

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Unlike many major figures in Western intellectual history, Hobbes has refused to become dated and quietly take his appointed place in the museum of historical scholarship. Whether by way of adoption or reaction, his ideas have remained vibrant forces in mankind's attempts to understand the problems and dilemmas of living peaceably with one another. As Richard Ashcraft said a few years ago:

One of the standards by which the greatness of political theorists is measured, is their ability to evoke in us new insights into 'the human condition'. Only a few political writers have risen Dionysus-like from the titanic assaults of their critics to become even more formidable forces in the shaping of our destiny. One of these giants is surely the irascible and irrepressible Thomas Hobbes<sup>1</sup>.

Given the power of Hobbes's thought, it is not then perhaps surprising to find that his writings have generated seemingly endless scholarly controversy and an astonishing range of incompatible interpretations. Among other things, he has been interpreted as a theist and an atheist, as a utilitarian and a deontologist, a humanist and a scientist, as a traditional natural law theorist and a legal positivist, a contractualist and an absolutist – indeed, as Professor Morris notes in his contribution to the present volume, 'as almost any kind of philosophical 'ist except Platonist or Aristotelist'.

Noting this confused situation a few years ago, one of the present editors compared it to a multiply contested will, each scholarly contestant battling to claim his right to inherit Hobbes's *corpus* to lend its weight to his favorite 'ist' or 'ism'. And the other noted that their method of doing so seemed to be to play King's men to Hobbes's Humpty Dumpty. Finding they could not put the whole together, each threw out the parts that looked most indigestible to him and proceeded to see what palatable dish he could cook up from the remainder. There came to be as many Hobbeses as there were King's men. It seemed to us time for a closer look at Hobbes, especially as there were some younger and a few older scholars who were beginning to cast doubt on whether the apparent contradictions in Hobbes's work that underlay those diverse interpretations really were all that contradictory. The suspicion was growing that there might be a good deal more philosophic coherence