Not often does an out-of-print book get the opportunity to be rescued from the remainder bin and granted the promise of enjoying a possible second lease on life. As the editor of *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory* (1990) and on behalf of its contributors (Deborah Baumgold, James Farr, Stephen Holmes, David Johnston, Gordon J. Schochet, Richard Tuck, and Sheldon S. Wolin), I thank the editors at the University Press of Kansas for including our volume in their list of works selected for conversion to open access books through the Open Book Program led by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.¹

Thirty years ago, amid an academic environment in political theory and philosophy already replete with scholarship on the seventeenth-century English political thinker Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), we introduced *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory* by asking, “Why yet another volume of Hobbes studies?” (3). Today, in a similar spirit, we might inquire, “Why does our collection of eight essays on Hobbes deserve the recognition of ‘Open Access,’ along with a host of new and renewed readers able to from free digital resources?” This time, however, we can answer the question with a measure of that is not simply prospective but also retrospective in light of some solid evidence. As things turned out, the life of *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory* (hardcover and paperback) both the prescience of our publisher and our own high expectations for the volume’s good fortunes. Impressed by the quality of its content and its innovative contributions to the existing literature on Hobbes, numerous reviewers commended the volume’s merit and cance, noting its scholarship throughout,” its “illuminating and
novel interpretations,” its “outline of a more historically credible and more theoretically challenging,” thinker, and “welcome relief from the typical dour portrait drawn of Hobbes.”2 Perhaps most as the pantheon of Hobbes studies goes, was G. L. Jones’s anticipation that Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory should “quickly join the works of Brown, Macpherson, Oakeshott, Plamenatz, Skinner, and Warrender as a standard resource in Hobbes studies” (Choice, 1990).

As gratifying as our colleagues’ and reviewers’ responses to the volume were (and remain), the fortunes of Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory also need to be placed within a particular context of Hobbes scholarship in Anglophone studies in the mid- to late 1980s. The four hundredth anniversary of Hobbes’s birth in 1588 brought to the fore an abundance of important new single-authored books representing a variety of disciplinary and interpretive approaches. Among the scholars whose books decisively transformed commentary in Hobbes studies well into the 1990s were Jean Hampton, David Johnston, Gregory Kavka, and Tom Sorell (1986–1987);3 Deborah Baumgold and Jules Steinberg (1988);4 Richard Tuck and Gary B. Herbert (1989);5 and the important collections edited by C. Walton and P. J. Johnson (1987); and G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (1988).6 Shortly thereafter, works on Hobbes by Robert Kraynak (1990), A. P. Martinich (1992), and Richard Flathman (1993) appeared, further amplifying the secondary scholarship, particularly in the of political theory.7 The blast of feminist critiques of social contract theories (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) arrived in article form in the late 1970s, followed thereafter by Carole Pateman’s book The Sexual Contract (1988). Her work helped set the course for using the analytics of gender, patriarchy, and the category of women in the interpretation of historical texts, including in an important collection devoted entirely to feminist interpretations of Hobbes that would be published later.8

Although it would be fruitless to attempt to identify a thematic link connecting the multiple and diverse works that sprang up (like mushrooms!)9 in the late 1980s, some of them (e.g., Baumgold, Johnston, Tuck, Kraynak, Martinich, Flathman) do in fact represent a shift in orientation and perspective within the universe of Hobbes studies, not unlike the one we were attempting to generate in our volume. As stated in the original introduction, our goal was to put into play an interpretive premise inspired less by questions of normative political philosophy than by perspectives in political theory. The premise holds that Hobbes is and foremost, a political thinker [whose] writings were, and foremost, political acts,” rather than preeminently (e.g., “mechanistic geometric materialist”) arguments, deontological postulations, or logical-deductive (e.g., “resolutive-compositive” exercises) (4). Just so, for us the issues at stake in reading Hobbes had less to do with privileging standards of philosoph-
ical argumentation (e.g., logical consistency, conceptual coherence, analytic clarity, noncontradiction, systematic reasoning) than with the ways in which political intentions, interests, and purposes might be discerned in his texts and how the texts, under the scrutiny of interpretive strategies and commitments, can be said to play out as political acts and interventions. Along these lines, our volume both into and helped to an emergent property in Hobbes studies in the 1990s; namely, a approach to his writings that, in particular, embedded questions of ethics and morality within rather than in opposition to contexts of history and modernity; dynamics of power; clashing political interests; problems of sovereignty; requirements for political order; dimensions of (dis)obedience; ideological delusions perpetrated by religion; the production, distribution, and regulation of modes of political interpretation; the struggles between church and state; and the politics of ambition, passion, toleration, and obligation. Just to name a few.

In the same vein, the political theory dimension signaled in the title of our volume marked an effort to take Hobbes the thinker out of the domain of purely philosophical interpretation where his works have been considered and assessed as contributions to analytical conceptual studies of human nature and psychology, reason, morality, rights, obligations, contract, and law. There is no doubt that these conceptually driven lines of engagement have been both enormously productive and partial in Hobbes studies, and continue to be so. Likewise, it would be misleading to suggest that there is a clearly delineable disciplinary “marker” that distinguishes between textual interpretive approaches that fall on the “philosophical” side of the ledger on the one hand and the “political theoretical” side on the other. The point is not to deny that Hobbes is a masterful (if often bedeviling) philosophical thinker. Rather, it is to say that Hobbes is not only that. Hence in conceiving a politically invested, historically attuned, strategically motivated, psychologically astute, and rhetorically alert Hobbes, we also presented a writer whose texts invite readers to immerse themselves in problems of real politics that, in a manner suited to Machiavelli, “go to the real truth of the matter than to its imagination,” while maintaining a perspective on “what is done” rather than simply (as the deontologists would have it) “what ought to be done.” Accordingly, to various degrees and through ent perspectives and interpretations, we set ourselves to show how Hobbes’s texts operate as both historical interventions within oppositional and overlapping political struggles of his own historical present and as arguments that can be brought to bear with relevance on contemporary dilemmas of politics, political concepts, and discourses of political theory.

The essence of Hobbes studies in political theory at the start of the 1990s was dramatic enough to lead one appreciative North American
reviewer (handling eleven books) to remark upon the extent to which the “vitality of current Hobbes scholarship” indicates a “developing community of research and re-delivering a “fundamental reorientation, a new ‘image’ of Hobbes . . . as a political thinker of contemporary relevance.” Embedded in that observation is the apt Faulknerian reminder that, at least in the world of Hobbes scholarship, past interpretations are never dead—they are not even past. Indeed, in the living present they are themselves subject to further interpretations that give rise in turn to ever-widening arcs of intellectual debates and (as is often the case with works on Hobbes) interpretive disputations. Over the past thirty years, in the realm where political theorists and their closest relatives in Hobbes studies tend to roam, the interrogative thicket of Hobbes scholarship has become ever more substantial, entangled, and dense with a dizzying abundance of (often multidisciplinary) collections, “companions,” and “handbooks,” as well as single-authored books on general topics with important chapters on Hobbes. And then there are the journal articles, far too many to count, far too numerous to list, but altogether evidence of the seemingly variety of approaches to Hobbes in the world of political thought and textual interpretation.

No canvassing of the Hobbes literature in political theory since 1990 would be complete, however, without mentioning some of the many single-authored books that reflect the current status and vitality of scholarship on Hobbes’s thought. Radical reappraisals have opened up, resisting the simplistic textbook pictures that reduce the origins of Hobbes’s thinking to the political imaginary of the state of nature where the life of man is famously “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”; or his use of language to and propositions; or his texts into a singular, architectonic exercise in system building; or limit his political theory to the doctrine of sovereign absolutism. Among the major reassessments, Quentin Skinner’s authoritative study *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (1996) set a new course (and incited new controversies) for thinking about Hobbes in relation to Renaissance humanism. Noel Malcolm’s *Aspects of Hobbes* (2002) constituted a commanding collection of new and previously published essays geared toward helping readers to see Hobbes “not as an isolated political philosopher, but as someone connected in all sorts of ent ways with the cultural and intellectual life of his age” (vii). Malcolm’s anticipations for his own work have also been born out in texts within the of political theory that are as inventively diverse and multiply focused in their interpretive approaches, themes, and topics as the activity of reading Hobbes allows. Which is to say, the scholarship is capacious, breathtaking, and innovative.

What else is new, then? The years 2000 through 2018 were an especially fecund period in Hobbes scholarship. Among the recent book-length ad-
ditions to the oeuvre we can count the following: a rational-choice study of connections between Hobbes’s method, his theory of the individual, and the desire for “glory”; a political philosophical analysis of positive agency in Hobbes’s understanding of reason and rationality; a historical contextual assessment of the political, partisan, and religious allegiances that mark his writings and response to the English Revolution; a narratival reading and deconstruction of *Leviathan* as an act of textual and political (democratic) disobedience; a reception study of Hobbes’s religious and political ideas in England in the late seventeenth century; a theoretical interpretive recasting of Hobbes’s materialism as an ontology of embodiment and interdependence; an intellectual contextual exegesis of Hobbes’s changing views of liberty amid the ideological of his time; a political philosophical investigation of Hobbes’s thinking with emphasis on the “invention-of-language” theme in his work; a thoroughgoing moral philosophical analysis of the natural laws, supporting a transcendent-interests interpretation of Hobbes’s political philosophy; a reassessment of Hobbes’s work that derives and a “theory of resistance rights” within his larger political project; a contextually situated, politically animated reconsideration of sovereignty (and modernity) in Hobbes’s thought as informed by the relation between his humanism and his mathematics; a conceptual analytical reconstruction of Hobbes’s legal philosophy and its for understanding international relations; a critique of the equation of “Hobbes” and “international anarchy” grounded in a contextual, historiographical, and textual reception study of Hobbes among leading thinkers in early modernity and its implications for a “Hobbesian turn” in modern international thought; and a normative political philosophical examination of Hobbes’s ethics and its implications for theorizing the relation between reasons of the right and the good.19

Any further attempt to inventory the entire catalogue of Hobbes commentary over the past thirty years would be an immense undertaking requiring a bibliographic feat close to the magnitude of Hobbes himself. And any to do justice to a description that seeks an overarching direction, meaning, or across the oeuvre would be an errand for a Foole.20 Two things seem certain, however. First, with every new eruption of scholarship the equivocal “Hobbesian” that so weighed upon the brains of early readers and subsequent commentators has become complicated, and challenged to the point of almost receding from view, as new es of the “thinkable” assume predominance in the ever-changing interpr Second, taken together, all these new works in Hobbes studies remind us that we learn to read in the wake of others, all the while modifying our relationships to the commonly shared object of inquiry, changing its questions, killing some and giving rise
to others, with sensibilities attuned not only to the possibility of the entirely new but also to the return of the presumed dead. To think of Hobbes studies in this way is to fully appreciate the extent to which the potential for dialogue across texts and authors, readers and writers, is as boundless, open, and as we allow it to become through the engagement and commentary of others. We therefore look forward to having *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory* rejoin the literature and “opened to access” with a view toward sustaining with a broader reading public an conversation animated by the life, the works, and the words of Thomas Hobbes.

Mary G. Dietz
May 2020
1. We note with sadness the death of our colleague Sheldon S. Wolin on October 21, 2015. This preface is written in memory of him.

2. Endorsements and reviews noted here include Thomas Spragens, ey Isaac, and Ross Randolph, Canadian Journal of Political Science 23, no. 3 (1990) and John Francis Burke, Perspectives on Political Science 20, no. 1 (1991). Subsequent citations of Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory and to chapters and contributors to the volume are too numerous to be listed here.


9. In his *De Cive*, or “Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society” (1651) VIII.1 [Bernard Gert, ed., *Man and Citizen* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith 1978, 205)], Hobbes suggests that in the state of nature we consider “men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other,” a metaphor that he does not repeat subsequently in *Leviathan* (1651) I. 13 (C. B. Macpherson, ed., Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), where his more famous description of man in the state of nature appears.


20. Recall, “The Foole hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice; and sometimes also with his tongue . . .” (Hobbes, Leviathan, I.15).