

“If it be without contention”: Hobbes on difference without disagreement

Teresa M. Bejan

The Author

Teresa M. Bejan is a Mellon Research Fellow in the Society of Fellows and a Lecturer in Political Science at Columbia University. She received her Ph.D. with distinction in Political Theory from Yale University in 2013 and holds previous degrees from the Universities of Chicago and Cambridge. Her work has appeared in *History of European Ideas* and the *Oxford Review of Education*, with essays on civility and evangelical liberty forthcoming in *Civility, Legality and the Limits of Justice* (ed. A. Sarat, CUP) and *The Lively Experiment: The Story of Religious Toleration in America* (eds. C. Beneke and C. Grenda). Her current book project, *Mere Civility: Tolerating Disagreement in Early Modern England and America* examines competing conceptions of civility and its relationship to toleration in the thought of Hobbes, Locke, and Roger Williams. In 2014, Dr. Bejan will begin a tenure-track appointment as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto.

The Paper

In recent attempts to recover a more tolerant Hobbes, the statement that “the Independency of the Primitive Christians” is “perhaps best” in ch. 47 of *Leviathan* is usually Exhibit A. Yet the conditionals appended to this so-called endorsement—“if it be without contention, and without measuring the Doctrine of Christ by our affection to the Person of his Minister”—have garnered surprisingly little attention. This paper will argue that understanding these conditionals and whether they could be satisfied is essential in reconstructing a Hobbesian theory of toleration. Placing them at the center

of one's interpretation reveals a distinctive institutional and ethical vision of "difference without disagreement" in which the permission of diversity in religious worship and association depended on scrupulous sovereign discipline over speech. This explicitly anti-evangelical approach to toleration presents a challenge for recent scholarship that presents Hobbes as a principled proponent of "Independency," yet I argue that this distinctive—and distinctively Hobbesian—vision of a tolerant society still resonates today.