

Introduction

Power, prosperity, and peace in enlightenment thought

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I

In the early 1780s, Benjamin Franklin was fascinated by the possibility of establishing a perpetual peace. In 1782, as an end to the War of American Independence began to appear on the horizon, he arranged for the translation and publication of a peace plan by a former galley slave, Pierre-André Gargaz.¹ Gargaz's plan for a union of European states, Franklin wrote, might "appear in some respects chimerical," but, he continued, "there is Merit in so good an Intention."² Towards the end of 1783 he was writing to the British MP David Hartley, a longstanding friend also involved in the Paris peace negotiations that ended the North American war, lamenting the stupidity of conflict. In the case of Britain and France there had been seven centuries of "mad wars" doing "one another mischief." Instead of wasting resources on war, Franklin asked, "how many excellent things might have been done to promote the internal welfare of each country? What Bridges roads, canals, and other useful public works, and institutions tending to the common felicity might have been made and established?" Franklin had a ready solution. He proposed to Hartley a collective treaty or "family compact" between Britain, France, and North America. North America, Franklin wrote, "would be as happy as the Sabine Girls, if she could be the means of uniting in perpetual peace her father and her husband."³

¹ [Pierre-André Garsaz], *Conciliateur de toutes les nations d'Europe, ou Projet de paix perpétuelle entre tous les souverains de l'Europe & leurs voisins* (n.p., 1782). See E. R. Cohn, "The Printer and the 'Peasant': Benjamin Franklin and Pierre-André Gargaz, Two Philosophers in Search of Peace," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 8, no. 1 (2010): 146–72.

² Franklin to unnamed person, 22 May 1783, *Benjamin Franklin Papers*, Digital Edition, The Packard Humanities Institute.

³ Franklin to David Hartley, 16 October 1783, *Benjamin Franklin Papers*.

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Franklin's was an age obsessed with such transformative visions of perpetual peace. As this volume showcases, these discussions were closely connected to contemporary debates about political economy. They were centrally concerned with the rise of global commerce and its effects on both competition among European states and on Europe's relation to the rest of the world. It was evident to every eighteenth-century commentator that perpetual peace could never be established without dealing with the realities of economic competition among rival states and empires. In an undated fragment entitled "Plans for Perpetual Peace," part of a projected work on war and peace, Jeremy Bentham noted that "All plans of this sort written in the past were premature [because] they were put forth before the spirit of enlightenment had spread sufficiently to allow people to recognize the community of interests that exists among nations. This will not be accepted before the science of political economy is understood by the general public."⁴

Students of politics and of international relations have tended to ignore the variety and the depth of the approaches to the relationship between commerce and peace that characterized the Enlightenment. They have also tended to focus their attention on a small subset of the eighteenth-century literature on perpetual peace, which they have regarded primarily as a moral discourse, as a succession of attempts to provide a normative grounding for international relations. The best-known discussion of perpetual peace has long been the essay with that title published by Immanuel Kant in 1795.⁵ However, the term "perpetual peace" had entered into wide circulation much earlier, thanks to the Abbé de Saint Pierre, whose continually revised and extended treatise on the subject first took shape during the diplomatic negotiations that resulted in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht.⁶ Among Saint-Pierre's most important readers in the eighteenth century was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who spent an important period in the 1750s intensively studying Saint-Pierre's writings, producing among other things a widely read abstract

⁴ Jeremy Bentham, undated fragment, Papers of Jeremy Bentham, The Bentham Project, Bentham MS Boxes 177 and 178, University College, London, 294–5.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1795). On Kant's essay, see James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (eds.), *Perpetual Peace. Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997); Immanuel Kant, *Vers la paix perpétuelle*, ed. Max Marcuzzi (Paris: J. Vrin, 2007); for an anthology of German peace plans, see Anita and Walter Dietze (eds.), *Ewiger Friede? Dokumente einer deutschen Diskussion um 1800* (Leipzig and Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1989); the continuing relevance of Kant's essay is discussed in, Reinhard Merckel and Roland Wittmann (eds.), "Zum ewigen Frieden." *Grundlagen, Aktualität und Aussichten einer Idee von Immanuel Kant* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996).

⁶ Charles Irénée de Castel de Saint-Pierre, *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* (Utrecht: A. Schouten, 1713).

of his treatise on perpetual peace.⁷ Saint-Pierre, Rousseau, and Kant represent a rather distinctive set of contributions to a much larger and more varied literature that extends back to the seventeenth century and proliferated after every major war in the eighteenth century, including the War of American Independence. By illuminating the contours of this wider literature about perpetual peace, and revealing the extent of its preoccupation with political economy, the chapters in this volume give us a better sense of these seminal Enlightenment debates and their historical legacies.⁸

The extent to which eighteenth-century writers were preoccupied with economic rivalry as a facet of intensifying political conflict is now well understood, thanks above all to the scholarship of Istvan Hont.⁹ Hont himself found David Hume and Adam Smith to be particularly illuminating starting points for thinking about the relationship between commerce and peace because of their focus on, as he put it, “how the logic of commerce actually played itself out when superimposed upon the logic of war.”¹⁰ According to Hont, Smith’s ‘The’ *Wealth of Nations* was not a treatise on “perpetual peace” in that it did not imagine a world without competition between states; on the contrary, Smith’s work amounted to “a competitive economic strategy.”¹¹ At the same time, however, Hont viewed Smith as developing a critical perspective on state behavior that was predicated on a cosmopolitan theory of globalization, or the spread of economic development around the world. The chapters in this volume take up and extend into new territory this important insight that “a cosmopolitan theory of commercial globalization” and a “competitive globalization strategy” were not necessarily mutually exclusive categories in eighteenth-century thought – though powerful tensions were generated by attempts to combine them. This volume is also indebted to Hont in an additional sense, since it represents an enduring collaboration that began in 2008 with a series of exploratory workshops he helped convene at King’s College, Cambridge, on the theme of “Commerce and

⁷ Rousseau’s abstract of Saint-Pierre’s treatise appeared in 1761 and became part of a particularly wide debate about perpetual peace in the context of the Seven Years War, but his accompanying judgment only became available posthumously, in 1782. The best modern edition is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Principes du droit de la guerre: écrits sur la paix perpétuelle*, ed. Blaise Bachofen and Céline Spector (Paris: J. Vrin, 2008).

⁸ See further, Hans Blom, “The Republican Mirror. The Dutch Idea of Europe” and Biancamaria Fontana, “The Napoleonic Empire and the Europe of Nations,” in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe. From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91–115 and 116–28; Bo Stråth, *Europe’s Utopias of Peace. 1815, 1919, 1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁹ See above all Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 6. ¹¹ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 8.

Perpetual Peace in the Eighteenth Century.”¹² Although the title of this book is *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment*, it is not solely concerned with the eighteenth century, the argument being that we understand what happened after enlightenment, normally understood as ending with the French Revolution. *Commerce and Peace* underlines the extent to which enlightenment controversies continue to influence and illuminate politics and society today, the point being that we ought to seek to understand them and their various legacies.

The relationship between commerce and peace was a central concern for those involved in correspondence with Franklin – physiocratic and *philosophe* circles in Paris, dissenters and reformers across Britain, and members of the governing class in the new North American republic – all of whom perceived themselves to be living through a distinctive period in history, characterized by acute uncertainty about the future. From their perspective, the world had changed since commerce had become the central issue of national politics. The natural sociability of human beings was being thwarted, including in the relations between states. This was a shift that Hume had dated to the previous century. In the first edition of Hume’s *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741), in the essay “Of Liberty and Despotism,” a title that was changed to “Of Civil Liberty” in editions from 1758, Hume claimed that until the seventeenth century “trade was never esteemed an affair of state.” Xenophon mentioned trade but doubted “if it be of advantage to a state.” Plato “totally excludes it from his imaginary republic,” and in more recent times “even the Italians [of the sixteenth century] have kept a profound silence with regard to it.” More recently, by contrast, trade had become “the chief attention, as well of ministers of state, as of speculative reasoners.” The cause of the new obsession with trade was evident to Hume: “the great opulence, grandeur, and military achievements of the two maritime powers [England and the Dutch Republic] seem first to have instructed mankind in the importance of an extensive commerce.”¹³

Commerce brought uncertainty in the form of the flux of markets. This might lead to the decline of major and minor states, as shown by the cases of Spain in the seventeenth century and of the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century. The former had neglected its domestic markets; the latter had seen the prices of its products undercut by the lower

¹² Follow-up workshops took place in Lausanne in 2013 and in Tartu in 2014.

¹³ David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1987), 88–9.

wage costs of its competitors.¹⁴ On top of this, states had begun to rely on national debts to fund the ballooning costs of warfare conducted by standing armies and large navies. The prevalent fear of unintended national bankruptcy, or monarch-inspired planned bankruptcy, was evoked most powerfully by Hume in his essay “Of Public Credit,” which deployed the image of cudgel-playing in a china shop as a description of “princes and states fighting and quarrelling amidst their debts, funds and public mortgages.”¹⁵ Hume, like so many of his contemporaries, regarded the new system of war finance to be a dangerous innovation. Its tendency was to lock the power politics of internationally trading states into a mutually reinforcing degenerative spiral. As a cancerous growth it had to be excised altogether from modern economic life. Either the economy had to be made institutionally incapable of financing modern war, or war had to be stopped and global peace achieved.¹⁶ The alternative was a world that was even worse than that of Thomas Hobbes’s gladiator states jealously monitoring each other’s preparedness for war. What Hume had called “jealousy of trade,” in an essay of 1758, was identified as an intensification of earlier, purely political, antagonism – or jealousy – between states. Economic war was becoming a permanent condition.¹⁷ In the view of Hume’s close friend Adam Smith, such a development was a gross abuse of the old vice of “national animosity.” Instead of “national friendship” between neighboring countries, “mercantile jealousy,” Adam Smith wrote, “inflames, and is itself inflamed, by the violence of national animosity.” It makes every nation “look with an invidious eye upon the prosperity of all the nations with which it trades, and to consider their gain as its own loss.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Istvan Hont, “The ‘Rich Country – Poor Country’ Debate in Scottish Political Economy,” in *Jealousy of Trade*, 267–324; “The Rich Country – Poor Country Debate Revisited: The Irish Origins and French Reception of the Hume Paradox,” in Margaret Schabas and Carl Wennerlind, eds., *Hume’s Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 222–342.

¹⁵ David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, 361–2.

¹⁶ Istvan Hont, “The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy,” in *Jealousy of Trade*, 325–54; Michael Sonenscher, “The Nation’s Debt and the Birth of the Modern Republic: The French Fiscal Deficit and the Politics of the Revolution of 1789,” *History of Political Thought*, 18 (1997): 64–103, 267–325; Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge. Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Istvan Hont, “The Political Economy of the ‘Unnatural and Retrograde’ Order: Adam Smith and Natural Liberty,” in *Französische Revolution und Politische Ökonomie*, ed. Maxine Berg et al. (Trier, 1989), 122–49, and “Jealousy of Trade: an introduction,” *Jealousy of Trade*, 1–156.

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776), 2 vols., II, Book IV, Chapter III, 82–3.

The response of numerous contemporaries was to condemn the new commercial world, or at least some of its most salient features. Victor Riqueti, marquis de Mirabeau, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Gabriel Bonnot de Mably all, in very different ways, advised the abandonment of industrial strategies seeking commercial dominion, on the grounds that they were ultimately self-defeating and would lead to the collapse of states. By contrast, Smith's 'The' *Wealth of Nations*, with its celebration of productivity, the division of labor, and machinery, was intended to destroy the idea that the wealth of modern nations could not last, but would decline like that of their ancient and early modern forerunners. National wealth could be preserved, Smith held, by implementing a national economic strategy of mass production, combined with mechanization, and constant technological innovation. Smith, like Jean-François Melon before him, suggested that it was technology and innovation, rather than wage rates, that would determine the outcome of competitive trade battles internationally. Smith's hope was that international relations could come to be characterized more by emulation, or economic competition conducted without envy and without involving all sorts of military and other power struggles over economic gains. Smith was convinced that there were kinds of economic competition that were instances of such noble rivalry. However, he was also far less sanguine than many of his contemporaries about the limits of the human capacity for judgment, and hence far more skeptical about the possibility of maintaining a stable distinction between emulation and envy, or engaging in economic competition while maintaining a cosmopolitan respect for the attainments of other nations.¹⁹ It was difficult to see, in other words, how the race for prosperity could ever be fully disentangled from the struggle for power, and it was easy to see how the latter could pervert the former.

In the early 1780s, Franklin and his friends had become convinced that conditions had arrived in which the kind of emulation among nations described by Smith could be made a reality. With Britain exhausted by war and nearly bankrupt, and France in similar circumstances, the time was ripe for sociability and peace to be restored to Europe. Recent events had confirmed the irrationality and waste of war, and underscored the likelihood that corrupt commercial systems led to national defeat. The prominent Welsh dissenting minister Richard Price was convinced that "the empire of reason and virtue" was imminent, with nations abandoning the sword of conflict. The defeat of Britain in the American Wars proved that corrupt forms of commerce, exemplified by Britain's mercantile system, could not sustain states in the building of

¹⁹ On Smith and emulation see Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 111–25.

commercial empires.²⁰ States able to recognize the benefits of commerce and the impossibility of establishing commerce without peace, were the future. Strategies to implement this cosmopolitan vision included the proclamation of free ports and leagues of armed neutrality against warmongers, commercial treaties between states, and agreement on an international code of law. In addition, the study of the classic texts concerned with perpetual peace was recommended, especially Saint Pierre's *Projet de paix perpétuelle*, usually "with Rousseau's remarks."²¹ Franklin and his friends anticipated a world in which human beings collected in communities would become more sociable, rationally accepting the benefits of peace, or recognizing the need to live peacefully because the alternative of endless war and the collapse of civilization was too monstrous to accept.

The major problem, Franklin recognized, was that human sociability was insufficiently powerful to draw communities and states together into mutually beneficial peaceful relationships. However rational it might be to embrace peace, and to maintain it, the reality of individual and national behavior so often pulled in an opposite direction. States were always more than capable of pursuing a policy entirely at odds with their own interests and those of humanity. This was why, in 1784, Franklin was speculating about ways of forcing states to abandon military confrontation. One way to get to perpetual peace that aroused his interest for a time was the air balloon. Another of Franklin's friends, the Dutch natural philosopher Jan Ingenhousz, remarked in a letter of 2nd January 1784, that balloons were "one of the greatest discoveries of natural philosophy."²² They had the capacity to force perpetual peace upon the world. Ingenhousz asked how an army could subsist if an enemy could "throw force and destruction upon their stores and magazines at any time?" Franklin replied on 16th January 1784, agreeing that balloons might very well "give a new turn to human affairs."²³ They would

²⁰ Richard Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution, and the means of making it a benefit to the world* (London, 1784), 7.

²¹ Saint-Pierre's *Projet* was republished several times in the final decades of the eighteenth century, and Rousseau's commentary many more times still. See, for example, "Projet de paix perpétuelle de M. l'abbé de Saint-Pierre" and "Analyse de J-J. Rousseau" in Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat Marquis de Condorcet, Charles de Peyssonnel, Isaac René Guy Le Chapelier, eds., *Bibliothèque de l'homme public; ou, Analyse Raisonnée des principaux ouvrages françois et étrangers, sur la politique en général, la législation, les finances, la police, l'agriculture et le commerce en particulier, et sur le Droit naturel et public*, Seconde année, Volume 5 (Paris: Buisson, 1791), 90–155.

²² Jan Ingenhousz to Franklin, 2 January 1784, in Jan Ingenhousz, *The Ingenhousz-Jenner Correspondence*, (London: Janus, 1964), 541.

²³ Franklin to Ingenhousz, 16 January 1784, in Ingenhousz, *The Ingenhousz-Jenner Correspondence*, 545.

contribute to convincing sovereigns of “the folly of wars.” Balloons were cheap; Franklin said that five thousand balloons carrying two men each would not cost more than five ships of the line. The technical problems associated with using balloons as a deterrent to war would be overcome, Franklin stated, once the English recognized their potential, because “they are such ingenious mechanicians.” Franklin involved himself in the experiments to keep balloons steady in the air in the following months, forwarding his correspondence to the French *Académie des Sciences* in the hope that control over the movement of balloons might soon be perfected.²⁴

Such inflated expectations of the 1780s were short-lived, as have been many subsequent hopes of engineering a technological means for ending war (including, for example, H.G. Wells’s 1933 vision of a global peace ushered in by an Anglophone “Air Dictatorship”).²⁵ The French Revolution seemed to many observers to have made a reality of Hume’s vision of warlike states battling for imperial and economic ascendancy. Though some retained Franklin’s hopes of a federative future – notably Thomas Paine – for many the renewal of war between Britain and France, after barely a decade of peace, underlined the inevitability of war between leading commercial states. The problem was “the prevalence and extension of the war-system throughout Europe, supported as it has been by the universal adoption of the funding-system.”²⁶ As George Chalmers put it, the renewal of “dreadful war” was accompanied by a train of evils, as “bankruptcy followed bankruptcy in rapid succession, our resources seemed to vanish, distrust and terror seized the mercantile world, and the Bank of England itself partook . . . of the general alarm.” Against a background of Terror across France, the supporters of reform became mute: “the once sacred name of Liberty itself became offensive.”²⁷ Chalmers believed that he could prove that despite war and bankruptcy, commerce thrived on peace, and that economic development would continue to occur in the face of the actions of states in making wars. Hume’s argument that bankruptcy would destroy both politics and trade was

²⁴ Creuzé to Franklin, 24 December 1783, 4 January and 14 February 1784; Jean-Baptiste Le Roy to Franklin, 7 January and 18 February, 1784, *Benjamin Franklin Papers*.

²⁵ H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1933).

²⁶ Jasper Wilson [James Currie], *A Letter, Commercial and Political, Addressed to the Rt. Honble. William Pitt: in Which the Real Interests of Britain, in the Present Crisis, Are Considered, and Some Observations are Offered on the General State of Europe* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinsons, 1793).

²⁷ Chalmers, *An Estimate of the Comparative Strength of Great-Britain. During the Present and Four Preceding Reigns, and of the Losses of Her Trade from Every War Since the Revolution* (London: John Stockdale, 1794), 14.

mistaken.²⁸ An alternative view was that war should be lauded as a means of revivifying the corruptions of national character that accompanied commerce. As John Brand wrote in 1797, drawing on Adam Ferguson's work, war would at least increase the "masculine energy which for more than half a century has been declining by a natural decay from the want of the necessity of exercising it, artificially accelerated by a mawkish and hypocritical system of petrifying [commercial] principles disseminated among us."²⁹

For other observers of European politics, including Kant, modern history offered a different lesson on the subject of perpetual peace. On the one hand, Kant was an outspoken critic of the warlike behavior of contemporary commercial states. On the other hand, he insisted on defining rigorous ethical limits on the use of state power even for peacemaking purposes. In Kant's view, the only truly successful agent of peace making had been war itself. The march of reason or sociability could not be relied upon to put an end to war. Rather, perpetual peace had to be conceived in terms of the "unsocial sociability" (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) that for Kant defined commercial society itself. According to Kant, the only stable peaceful equilibrium was one in which the destructive powers of states – particularly their fiscal capacities – were reined in by "republican" governments of consenting citizens who, exhausted by war, had come to dissent from violence. This equilibrium was defined in principle as the purely moral product of good will, as an (automatically peaceful) "ethical commonwealth" or Kingdom of Ends; but historically Kant claimed that it would be the product of unsociable, possibly near-fatal collisions among intelligent, self-loving selves, a process that would eventually foster an (perhaps reluctant, but peaceful) attachment to "culture" and to "right." One of the great tasks of philosophy, according to Kant, was to work out what a politics erected on this foundation would look like.

II

Eighteenth-century discussions of perpetual peace – especially Kant's – have continued to serve as a starting point for reflection about the normative structure of the international order. They have also been linked to contested claims about the ability of modern Western states to behave in a peaceful, self-limiting way, or to generate an international legal

²⁸ Chalmers, *An Estimate of the Comparative Strength of Great-Britain*, ix–x.

²⁹ Brand, *Considerations on the depression of the funds, and the present embarrassments of circulation: with propositions for some remedies to each* (London: Richard White and T. Longman, 1797), 64–9.

order and operate within its confines. Such claims are a key aspect of these states' identity, on a par with the claim that there is a particular affinity between their political institutions and a market-based economy (though one prominent explanation of this peaceful tendency is called the “democratic peace thesis,” conspicuously referencing political institutions alone).³⁰ On the other hand, the development of an international legal order, like economic globalization, can be seen as the product of centuries of war-making by Western states and as the continuation of a long history of Western empire-building.³¹ From this perspective, the flourishing of literature on the “democratic peace” since the 1980s looks like an echo of earlier imperial ideologies from the turn of the twentieth century, Anglophone ones in particular.³² This is the same point of origin to which historians are increasingly inclined to trace the development of international organizations like the League of Nations and the United Nations.³³

The chapters in this volume are contributions to a fundamental reassessment of Enlightenment debates about “perpetual peace” and their legacy in the history of political thought. They examine how eighteenth and nineteenth-century theorists of international order approached the conduct of the European states and empires of their time, particularly with regard to economic rivalry and the rise of public finance. The history of the idea of “perpetual peace” is most often told in terms of the classic juridical analogy that results from the idea of international relations as a state of nature, comparable to a state of nature among individual human beings.³⁴ In these terms, “perpetual peace” denotes a legal framework that puts an end to the anarchy of international relations. The result is an analytical typology that has often been

³⁰ On these aspects of the identity of the democratic state see particularly John Dunn's extensive investigations, most recently in *Breaking Democracy's Spell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Also relevant is his “The Identity of the Bourgeois Liberal Republic,” in *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 206–25. On “democratic peace” see, classically, Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 205–35; and Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 323–53.

³¹ See e.g. Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007).

³² Duncan Bell, “Before the Democratic Peace: Racial Utopianism, Empire and the Abolition of War,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 3 (2014): 647–70.

³³ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Cf. Theodore Christov, *Before Anarchy: Hobbes and his Critics in Modern International Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).