greatest part of [dissenters'] . . . Errours seem to be deduced from Mr. Hobbes his definition of the Right of Nature" and laments that Hobbes's followers "challenge to themselves Liberty of Conscience, or a publick free exercise of what Religion they

65. On this topic see John Patrick Montaña, *Courting the Moderates: Ideology, Propaganda, and the Emergence of Party, 1660–1678* (London, 2002). Derek Hirst also addresses this aspect of Restoration polemic in Hirst, "Making All Religion Ridiculous."

66. Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630–1660* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 172, 137–82. In his excellent chapter on Quakerism, skepticism, and "the Radical Enlightenment," McDowell also valuably demonstrates the intellectual links between Hobbes and his friend the Independent and Quaker defender Henry Stubbe, who was also, for a time, a client of Sir Henry Vane.

67. John Shafte, *The Great Law of Nature; or Self-Preservation, Examined, Asserted, and Vindicated from Mr. Hobbes His Abuses* (1673). According to the author, the work was composed in 1670 and 1671 and circulated in manuscript before it was published in 1673 (sig. A2).

best fancy" (p. 2). Eachard lampoons Hobbes for "Making out all men to be Rational beasts . . . and every man when he pleases a Rational Rebel . . . with all demureness, solemnity, quotation of Scripture, appeals to Conscience and Church—History."⁶⁸ "[D]on't mistake your selves," he writes: "[H]e's every whit as much against the Civil Power, as Ecclesiastical . . . As for the rest of his Politicks, they are such as are known to every Dragoon: and when he writ them, as he pretended, for the immortal Peace of his Country; he might e'en as well have put out a Regular System to teach people how to charge a Gun" (sigs. A7–A7v). Eachard's evaluation—shared by many royalist Anglicans—that Hobbes was responsible for encouraging the "Rational Rebels" of conscience persisted at least until the aftermath of the Rye House Plot in 1683.⁶⁹

Some of the reasons Oxford gave for burning Hobbes's books can direct our attention to the radicals' most troublesome arguments and so will provide the last guideposts before we turn to dissenters' pamphlets and then, finally, to *Samson Agonistes*. Predictably, the university found fault with Hobbes's arguments that "Self preservation is the fundamental obligation of nature, and supercedes the obligation of all others, when ever they stand in competition with it" and that "Every man after entering into a society retains a right of defending himself against force, and cannot transfer that right to the Commonwealth."⁷⁰ These were radical, but straightforward Hobbesian claims. The *Judgment and Decree* also demonstrated the university's awareness of a subtler implication of these claims, namely that "not only a foreign Invader but a domestic Rebel puts himself again into a state of nature to be proceeded against not as a subject but as an enemy: and consequently acquires by his rebellion the same right over the life of his prince, as the Prince for the most heinous crimes has over the life of his own Subjects" (p. 3). Oxford was thus aware of a facet to Hobbes's thought that many religious and political radicals came to understand in the previous decades: that however terrible Hobbes's state of nature seemed to be, there was a benefit to be had by considering themselves in it—and in persuading their compatriots they were in that state too. With a simple shift in attitude, it seemed, one could acquire rights against the state he or she did not previously have.

68. John Eachard, *Some Opinions of Mr. Hobbs Considered in a Second Dialogue between Philautus and Timothy, by the Same Author* J. Eachard (1673) sig. [A5].

69. *The Judgment and Decree of the University of Oxford*. See Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics*, p. 38.

70. *The Judgment and Decree of the University of Oxford*, pp. 3–4.

Each of Hobbes's claims identified by the University had found expression in dissenting arguments. Dissenters around 1670, as De Krey has shown, granted varying authority to civil magistrates over matters of belief.⁷¹ The prominent Congregationalist preacher John Owen and latitudinarian Presbyterian divine John Humfrey made their cases for conscience conceding, as Hobbes did, the magistracy's jurisdiction over church matters: their hope too was for indulgence.⁷² The more radical voices, however, denied civil power had any such jurisdiction in the first place. I will explore claims of self-preservation among both sets, looking first at the moderate royalist Richard Baxter, then turning briefly to Robert Ferguson, Sir Charles Wolseley, William Penn, and Nicholas Lockyer.

Despite major philosophical differences between the two, the Presbyterian non-conformist Richard Baxter shared with Hobbes a hope for a broader state church, preferably under a monarch. Perhaps because he understood Hobbes to encourage subscription to de facto power, Baxter in the Commonwealth years preached against *Leviathan* and may have encouraged a campaign of Presbyterian printers to censor Hobbes.⁷³ That Baxter makes some of the most explicit cases for self-preservation, therefore, is all the more surprising.⁷⁴ For Baxter, nonconformity was an unambiguous act of self-preservation. Nowhere do we see a materialist invocation of a warlike natural state as in Hobbes; instead self-preservation explicitly becomes God's law. Refusing to hear a harmful sermon was "act of *obedience to God*, and of *self-preservation*"—the two were consistent: "As Souldiers must forsake a trayterous General, or Seamen a perfidious or desperately unskilful Pilot that would cast them all away[,] . . . so may they in such a case refuse [to hear a sermon], without usurping any Government themselves."⁷⁵ Baxter would soon elaborate on the importance of self-preservation in a way that further differentiated it from Hobbes's materialist conception. He wrote of the "rational Love of Happiness and self-preservation which God did put into innocent *Adam*, and hath planted in mans nature as necessary to his Government."⁷⁶

71. See Gary De Krey, "Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667–1672," *Historical Journal* 38.1 (1995).

72. De Krey, p. 57.

73. Collins, "Silencing Thomas Hobbes: The Presbyterians and Their Printers."

74. It would be a fair objection to say that Baxter re-Christianizes Hobbesian "self-preservation," which had been latent in Grotius.

75. Baxter, *The Cure of Church-Divisions* (1670), p. 96.

76. Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, Early English Books, 1641–1700 / 343:11 (1673), p. 147.

"Self-preservation" became a "duty," along with "Piety, Justice, [and] Charity" (p. 166). In its persecution of dissenters England violated this duty: "[A]s self-preservation is the chief principle in the *Natural* body, which causeth it to abhor the wounding, or amputation of its members, and to avoid division as destruction, except when a gangrened member must be cut off, for the saving of the body; so it is also with the *mystical* body of Christ. He is senseless and graceless that abhorreth not Church-wounds" (pp. 740–41). Richard Baxter effectively shared with Hobbes a vision of a broader state church based on the primacy of self-preservation, but in proposing such a vision, he threw an elaborately constructed Christian tent over Hobbes's materialist rationale.

The Independent Robert Ferguson, a Shaftesbury client and future Rye House plotter, like many tolerationists, was quick in his reply to Parker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* to distance himself from "Hobbs and some other wild, Atheistically disposed persons of late" who, he says, "have managed an opposition to all natural Laws."⁷⁷ If inaccurate, that distance is plausible until he cites as natural law Hobbes's signal idea, "the instinct of self-preservation all men are by Nature imbued with" (p. 231). He slyly argues that "*Sincere Obedience to the whole Law of Creation is not only still required, but it is required under the penalty of Damnation,*" thereby not only requiring acts of self-preservation since self-preservation is part of the "Law of Creation" but turning that instinct toward a concern for preservation in the afterlife (p. 162). Hobbes undergoes a Christianizing in Ferguson, as he does in Baxter. For example, theologized echoes of Hobbesian self-preservation appear in Ferguson's digressions on suicide, for their allowance of which he castigates the pagans. Suicide means "invading the jurisdiction which belongs to God, who only hath power to dispose of us" (p. 229). As in *Samson*, here we see the conjunction of radical tolerationism, which casts a space outside the state's purview where encroachment amounts to "invasion," and self-preservationism, where preserving ourselves is preserving "the jurisdiction which belongs to God."

Ferguson dedicated *A Sober Enquiry* to Sir Charles Wolseley, the former Independent M. P. who was "one of a few men in Cromwell's inner circle who advocated a greater degree of toleration in religion than

77. Robert Ferguson, *A Sober Enquiry into the Nature, Measure, and Principle of Moral Virtue, with Reflections Upon Three Late Books by S. Parker by R.F.* (1673), p. 51.

Cromwell himself.”⁷⁸ In 1668, Wolseley had published anonymously *Liberty of Conscience the Magistrates Interest* denying the state’s jurisdiction over religious matters and claiming “every man in the World is to be a Judge for himself, in all matters of the Gospel Religion.”⁷⁹ “[T]o say a man is not to judge for himself, is to unman him,” he continued (p. 44). The link between the individual judgment and the natural constitution of man had been critical to Hobbes, and the notion that joined them, again, had been self-preservation. In the arena of self-preservation the individual judgment was all. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes had written, “As first a man cannot lay down the right of resisting them, that assault him by force, to take away his life; because he cannot be understood to ayme thereby, at any Good to himselfe. The same may be sayd of Wounds, and Chayns, and Imprisonment; both because there is no benefit consequent to such patience; as there is to the patience of suffering another to be wounded, or imprisoned: as also because a man cannot tell, when he seeth men proceed against him by violence, whether they intend his death or not” (p. 192). Even after consent had been given over to a sovereign, other men’s intentions were fundamentally unknowable. Resistance was therefore an epistemological question: because “a man cannot tell” what harm awaits him, he maintains his right to judge and thus to resist. In this way a functional characteristic of the state of nature persists in human fallibility, and as the Oxford book burners observed, was accessible by other means: when it even appears men are proceeding against us to hurt or imprison us, dissenters could reason, we have returned to the state of nature. Any obligations to submit to civil authority, the most radical could imagine, had therefore been dissolved. Many readers of *Leviathan* misinterpret or miss the importance of this passage. For example, in the course of an otherwise trenchant book Giorgio Agamben concludes, “In Hobbes the state of nature survives in the person of the sovereign, who is the only one to preserve its natural *ius contra omnes*.”⁸⁰ To the contrary, the potential to wage war against all—the sovereign power—survives through human fallibility in each individual’s concern for self-preservation.

78. Timothy Venning, “Wolseley [Ouseley], Sir Charles, Second Baronet, Appointed Lord Wolseley under the Protectorate (1629/30–1714),” DNB; De Krey, “Dissenting Cases for Conscience,” pp. 62–65.

79. Charles Wolseley, *Liberty of Conscience, the Magistrate’s Interest* (1668), p. 42.

80. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif., 1998), p. 35. An exception is Glenn Burgess, “On Hobbesian Resistance Theory,” *Political Studies* 42 (1994).

Consequently, we should pay close attention to self-constructed performances of quietism that create the appearance of attack. Hobbes's figure haunts such constructions in the question of whether state enforcement of belief amounts to a declaration of war against nonconformists, and thus a return to a Hobbesian natural state. With absolutists like Parker insisting that stringent uniformity must be used to quell rebellious dissent and thereby preserve the peace, dissenters often denied there was any present peace to be preserved, casting persecution as the state's declaration of war against its citizens and their own actions as self-defense. The Quaker leader William Penn, for example, wrote, "peace . . . has been . . . broken by the frequent Tumultuary Disturbances that ensue the Disquieting our meetings."⁸¹ Perhaps recalling that the threat of imprisonment was sufficient grounds for resistance in Hobbes, Penn decried the state's treatment of Quaker prisoners of conscience as "not more unchristian than inhumane," concluding, "Where Liberty and Property are destroyed, there must always be a state of force and war, which however pleasing it may be unto the *Invaders*, it will be esteemed intolerable by the *Invaded*, who will no longer remain subject."⁸² Eachard must have had charged passages like this in mind when he denounced "those that are feigned to be in [the] condition" of Hobbes's natural state.⁸³ Nicholas Lockyer wondered in a work he published anonymously in 1670 but whose publication nevertheless required him to flee to Holland, what if "the chiefest of the Persecutors" were so dealt with "In their solemn Worship to be so hared and disturbed by a Tumult and Rabble; to be tore and haled from their places and Assemblies, and imprisoned by Officers and armed men[?]"⁸⁴ And "Will any wise State judge it according to the principles of Wisdom and Policy by threatened ruine and destruction to irritate such a People, having heretofore also tasted the ill consequence of such like provocations?" (p. 10).

If narratives of peaceful worship invaded by state agents are everywhere in dissenting literature, Hobbes is just offstage. Words like "hared," "tumult," and "torn" emphasized the confusion caused by the invasions,

81. William Penn, *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience* (1671), p. 28. Given the temptation to see Penn and the Quakers as quietist, it is worth remembering that Penn was the son of one of England's most successful naval commanders.

82. William Penn, *The Peoples Ancient and Just Liberties Asserted* (1670, 1810), pp. 40, 48.

83. Eachard, *Mr. Hobbs's State of Nature Considered*, sig. a1v.

84. Nicholas Lockyer, *Some Seasonable and Serious Queries Upon the Late Act against Conventicles, by a Friend to Truth and Peace N. Lockyer* (1670), p. 8.

thus ratcheting up the uncertainty that could further legitimize Hobbesian violence. When the 1670 bill authorized paying informers to infiltrate conventicles, a provision that immediately produced a new class of professional informers, the state's invasions deepened the epistemological crisis.⁸⁵ An informer "*Ferrets a Conventicle just as a Poll cat, does Rabbets in their Burroughs,*" one anonymous author wrote, and "will Court a man to beat him . . . and dropp dangerous words on purpose to prosecute you for Concealing them."⁸⁶ Even in worship, friend and foe were now indistinguishable.

IV

It has been said, "A Rubicon was crossed with the reception of Hobbes into western thinking."⁸⁷ I want to examine *Samson Agonistes*' role in such a reception by situating the drama as a screen onto which the epistemological crisis created by the Clarendon Code gets projected, and also as a projector of that same epistemological crisis through time. Just recently, critics have come to see *Samson* as an encounter with Hobbes. But what kind of encounter? Martin construes the drama as a reproof against the "Hobbesian" Philistines and "Dagon or Leviathan."⁸⁸ Kahn, by contrast, suggests it "may draw on the arguments of Grotius, Hobbes, and others regarding the status of the captive who has not consented to his conqueror."⁸⁹ Which is it? Seeming at first contradictory, these interpretations are not mutually exclusive, for together they capture the idiosyncratic reception of Hobbes among dissenters, where royalist uniformity was as repugnant as the primacy of self-preservation was useful.⁹⁰ The reading of *Samson Agonistes* that follows, therefore, is one that for the first time takes into account dissenters' complicated reception of

85. Douglas Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, 1661–1689: A Study in the Perpetuation and Tempering of Parliamentarianism* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), p. 60.

86. Anon., *The Character of an Informer* (1675), pp. 4–5, 2.

87. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, p. 250.

88. Martin, "The Phoenix and the Crocodile," p. 262.

89. Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674*, pp. 252–53.

90. I am influenced here by Patterson's observation that "It has become fashionable . . . to cite out of context Milton's metaphor in *Areopagitica* of books as dragon's teeth sown in the earth that spring up armed men; but not enough work has been done on what processes are implied by such sowing and how long they take." See Annabel M. Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), p. 22.

Hobbes and attempts to draw out a few of the implications of Milton's reception of Hobbes for the history of political thought.

Famously, two main arguments dominate critical discussions of Samson. One, advanced by Stanley Fish, Joseph Wittreich, and others, doubts that God prompts the "rousing motions" that lead Samson to the destruction of the theater. *Samson Agonistes* becomes either ironic or skeptical.⁹¹ The other, made persuasively by David Loewenstein and David Norbrook, is that God does prompt Samson's rousing motions and, however distasteful it might be to a liberal academic community, Milton's Samson engages in sanctioned killing.⁹² I propose to bridge these positions with the contention that the state's treatment of non-conformists became the occasion for Milton to dramatize the movement toward a Hobbesian bodily and epistemological crisis where all violence was licit.⁹³ In my view the uncertainty that pervades so much of *Samson Agonistes* does not critique Samson's destruction of the theater so much as it does to authorize it. Within Samson's growing submission to God's grace, emphasized in his movement from "cannot" to "will not" to "will," is something neglected in previous accounts of the drama: Samson's concomitant submission to the Philistines' raw power, his gift of his body to total vulnerability. For Hobbes's self-preservationism, rights against the state increased as bodily security decreased; the condition of full rights thereby engendered was called "sovereignty." Alongside Samson's growing faith is Samson's growing vulnerability to physical power, a vulnerability exasperated by epistemological crisis. Seen from this vantage point, the parallel tracks leading to Samson's literally blind submission to the Philistines' raw power, on the one hand, and his subsequent sovereign power over them, on the other, constitute a reception of Hobbes whose themes would dominate the rise of liberalism

91. See Stanley Fish, "Spectacle and Evidence in *Samson Agonistes*," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988–1989); Joseph Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson Agonistes* (Princeton, 1986); Joseph Wittreich, *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes* (Pittsburgh, 2002).

92. See Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries*, and David Norbrook, "Republican Occasions in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*," *Paradise Regained in Context: Genre, Politics, Religion*, ed. Albert C. Labriola and David Loewenstein, *Milton Studies* 42 (Pittsburgh, 2002).

93. I concur with Lewalski's observation that the drama is comprised of "political choices . . . characterized by imperfect knowledge and conflicting testimony" as I do with Kahn's that *Samson* explores "the creative fiat of interpretation in the absence of any more secure or more legible foundation." See Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Milton's *Samson* and the 'New Acquaint of True [Political] Experience'," *Milton Studies*, ed. James D. Simmonds, 24 (Pittsburgh, 1988), p. 248; Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, p. 254.

over the next century. Samson embodies democracy's vexed paradox of the "sovereign subject," who, insofar as he or she is sovereign, can take lives with legitimacy, but being subject, is vulnerable to the same.⁹⁴ Occasioned by Parliament's hostility to dissenters, Milton's precise reception of Hobbes, I therefore want to suggest, deserves considerable scrutiny for a more thorough understanding of the development of liberal Whiggism.

Sharon Achinstein suggests that *Samson* "may be the most brilliant piece of political theory created in the seventeenth century if we think about political theory not only in terms of a discourse of abstraction, but also of contemplation . . . and subjective experience."⁹⁵ I propose to read Samson's subjective experience of imprisonment by the Philistines with Hobbes's state of nature in full view. Milton had inconclusively pondered the prisoner's obligations in his consideration of the biblical Daniel's adherence to Nebuchadnezzar, and wondered genuinely, "What else could he do? He was a prisoner."⁹⁶ Hobbes could be helpful here. As Oxford observed and Penn perhaps accepted, a Hobbesian prisoner was no longer obliged to the state—was "separate" from society (to use the root meaning of "Nazarite") and now resided in the state of nature.⁹⁷ We know this, Hobbes said, because "they lead Criminals to Execution, and Prison, with armed men, notwithstanding that such Criminals have consented to the Law, by which they are condemned."⁹⁸ Hobbes here recognizes, according to Michael Walzer, that "Prisoner and guard are simply at war with one another; they are no longer members of the same state."⁹⁹

What does it mean to create characters in such a relationship? The analysis that follows will be structured around questions of approach: how does Milton approach his readers, and in turn how is Samson approached? Like most dramas, *Samson* has comings and goings, but comings, as we have seen, became critical in Hobbesian self-preservationism in the way they could signal intent. The Argument makes clear that Samson is intended as a drama of "visitations." For natural man, how he

94. Agamben, p. 124.

95. Achinstein, p. 137.

96. *CPW*, ed. Wolfe, VI, 800.

97. *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, p. 552, fn. 31.

98. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 199. See also Hobbes, *Works*, VI, 226.

99. Michael Walzer, *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 81.

is visited, how he is approached, is a grave issue. Reliably observant, Eachard had mocked Hobbes's timorousness. When a stranger in Eachard's dialogue invites Hobbes for a walk, Hobbes responds, "No, I thank you, unless I knew your tricks better: you may chance to get behind me, and bite me by the Legs . . . I know better things than to trust my self with one that I never saw before. I have but one *body*, and I desire to carry it home all to my chamber" (pp. 2–3). By "approach," therefore, I mean first the sense captured by Needham's translation of Selden's *Mare Clausem* quoted by the OED, "by diligent watchfulness discover[ing enemies'] approaches." Milton himself provides the spectrum of possibilities over the short course of a few lines, where approaches can range from that employed by the man who "Ran on embattled Armies [that were] clad in Iron" (Samson) to the "safest [man] who stood aloof" (ll. 129; 135). It is tempting to see characters' approaches as interstices "leading up" to "what happens," but I want to promote them to a greater importance.

Starting then with the 1671 material volume in which the drama appears, "*PARADISE REGAIN'D. A POEM In IV BOOKS. To which is added SAMSON AGONISTES*," and keeping the question of "approach" in mind, we find that *Samson* could be spied from far off, the whole of *Paradise Regained* complexly involved in Milton's approach. Seen also against Milton's spectrum, the prose introduction marks his approach as at once armed and tentative, gingerly self-defensive yet poised to fight. As though confirming the threats all around him, Milton operates defensively in what he calls the "epistle," defending even its use. The reason he feels required to give for including it? "Self-defense." He explains his epistle appears "though ancient Tragedy use no Prologue, yet using sometimes, in case of self defense, or explanation, that which *Martial* calls an Epistle." In part of Hobbes's letter to Edward Howard that did make it into *The British Princes*, Hobbes had written, "I am assured [the poem] will be welcome to the world with its own confidence; though if it come forth *armed with verses and Epistles* I cannot tell what to think of it. For, the great Wits will think themselves threatened, and rebel."¹⁰⁰ It is here, perhaps, that lessons from Anglicans' and Presbyterians' hostile reception of *Leviathan* combine with his psychology of rebellion—Hobbes was then working on *Behemoth*—to provide the vocabulary for a poetics of the state of nature. Here Milton invokes such a poetics with

100. Hobbes, *Correspondence*, II, 704. Italics mine.

the converse of Hobbes's position, that the armament of an epistle may be employed, or claim to be employed, in self-defense.

Samson of course is blind, and critics have commented extensively on his blindness. But from the Hobbesian perspective of the approach, Samson's blindness matters for political reasons extending beyond autobiography or the doctrine of the "inner light": Samson is less equipped to perceive threats.¹⁰¹ The critical paradox, however, is that his vulnerability means he is at greater liberty to defend against the threats he does perceive. Since to be imprisoned is to be released from obligations to the state, to be blind in prison—"prison within prison / . . . / . . . worst imprisonment" in the Chorus' formulation—is to be doubly free to commit whatever defensive violence against it one can muster (ll. 153–55).¹⁰² In his *Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State, in Mr Hobbes's Book Entitled Leviathan*, Clarendon saves unique vehemence for Hobbes's contention that "the guilty person is not only *not* oblig'd to submit to the Sentence, how just soever, but hath a right to resist it, and to defend himself by force against the Magistrate and the Law."¹⁰³ That one claim, Clarendon said, had left a king "in so weak a posture to defend himself, that he hath reason to be afraid of every man" (p. 143). In *Samson* we find Hobbes's link between rights and physical vulnerability at work: shorn of his strength, imprisoned, and blind—infinately vulnerable—Samson has infinite and sovereign justification to take lives and wage war.

The Chorus' initial description of Samson is illuminating, for it demonstrates Samson's vulnerability and illustrates what the Philistine state must see too: a formerly powerful body newly defenseless, lying "at random, carelessly diffus'd, / With languish't head unpropt, / . . . abandoned, / And by himself given over" (ll. 118–21). Milton later constructs Samson's vulnerability more fully, this time reminding readers

101. For a recent discussion that briefly explores the interplay of sight and threat, see Susannah B. Mintz, "Dalila's Touch: Disability and Recognition in Samson Agonistes," *Milton Studies*, ed. Albert C. Labriola, 40 (Pittsburgh, 2001), p. 175.

102. All verse references are to *John Milton*, ed. Hughes, and are cited parenthetically in the text.

103. Italics mine. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *A Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State, in Mr Hobbes's Book Entitled Leviathan* (Oxford, 1676), p. 138. Clarendon completed *A Brief View* in exile in April 1670, but the work was published posthumously in 1676, with a dedication to Charles II. See Martin Dzelzainis, "'Undoubted Realities': Clarendon on Sacrilege," *The Historical Journal* 33.3 (1990), 515.

that Samson had in fact provoked the Philistines as well, an historic fact that amplifies Samson's danger:

[N]ow [God] hath cast me off as never known,
 And to those cruel enemies,
 Whom I by his appointment had provok't
 Left me all helpless with th' irreparable loss
 Of sight, reserv'd alive to be repeated
 The subject of thir cruelty (ll. 641–46).

After Samson's initial soliloquy the Chorus comes upon Samson in "a place nigh, somewhat retir'd" and Samson's fearful reaction upon hearing feet corresponds with his danger. Fallen from grace, blind, imprisoned, and desolate, he presupposes the worst: "But who are these?" he wonders, "for with joint pace I hear / The tread of many feet steering this way; / Perhaps my enemies who come to stare / At my affliction" (ll. 110–13). In the vulnerability of his state he must be assured: "We come thy friends and neighbors not unknown," the Chorus tells him in a line seemingly calculated to demonstrate the threat the "unknown" poses to an insecure body (l. 180). Assured, Samson adopts a narrative of his life combining Baxter's seafaring self-preservationist similes with Ferguson's tolerationist argument against suicide—that the body is a "jurisdiction which belongs to God." Recalling Baxter's "desperately unskilful Pilot," Samson compares himself to "a foolish Pilot [who] have shipwreck't / My vessel trusted to me from above" (ll. 198–99). As both Baxter and Ferguson did, Milton here Christianizes Hobbesian self-preservationism in the service of a tolerationist vision.

That effect is similar in Samson's initial encounter with Manoa, who more than any other character save Samson operates under the dictates of self-preservation, declaring flatly at one point, in a line that must have shouted its Hobbesian provenance to Milton's contemporaries, that Samson should not punish himself because "self-preservation bids" (l. 505). On Manoa's approach, Samson is now aided by the Chorus' eyes; he is told who approaches and, critically, how. Manoa's "Locks white as down" remind Samson of his own shorn impotence, and so Manoa's approach temporarily "renews th' assault" Samson perceives (ll. 326, 331). For his part, Manoa, at once a cautious natural man who recalls the "invincible Samson" but powerful enough still to be a father full of care, approaches "With careful step," the Chorus tells Samson (ll. 341; 327).

Manoa soon laments how the man who once “walk’d [the Philistines’] streets, / None offering fight; who single combatant / Duell’d thir Armies” now could not even “save himself against a coward” (ll. 344–47). As Manoa’s invocation of “self-preservation” indicates, much of Samson’s psychological despair occurs in this register of saving, or not saving, himself. As Samson’s self-flagellation draws him toward suicidal thoughts, Milton indicates such thoughts contravene natural law with Samson’s lament, “nature within me seems / In all her functions weary of herself” (ll. 595–96). Samson’s vulnerable body is itself threatened by his despair, which “armed with deadly stings / Mangle [his] apprehensive tenderest parts, / Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise / Dire inflammation” (ll. 623–26). “Be penitent and for thy fault contrite,” Manoa reprimands Samson,

But act not in thy own affliction, Son;
Repent the sin, but if the punishment
Thou canst avoid, self-preservation bids;
Or th’ execution leave to high disposal,
And let another hand, not thine, exact
Thy penal forfeit from thyself; (ll. 502–08).

Manoa has often been read as a blundering old man, but his advice to Samson here would have had considerable poignancy for dissenters uneasy about their civil disobedience. As they are for Samson, the doctrines of self-preservation and “another hand” could be both solace for crippling despair and impetus to action.

If the Chorus could confidently tell Samson, “here comes thy reverend Sire,” Dalila’s approach comparatively comes shrouded in mystery (l. 326). Even to the Chorus’ helpful eyes, she is inscrutable: “who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?” they wonder. “Female of sex it seems” is about all they can initially suggest before finally concluding that “Some rich Philistian Matron she may seem, / And now at nearer view, no other certain / Than *Dalila* thy wife” (ll. 710–24). Her appearance as told to him being as suspect as her former actions, Samson insists, “let her not come near me” (l. 725). Yet however much Dalila’s approach confirms the primacy of self-preservation, in Dalila we can also see Milton, like Ferguson, distancing himself from those facets of Hobbesian thought he and those he hoped to persuade considered most repugnant. Dalila’s words touch on nearly every perversion implied by Scargill’s cartoonish *Recantation*: she is an insincere moral relativist for whom adherence to

civil authority is the only obligation. No doubt, Milton like Ferguson wants to steer away from Hobbes, or at least those elements likely to cause offense. Hobbes, however, is not the main target. As we have seen, Parker and the Anglican conformists used Hobbes to defend the clergy in ways Hobbes never sanctioned. Indicating his own resistance to the Anglicans, Milton places the "Priest / . . . not behind, but ever at [Dalila's] ear" (ll. 857–58). It is less Hobbes's Erastianism than Parker's with which Milton here takes issue. Yet if this section partly critiques Hobbes, its accommodations to him are evident in Dalila's absurd suggestion that the state can take "full possession" of her mind and body to employ her even against her own husband (l. 869). "To the public good / Private respects must yield, with grave authority" is her warped rationale, which is admittedly not far from *Leviathan's* rationale, nor from that of Parker's *Discourse* (ll. 867–68). But what makes it unpalatable to Milton is that it contravenes both self-preservationist rationales articulated by Manoa just a few lines earlier, the Hobbesian materialist one of the physical body and the Christian one of the body as a "jurisdiction which belong[s] to God," the adjective "grave" being Milton's intimation that "full possession" is equivalent to spiritual death. As if to make the primacy of self-preservation even clearer, Milton has Dalila plead, "Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand," to which the ever wary Samson responds, "Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake / My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint" (ll. 951–53). If here Samson behaves as if he is in a Hobbesian state of nature, he also very nearly says it, denying that he is or ever was the Philistines' "subject, / . . . under [any] protection but [his] own" and distinguishing the Philistines from legitimate authority by calling them an "impious crew / Of men conspiring to uphold thir state / By worse than hostile deeds" (ll. 886–88).¹⁰⁴ In *Leviathan*, Hobbes had said that so-called punishment enacted "without precedent publique condemnation, is not to be stiled by the name of Punishment; but of an hostile act" (p. 354). Just as Milton's "prison within prison" grants Samson rights against the state verging on the superfluous, so too does "worse than hostile deeds" extend the case: Milton seems everywhere interested to ground Samson's coming destruction of the theater in ever-strengthening rights of self-preservation.

104. Martin suggests that Milton draws this language from Cicero's *De Legibus*. See Martin, "The Phoenix and the Crocodile," p. 255, fn. 22.

By now, it should be no surprise that Milton describes the “haughty . . . high-built and proud” giant Harapha’s approach with as much care as he does the Chorus’, Manoa’s, and Dalila’s (ll. 1069–70). Again, ominously, the Chorus can offer Samson no security: “Comes he in peace?” they worry to Samson. Harapha’s “habit carries peace” but “his brow [carries] defiance,” they warn (l. 1072). As with Dalila, the signals they get from the visitor are mixed, and the resulting indeterminacy again raises Samson’s spine. The precise wording Samson’s belligerence takes, however, indicates Milton’s interest in highlighting Samson’s limitations—the handicaps of imprisonment and blindness that come ultimately to license unrestrained human freedom. He proposes to fight in “Some narrow place enclos’d, where sight may give thee, / Or rather flight, no great advantage on me,” a proposal that in the course of Samson’s bluster primarily serves to remind readers of his limitations (and by inference, liberties). Neither should it be surprising that the Officer’s approach with “A Scepter or quaint staff” in hand leads the Chorus to conclude warily, “Perhaps more trouble is behind” (ll. 1303, 1300).¹⁰⁵ The Chorus’ observations and judgments—friend, foe, or we don’t know—provide just those visual cues necessary for the survival of a Hobbesian natural man, and ultimately help to protect Samson, if also, like the Nazarite law to which they submit and he does not, to constrain him.¹⁰⁶ This was Hobbes’s fundamental bargain: liberty given over in fear in exchange for protection.

How are we to act, however, when the state created to protect its citizens now assaults them and imprisons them for their beliefs? When its bribes make it difficult to tell friend from foe? Hobbes had perhaps unwittingly given an answer: “He that is subject to no Civill Law, sinneth in all he does against his Conscience.”¹⁰⁷ In the absence of all evident protection but God’s, “natural” rights of self-preservation spring forth like “armed men” from the earth: conscience and self-preservation

105. “Quaint” here retains the “bad sense” given by the OED 1b of “cunning, crafty, given to scheming or plotting,” as well as that cited by Hughes as “curiously made or decorated.”

106. For a discussion of the Chorus in relation to the Hebraic law, see Joan S. Bennett, “Liberty under the Law: The Chorus and Meaning of *Samson Agonistes*,” *Milton Studies*, ed. James D. Simmonds, 12 (Pittsburgh, 1978).

107. *Leviathan*, ed. MacPherson, p. 366. The extent to which Hobbes could be turned against himself is made evident by the full sentence: “Though he that is subject to no Civill Law, sinneth in all he does against his Conscience, because he hath no other rule to follow but his own reason; yet it is not so with him that lives in a Common-wealth; because the Law is the publique Conscience, by which he hath already undertaken to be guided.”

are all.¹⁰⁸ Samson's perplexed last speech in the presence of the Chorus betrays the epistemological crisis of the world to which he's surrendering himself: "how the sight / Of mee as of a common Enemy, / So dreaded once, may now exasperate them, I know not" (ll. 1415–17). Evacuating all knowledge with all protection, Samson submits alike to total faith, total vulnerability, and total warfare as epistemological crisis in full bodily danger licenses the recourse to unrestrained "Conscience."

Departed from the Chorus' (and even the readers') company, at the center of the Philistine theater, Samson inhabits the paradox of the "sovereign subject," both radically, ineffably vulnerable and radically, ineffably free. In bodily terms, among enemies "Without help of eye," Samson becomes totally subject to the Philistines' power—not legitimate sovereign power, but raw power, the power over life—and through that subjection to raw power comes to a kind of sovereignty, the legitimized power to kill (l. 1625). This is the heart of the Hobbesian state of nature, where "every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body." Samson's material power over life and death—worldly sovereignty, that is—has to this point been only potential, yet what activates that potential should not be distinguished from the paradoxical acts of submission to the Philistines' power and to God's. In spiritual terms the bodily submission to the Philistines is a giving over of a "jurisdiction which belongs to God," a "Vessel trusted . . . from above." Samson's total subjection to the Philistines' raw power, which is at the same time a claiming of sovereignty, is an act of faith, and the claim to worldly sovereignty legitimized by physical vulnerability is an ecstatic submission to the "rousing motions," a "command from Heav'n" (l. 1212). This ecstatic submission is the heart of the doctrine of grace. Grace and self-preservation thus join in paradox: to be sovereign, Samson must be subject; to be subject, Samson must be sovereign. For Ferguson, sovereign action was submission to God's will, as can be seen in his powerful rhetorical exhortation to active resistance, "Who acts the power he is

108. Significant in this context is the earlier Hobbes claim: "Since all covenants of obedience are entered into for the preservation of a man's life, if a man be content, without resistance to lay down his life, rather than to obey the commands of an infidel, in so hard a case he hath sufficiently discharged himself thereof. For no covenant bindeth farther than to endeavour; and if a man cannot assure himself to perform a just duty, when thereby he is assured of present death, much less can it be expected that a man should perform that, for which he believeth in his heart he shall be damned eternally." See *The Elements of Law, Natural & Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Cambridge, Eng., 1928), p. 125.

imbued with[?]" Samson "can" be completely vulnerable, and thus sovereign, so he finally "will" (ll. 1320, 1342). "It is our *Will-not*, not our *Can not* that ariseth in judgment against us," according to Ferguson (p. 279). Samson's submission to God and the Philistines is ultimately a submission to God's "nature within [him]"—that is, to himself.

Nowhere is the paradox of the sovereign subject more evident than in Samson's non-suicide suicide. Thinking about that paradox will lead to my final comments about what Milton's reception of Hobbes may mean. The Chorus describes Samson's death in the passive voice, as "self-killed / Not willingly" (ll. 1664–65). Self-preservationist and sovereign, Samson "will not" kill himself, only others (l. 1342). Subject to the Philistines and God, Samson's body may nevertheless be "dispensed" for destruction (l. 1377). In the complex antinomies of Samson's acts of submission and autonomy, consent and coercion, Samson's body is both a passive locus of violence and an active purveyor of it. It is no doubt possible to try to explain this paradox with recourse to doctrinal points of Milton's theology, but that is not my project. Rather, the unresolved contradiction seems of greater utility in thinking about how something called the liberal democratic "citizen" can always be "dispensed" in his or her own name. If Milton's recourse to the laws of self-preservation is inscribed within his attempt to produce for dissenters a sovereign realm free from the state's persecution, then Samson's submission to God and raw power helps to produce that same sovereign's subjectivity. If in the near term the dissenting subject reading *Samson Agonistes* can look with "eyes fast fixt" on the allure of sovereignty articulated in a theologized language of self-preservation, in the long term he or she will come to know that that station too involves subjection and vulnerability to the state's violence, only now, sanctioned, somehow, by oneself (l. 1637). That Samson can kill himself without his consent can be seen as a final entangling of Hobbes's materialism and Milton's Christian liberty, where the natural dictate to save oneself at the expense of all others is forever subject to nullification by God. Hence the promise and the terror of the modern notion of "popular sovereignty," being subject and sovereign, "below and, at the same time, most elevated": "in control" yet still always at the state's mercy.¹⁰⁹

109. Agamben, p. 124.

This essay has moved from Thomas Hobbes's views on toleration to dissenters' use of Hobbes's arguments for self-preservation and then to Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, which makes use of Hobbes's primacy of self-preservation in previously unacknowledged ways. Such a reception helps to explain the liberal paradox of the "sovereign subject." I have adopted a view of *Samson Agonistes* that sees it as both written by contemporaneous political thought, and writing subsequent political thought. There is more to be said about Milton's reception of Hobbes. Such a reception invites us to scrutinize the 1660's as much along the axis of Erastianism and clericalism as we have along the axis of republicanism and royalism. A common antipathy with Hobbes for the clergy prompted Milton to turn to an anticlerical materialist and find further common ground in the language of self-preservation. Such language was ultimately put to radical religious ends that Hobbes manifestly reviled, yet such is the nature of strange bedfellows. More work needs to be done, therefore, on the alliances of what might be called the anti-ecclesiastical left and the anti-ecclesiastical right to determine whether "strange bedfellows" is even the appropriate term. Also worth remembering is something that royalist Anglicans and Presbyterians may have understood but that scholars have largely overlooked: that Hobbes was to be feared not in spite of his strong claims regarding sovereignty but because of them. If scholars have been reluctant to consider the role of Hobbes's reception in emerging Whiggism, it may be because a perceived royalism has successfully protected from view those arguments on the anti-ecclesiastical left that found purchase on the political left. Finally, recalling Hughes's failure to indicate Aubrey's emendation, Milton studies may profitably ask itself what investment it has in keeping Hobbes and Milton in opposition.¹¹⁰

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