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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE  
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



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*Hobbes and Bramhall  
on Liberty and Necessity*

EDITED BY  
VERE CHAPPELL  
*University of Massachusetts*



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## Abbreviations

1st	First (unauthorized) edition of Hobbes's <i>Of Liberty and Necessity</i> (1654)
AV	Authorized Version (of the Bible)
<i>Def.</i>	First edition of Bramhall's <i>A Defence of True Liberty</i> (1655)
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
ed.	Editor (of this volume)
<i>EW4</i>	Volume 4 of <i>The English Works of Thomas Hobbes</i> , edited by William Molesworth (1840)
<i>EW5</i>	Volume 5 of <i>The English Works of Thomas Hobbes</i> , edited by William Molesworth (1841)
MS	Harleian Manuscript of Hobbes's <i>Of Liberty and Necessity</i>
<i>ODEE</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>Ques.</i>	First edition of Hobbes's <i>The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance</i> (1656)
<i>W1</i>	First edition of Bramhall's Works (1676)
<i>W3</i>	Third edition of Bramhall's Works (1842–4)

## Introduction

In 1645 the Marquess of Newcastle invited two of his acquaintances, Thomas Hobbes and John Bramhall, to have a philosophical discussion at his house in Paris. The three men were Englishmen, forced to live abroad by the Civil War at home; all three were prominent supporters of the by-then losing Royalist cause. Newcastle had been a commander in the Royalist army; Bramhall was not only a bishop in the Anglican Church but a forceful advocate of the King's position on matters of church governance; and Hobbes was a well-known political theorist whose recently published *De cive* was widely read as a defence of the English monarchy.

The subject set for the discussion was human freedom, on which the Marquess knew his guests had sharply different views; the discussion in fact became a debate between the two. After the event, Newcastle asked them to send him written statements setting forth their positions. Bramhall responded with a 'discourse' on liberty and necessity; and he must have sent a copy to Hobbes as well, for the latter's 'treatise' *Of Liberty and Necessity* followed Bramhall's work point for point, criticizing it in addition to presenting and defending his own views.<sup>1</sup> Bramhall responded in turn with *A Vindication of True Liberty from Antecedent and Extrinsic Necessity*, which was both a point-by-point defence of his original position against Hobbes's criticisms and a critical attack on Hobbes's position.

This might have been the end of the Hobbes–Bramhall debate on freedom but for a later event that none of the participants foresaw. Neither author had intended his written statement to be published. But a French friend of Hobbes's asked for a copy of his manuscript so that he might read it. This

<sup>1</sup> I call these two works Bramhall's 'discourse' and Hobbes's 'treatise' for convenience. Their authors did sometimes so refer to them, but these labels were not part of their titles.



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friend knew no English, so he asked a young Englishman, apparently with Hobbes's permission, to translate it for him. This young man, one John Davies of Kidwelly, made a copy of the manuscript for himself, without Hobbes's permission; and several years later, in 1654, he published the work, with a polemical preface praising Hobbes and excoriating 'priests, jesuits, and ministers'. Bramhall, who was of course a priest, felt betrayed, sure as he was that Hobbes must at least have known his treatise was to be published. So Bramhall responded by publishing his earlier *Vindication*, with the title *A Defence of True Liberty from Antecedent and Extrinsical Necessity* (1655). Hobbes then responded with *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance* (1656), and Bramhall in turn with his *Castigations of Mr Hobbes* (1658). Hobbes at that point chose not to answer back again; but even so, the original debate between the two authors had become an extended controversy.

This volume presents a major portion of that controversy. It contains the complete texts of Bramhall's original discourse and Hobbes's treatise, together with substantial selections from Bramhall's *Defence* and Hobbes's *Questions*. It also includes a few excerpts from four of Hobbes's other works: *The Elements of Law*, *Leviathan*, *De corpore*, and *De homine*.

The Hobbes–Bramhall controversy over freedom is a striking episode in the history of early modern philosophy. Both authors speak and argue with force and ingenuity; each has a knack for making his own position seem attractive and the other's not; and their opposition to one another is unyielding. Furthermore the subject of their dispute is of central importance, not only for our understanding of ourselves but for the conduct of our lives. Narrowly construed, the question between Hobbes and Bramhall concerns the nature of human freedom – the freedom with which, they both agree, human beings sometimes act. But the answer to that question depends upon our own nature, and the nature of the world within which we act – and also, at least for these two authors and for nearly all of their contemporaries, upon the nature of God and of our relation to him.<sup>2</sup> And on the other hand, our view of human freedom has implications for our conception and practice of morality and politics. Nor is this a question of merely historical interest. Philosophers, theologians, and scientists today are still very much concerned with it, to a significant

<sup>2</sup> Hobbes as well as Bramhall takes the Bible to be an important source of evidence or authority in deciding not only ethical and political issues but also metaphysical ones such as that concerning the nature of freedom and whether human beings have it.

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extent in the same terms as those in which Hobbes and Bramhall confronted it.

Neither Hobbes's nor Bramhall's view of human freedom is wholly original. Hobbes is a determinist: he thinks that everything that happens, including every human action, is the necessary effect of antecedent causes. Bramhall, by contrast, thinks that some human actions are not necessitated by antecedent factors; these are the free actions we perform. Hobbes agrees that there are free actions; but he conceives freedom in such wise that it is logically consistent with necessity: his position is that which philosophers today call compatibilism. Freedom in Bramhall's view, however, is inconsistent with necessitation; he is an incompatibilist. An incompatibilist has two alternatives: accept necessity and forgo freedom or keep freedom and reject necessity. Since it is the latter that Bramhall opts for, his position is called libertarianism.<sup>3</sup>

But Hobbes was hardly the first determinist, or the first compatibilist, in the history of philosophy; nor was Bramhall the first libertarian. Positions of both these kinds had frequently been held by ancient and medieval philosophers, and both were being advocated by other thinkers in the early modern period, theologians as well as philosophers. Hobbes's view of freedom and necessity was quite similar to that of the Protestant Reformers, Luther and Calvin among others. And Bramhall's view was close to that of the most influential Catholic thinkers of the day, namely the Jesuits, who followed Molina and Suarez. It must not be thought that all Protestants were determinists and all Catholics libertarians. On the Catholic side, for example, there were the Jansenists, implacable opponents of the Jesuits on the matter of human freedom and necessity. And among Protestants, the followers of James Arminius had rejected the determinism of the orthodox Calvinists in Holland and developed a view of freedom that was much like that of the Jesuits. This Arminian position had also become influential in Stuart England, especially among the clergy. Bramhall himself was often identified as an Arminian.

Hobbes, of course, was more than merely a determinist, and Bramhall more than a libertarian, even in the works comprising their controversy

<sup>3</sup> Actually, an incompatibilist has a third alternative, since he may reject both freedom and necessity. And similarly, a compatibilist need not be a determinist, and need not allow freedom. For compatibilism and incompatibilism are views about the logical relationship of freedom and necessity; whether everything is necessary or whether there is freedom is another question. As a matter of historical fact, it is true that most compatibilists have been determinists and have believed in freedom, as Hobbes does; and that most incompatibilists have been libertarians, as Bramhall is.

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over freedom. Each set his view of liberty, necessity, and their relation to one another within a comprehensive psychology and cosmology, and related it to distinctive ethical, political, and theological theories, though both Hobbes and Bramhall sought to stay within a broadly Christian, indeed Protestant, framework. And it is in these surrounding areas that some of the sharpest differences between Hobbes's and Bramhall's thinking are to be found – and also where their most original ideas emerge.

There are not, to be sure, very many original ideas to be found anywhere in Bramhall's thinking. His philosophical views in general are traditional and orthodox, replicating to a large extent the Aristotelian Scholasticism of the High Middle Ages, though sometimes with modifications introduced in the sixteenth century. Even Bramhall's theological views were largely those of the Scholastics – except where those had been rejected by the Protestant Reformers, for Bramhall was a fierce critic of 'Papism' in his writings and sermons. One valuable feature of Bramhall's contributions to the controversy with Hobbes, especially for modern readers, is their explanations of Scholastic ideas and terms, often done more simply and clearly than those of the Scholastics themselves.

There is more originality in Hobbes's contributions. For one thing Hobbes was a metaphysical materialist. Whereas most of his contemporaries acknowledged the existence of immaterial as well as material beings, Hobbes thought to reduce all things, including human minds, to matter. Such a position was no novelty in ancient times, but few thinkers in the mid seventeenth century maintained it, and virtually no Christian did. Being a materialist required Hobbes to develop a whole new psychology, since on the prevailing view the human mind or soul is an immaterial substance with special powers that can only be exemplified in such a substance. This is a task to which Hobbes devoted considerable effort. And apart from his materialism, Hobbes had already constructed a distinctive political philosophy, quite different from the views prevailing at the time; and some of these come into play in his treatise as well.

The most important part of Hobbes's materialist psychology for his view of human freedom concerns desire (or appetite) and will. These are the powers that have traditionally been taken to be most closely involved in the motivation of action: people perform actions because they will to perform them, and they will to perform the actions they do because they desire (or want) the things they think those actions will bring them. In the traditional psychology, maintained by the Scholastics and by Bramhall, desire and will

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are sharply differentiated from one another. Desire is a power of the sensitive soul, which may well be purely material and is found in brute animals as well as in human beings. But will can only be ascribed to a soul that is rational, and a rational soul, because it must be immaterial, is only found in human beings.<sup>4</sup> For Hobbes, however, there are no immaterial beings, souls or anything else; and whatever powers human beings have are powers of material things. Hobbes concludes that there is no such thing as will as the Scholastics conceived it, and that the only factors motivating actions are desires, or species of desire. Hobbes does, however, give the word ‘will’ a place in his psychological vocabulary. Typically, when an agent is ready to act, he will have many different desires competing among themselves, so to speak, to produce the action that will be performed: this is the situation of a person deliberating about what to do. The one desire that wins this competition, the one that actually motivates the agent to act as he does, is what Hobbes calls the agent’s ‘will’ with respect to the action performed. Thus, although there are wills for Hobbes, a will is not a distinctive kind of mental operation, different from a desire; wills rather constitute a subclass of desires.

There is much in Hobbes’s ethical and political theory that is original as well. This is the area in which Hobbes worked most extensively throughout his life, and for his contributions to which he is best known. Baldly stated, his central view is that right and wrong, whether moral or legal, are defined in terms of laws arbitrarily decreed by some authoritative lawmaker, either the political sovereign within a civil society or, behind and in addition to that, God himself. Connected with this central premise is the claim that there is no independent standard of right apart from the lawmaker’s will, no antecedent principle which determines or even influences his decrees. And from this Hobbes concludes that what God or the sovereign decrees to be right *is* right, just because he does decree it. This is tantamount to saying that might is right, since right is created by might – God’s or the sovereign’s power.

Hobbes brings these moral and political ideas into his debate with Bramhall in response to the latter’s claim that if all actions are necessitated in advance, it follows that both the civil laws and God himself are unjust, because they condemn and punish men for doing wrongs they cannot help but do. Hobbes’s answer to this is that God and the laws cannot be unjust,

<sup>4</sup> Among mortal creatures, that is. For angels also have – or rather are – immaterial souls, and angels have will and other rational powers accordingly.

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by definition, and that justice requires not that a malefactor have been able to avoid his evil action but merely that he have done it voluntarily, in response to his own will. And this is perfectly consistent, Hobbes says, with the agent's having been necessitated to perform that action. As for punishment, the purpose of it in Hobbes's view is not vengeance or recompense for bad actions done in the past, but to prevent bad actions from being done in the future. On that understanding, punishment is justifiable even if the malefactor could not have avoided the action for which he is punished. Bramhall of course is repelled by all of these doctrines: Hobbes's voluntaristic account of right and of God's action and his utilitarian account of punishment are in direct conflict with the traditionally sanctioned ethical and theological views he holds.

Let us now take a closer look at the central issues in the Hobbes–Bramhall controversy and at the positions each author takes on them. These are the issues that directly concern the nature of freedom and of necessity.

For Bramhall, a free action is one that is not necessitated by 'antecedent and extrinsic' causes. He does not claim that free actions have no causes, only that their causes do not make it necessary that they occur. Nor does he deny that things other than human free actions are necessitated by their causes; on the contrary, he thinks that the vast majority of natural events – the things that happen in the natural world – do have causes that antecedently and extrinsically necessitate their occurrence. What differentiates free actions from natural events for Bramhall is that they are caused (or partly caused) by volitions, and that volitions themselves have no causes, or at least no causes either antecedent to their occurrence or extrinsic to themselves. A volition as Bramhall understands the term is an act of willing, an exercise of the rational faculty or power of willing, which power Bramhall calls the will; the actions volitions cause he calls voluntary.<sup>5</sup>

How is it then that volitions come about for Bramhall, if they are not caused (or fully caused) to do so? His answer is that they 'take [their] beginning from the faculty of the will' (*Defence*, § 30), that is, from the faculty or power of willing, acting independently and on its own. For the will is a

<sup>5</sup> Bramhall does not actually use the term 'volition' very often in his exchanges with Hobbes; he rather speaks of 'acts of the will' or 'acts of willing'. But 'volition' and 'act of the will' are synonymous in Scholastic usage, and Bramhall himself uses them as such in his *Defence*; see §27. Bramhall also makes 'election' and 'choice' acts of the will, but these terms are not synonymous with 'volition'. For although every (act of) election and every (act of) choice is a volition, the converse does not hold: there are volitions other than these, those namely whereby what is willed is a final end and not a means to some end.

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special sort of power, unlike any other: it has, as Bramhall says, ‘dominion . . . over itself’ and also, thereby, ‘dominion over its own acts to will or will without extrinsical necessitation’ (ibid., §§ 7, 32). Or, as he also puts it, the will ‘has the power to move itself’; it ‘determines itself’ (ibid., §§ 20, 17). This does not mean that the will is not subject to external and antecedent influences; it means that no set of such influences suffices to make it act. Whether it produces a volition at all, or which volition it produces – whether one to perform or one not to perform a given action – is ultimately up to it.

An autonomous power of the sort the will is is a free power, in Bramhall’s view, because its operation is not necessitated by causes other than itself. Since the products of the will’s operations, that is, its volitions, are not caused, and hence not necessitated, by anything other than the will itself, these volitions are free as well. As for the voluntary actions to which free volitions in turn give rise, they are free because their causes – that is, these volitions – are free. Bramhall, in common with many metaphysicians of his time, held to the principle that if the cause of an event is necessary then the event is necessary too. But Bramhall also held the converse principle, that if the cause of an event is free then the event is free as well. Thus a voluntary action inherits its freedom or necessity from the volition that gives rise to it.<sup>6</sup>

Hobbes objects to Bramhall’s account of freedom on several grounds. First, although he agrees that voluntary actions are those caused by volitions, he denies that these volitions are the exercises of a special kind of rational faculty or power, one uniquely possessed by human beings: there is no such power as ‘the will’ for Hobbes.<sup>7</sup> This denial is dictated by Hobbes’s materialistic psychology, as we have seen. But secondly, and independently of that, Hobbes argues that no power of any being could have the properties that Bramhall attributes to it. Bramhall speaks of the will as performing actions and as suspending its act, as commanding and moving things, as being advised by the understanding, and so forth. These are

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that although Bramhall’s view of freedom (which is also the view of the Dutch Arminians) is Scholastic, in the sense that several Scholastic philosophers – Suarez, Molina, and Bellarmino, and perhaps Scotus too, among others – defended it, not every Scholastic philosopher did so. Thomas Aquinas did not, for one; some commentators have held that Aquinas was in fact a compatibilist with respect to freedom and necessity, and may even have been a kind of determinist: see e.g. James Petrik, ‘Freedom as Self-Determination in the *Summa Theologiae*’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (1989), 87–100.

<sup>7</sup> Hobbes, like Bramhall, rarely uses the term ‘volition’; nor does he often speak of ‘acts of the will’, presumably because this term suggests a contrast with ‘the will itself’ or ‘power of willing’. In his own vocabulary, Hobbes most often refers to volitions simply as ‘wills’, a will being a datable event or state occurring in the course of an agent’s process of deliberation.

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properties that logically require an agent, or at least a substance, for their subject; but powers themselves are properties of agents or substances, and one property cannot intelligibly be attributed to another. Hence Bramhall's very concept of the will is incoherent, according to Hobbes. It embodies what Gilbert Ryle would later call 'a category mistake'.

Finally, Hobbes attacks the idea that a being of any kind, whether power or agent or substance, should move or determine itself. For Hobbes it is a fundamental principle that 'nothing takes beginning from itself, but from the action of some other immediate agent without itself' (*Treatise*, § 30); and he maintains that a self-causing being is explicitly ruled out by this principle. Bramhall seeks to meet this objection by distinguishing beginning to be from beginning to act. He says he accepts Hobbes's principle with respect to the former but not with respect to the latter, and that it is only beginnings of action that he holds the will to 'take from itself' (*Defence*, § 33). Hobbes responds, however, that whenever something begins to act, there also is something that begins to be, namely an action; and he contends that Bramhall ends up 'contradicting what he had said but in the line before' (*Questions*, § 33).

What view of freedom, then, does Hobbes put forward as an alternative to Bramhall's? One essential feature of Hobbesian freedom is that it is logically compatible with necessity; so let us begin by considering how Hobbes conceives of necessity.

Hobbes defines 'necessary' as 'that which is impossible to be otherwise, or that which cannot possibly otherwise come to pass' (*Questions*, § 1). But this is unhelpful: any question we might have about the meaning of 'necessary' will apply equally to that of 'possible' and 'impossible'. More revealing is the connection that Hobbes sees between necessity and causation. A cause, he holds, is something that necessitates its effect, that makes it necessary for the effect to occur. Although Hobbes often speaks of necessary causes, suggesting that he might recognize causes other than necessary, this term is in fact a pleonasm for him: every cause is a necessary cause. Note that by 'necessary cause' Hobbes does not mean 'cause which itself must occur' but rather 'cause whose effect must occur'; a necessary cause is a cause that necessitates, not one that is necessitated. Nor does 'necessary cause' mean 'cause whose occurrence is necessary for the occurrence of its effect', as opposed to 'cause whose occurrence is sufficient therefor'. Indeed, Hobbes explicitly argues that a sufficient cause of an effect must be a necessary cause of it too (*Treatise*, § 31).

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But what is the nature of the necessity that Hobbes thinks attaches to the causal relation? Modern philosophers (since Leibniz at least) distinguish two different species or kinds of necessity, ‘logical’ or ‘analytic’ on the one hand, ‘synthetic’ or ‘natural’ or ‘physical’ on the other. The one kind of necessity depends upon the logical relations that hold among concepts, or perhaps among the meanings of words. The other depends upon the laws according to which nature or the physical world actually operates. So one thing it would be helpful to know about Hobbes’s view of necessity is whether he conceives it to be logical or physical. This is not a question, unfortunately, that he himself explicitly addresses; but there is a passage in his *De corpore* in which he says that when a cause is ‘supposed to be present, it cannot be understood but that the effect is produced’ (II.ix.3). This suggests that a cause not followed by its effect is inconceivable, a violation of the laws not merely of nature but of thought. And if so then Hobbes’s view is that effects follow their causes with logical and not merely with physical necessity – the same view that was explicitly put forward later on in the seventeenth century by Spinoza.

Another indication that the necessity Hobbes has in mind is logical necessity is that he presents an argument in which the necessity in question is unmistakably logical. The argument is that (premise) it is necessary that a proposition of the form ‘ $P$  or not- $P$ ’ is true; therefore (conclusion) either it is necessary that  $P$  is true, or it is necessary that not- $P$  is true (Treatise, § 34). This is a blatantly fallacious argument, and Bramhall rightly calls Hobbes on it – an exchange that shows both that Hobbes is capable of bad reasoning and that Bramhall is capable of sound and penetrating criticism. But the point is that Hobbes intends this argument to establish something about the necessity that he is concerned with. And that necessity can only be logical: a proposition of the form ‘ $P$  or not- $P$ ’ is true of necessity because it is a logical truth.

Hobbes holds that everything that is or happens has a necessary cause. It is important to note that he does not take the necessary cause of a particular being or action to be another particular being or action. He acknowledges that we may sometimes call a single particular event a cause: thus ‘the last feather’ may be said to ‘break the horse’s back’ (Treatise, § 11). But this is really only part of the cause as a whole: the ‘last cause’ yet not the ‘whole cause’. For Hobbes, the ‘cause simply’ or the ‘entire cause’ of any action, that which, he says, ‘necessitates and determinates’ it, ‘is the sum of all things which . . . conduce and concur to [its] production’ (ibid.). Furthermore,



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since every member of such a ‘concourse’ of (partial) causes is itself ‘determined to be such as it is by a like concourse of former causes’, each of which is in its turn determined by another such concourse, and so on, and since all these causes were ‘set and ordered by the eternal cause of all things, God Almighty’, it follows that the entire cause of every present action is a vast series of collections of partial causes extending back to and including the original action by which God created all things. So God himself, or more precisely the will of God, though not the whole cause, is nonetheless a partial cause of everything that happens in the world.

Armed now with some understanding of Hobbes’s conception of necessity, let us turn to the freedom that he holds to be compatible with it. In several texts he defines freedom (or liberty – the two terms are equivalent for him) as the absence of impediments to action, or more specifically, as the absence of external impediments, meaning those ‘that are not contained in the nature and intrinsic quality of the agent’ (Treatise, § 29; cf. *De cive* ix.9; *Leviathan* I.xiv). As he notes, even inanimate beings are free by this definition, so that water, for example, ‘is said to descend freely, or to have liberty to descend, by the channel of the river, because there is no impediment that way; but not across, because the banks are impediments’ (Treatise, § 29). But in his characterizations of the freedom of animate creatures – those which have appetites and thus are voluntary agents – Hobbes includes a reference to their wills, that is, to their acts of willing. Thus ‘a free man is he, that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to’; and the liberty of such a man ‘consists in this, that he finds no stop in doing what he has the will . . . to do’ (*Leviathan* I.xxi). More simply, ‘a free agent is he that can do if he will, and forbear if he will’ (Treatise, § 33).

Some commentators have been misled by this last statement; they think (understandably, it must be admitted) that Hobbes is saying an agent must be able both to do something and not to do that same thing, whichever he wills, in order to be free. But that is not Hobbes’s position. An agent for him is free only with respect to particular actions, and doing  $x$  and not doing  $x$  are distinct particular actions, even though we say (loosely) that the  $x$  done and the  $x$  not done are ‘the same action’. What Hobbes should have said is that ‘a free agent is he that can do  $x$  if he wills to do  $x$ , or forbear doing  $x$  if he wills to forbear’. An even better way of stating his position would be: ‘an agent is free with respect to a particular performance or forbearance only if he is able to carry out or accomplish that performance

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or forbearance should he will to do so' – with the proviso, of course, that 'is able to accomplish' means not 'has the natural capacity or power to accomplish' but 'is not externally impeded from accomplishing'.<sup>8</sup>

It follows from Hobbes's account of freedom that every voluntary action that is actually performed is a free action, or as he puts it, that 'all voluntary acts are free' (he also takes the converse to be true) (*Questions*, § 28). For if a man wills to do something, and then actually does it, he must be able to do what he does, by the principle that what is actual is possible. And if he wills to do something, and then is prevented from doing it by some external impediment, he performs, not a voluntary action that is not free, but no action at all, and *a fortiori* no voluntary action.

All free human actions are voluntary for Hobbes, and all voluntary actions free. The question arises: what sorts of human actions are there besides those that are voluntary and free? What factors or conditions suffice in Hobbes's view to make an action non-voluntary or unfree? Necessity is not such a factor, since necessity is perfectly compatible with freedom as well as voluntariness – this is Hobbes's compatibilism – and indeed all free and voluntary actions are necessary – this is his determinism. Hobbes considers three sorts of actions that have traditionally been held to be unfree or non-voluntary: first, actions that are too trivial or habitual or sudden to be thought about before being performed; second, actions an agent is forced to do by some agent other than himself; and third, actions an agent is compelled to do by threats or dangers or other such external circumstances.

Actions of the first kind have usually been thought to be indeliberate, that is, not preceded by deliberation. And philosophers since Aristotle have made deliberation a precondition of will: an act of willing occurs only at the end of a deliberative process. Since sudden actions are supposed to happen too quickly for deliberation, and trivial actions not to need deliberation, such actions are held not to be preceded by volitions and hence not voluntary. Hobbes's treatment of such cases is curious. He does not deny that a voluntary action must be deliberate, or that an act of willing must be preceded by deliberation – indeed, he defines an act of willing as the last desire occurring in a process of deliberation. Rather, what he claims is that such

<sup>8</sup> Hobbes's position here is thus different from Locke's, for whom it is *true* that an agent must be able both to do something and not to do that same thing, whichever he wills, in order to be free (see *Essay concerning Human Understanding* II.xxi). Some commentators have misconstrued Locke's position too; and some, because they have misunderstood Locke, or Hobbes, or both, have mistaken the relation between Locke's and Hobbes's views of freedom.

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actions are not really indeliberate. An agent who does something suddenly or automatically, Hobbes says, though he may not deliberate about that very action at that very moment, nonetheless had time or occasion 'to deliberate all the precedent time of his life whether he should do that kind of action or not' (Treatise, § 25). So such actions are voluntary after all.

An action that is forced, by contrast, is not voluntary for Hobbes; indeed, it is involuntary, an action done against the agent's will. So force seems to be a factor that does keep an action from being voluntary, and hence free. In one place Hobbes maintains, however, that it is not proper to attribute forced actions to their nominal agents; they are really the actions of the agents who do the forcing. Thus 'when a man by force, seizing on another man's limbs, moves them as himself, not as the other man pleases . . . the action so done [is not] the action of him that suffers, but of him that uses the force' (*Questions*, § 19). It is not clear whether Hobbes means to generalize this judgement, to make it apply to all cases of forced action. But if he does, then such actions are not involuntary either. For they are voluntary actions on the part of their true agents, the agents who use the force.

As for actions that are compelled, these Hobbes regards as simply and straightforwardly voluntary. Compulsion is effective in causing an action only to the extent that it works upon the will of the agent; and when it does it is the agent's will that immediately causes his action. A man, Hobbes says, 'is then only said to be compelled when fear makes him willing to [do something], as when a man willingly throws his goods into the sea to save himself, or submits to his enemy for fear of being killed' (Treatise, § 19). Hobbes acknowledges that compulsion is sometimes confused with force. People say that circumstances 'force' them to do things that it is in their power to forbear doing, and on the other hand that (Bramhall's example) 'a Christian [drawn] by plain force to the idol's temple' is 'compelled' to go there. But these ways of speaking, Hobbes thinks, violate 'the propriety of the English tongue' (*Questions*, § 19). Properly speaking, force does and compulsion does not preclude voluntariness and freedom.

Bramhall is vehemently opposed to Hobbes's view of freedom, as he is to most other parts of the Hobbesian philosophy. Sometimes the criticisms that he aims at particular points about freedom, however, are really directed to the broader psychological and metaphysical doctrines from which these points follow. Thus Bramhall ridicules the idea that freedom should be possessed by brute animals such 'as bees and spiders' (*Defence*, § 3). But

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this is just a consequence of Hobbes's reduction of will to sensitive appetite – a dictum of his general psychology. Sometimes Bramhall's objections rest upon a different understanding of crucial terms, including the terms 'free' and 'liberty' themselves. Thus he charges that Hobbes, by making liberty depend upon the absence solely of external impediments, 'cuts [it] off . . . from inward impediments also, as if a hawk were at liberty to fly when her wings are plucked, but not when they are tied' (*Defence*, § 33). Hobbes, in responding, pleads guilty to the charge, but counters that 'to say, when her wings are plucked, that [the hawk] wanted the liberty to fly, were to speak improperly and absurdly' (*Questions*, § 33). This move is typical for Hobbes: in such terminological disputes he regularly claims that his usage conforms with that of 'the common people, on whose arbitration depends the signification of words in common use', whether the tongue be English or Latin or Greek (*Questions*, § 8).

Another charge that Bramhall makes against Hobbes's account of liberty is that it is refuted by certain passages in Holy Scripture, and he lists several of these (*Discourse*, §§ 6–12). But Hobbes argues in each case that the passage in question does not actually say – or at least need not be interpreted as saying – what Bramhall takes it to do. And indeed Hobbes beats Bramhall at his own game in appealing to the Bible. For in his *Questions* (in a long discussion not included in this volume) Hobbes lists all the 'places of scripture' which he takes to bear in any way upon the nature of freedom. These he divides into three 'sorts': (1) those 'that make for me', (2) those 'that make equally for the Bishop and me', and (3) 'those which seem to make against me'. He then undertakes to show one by one that no passage of the third sort really does weigh against him (*Questions*, pp. 6–15 in *EW5*). As might be expected, Bramhall has more to say about the interpretation of these passages in his *Castigations of Mr Hobbes*.

Bramhall does put his finger on one point that appears to be a genuine difficulty for Hobbes's account. The official definition of liberty is that it is the absence of external impediments – impediments which keep one from doing what he wills to do in the case of an animate agent. But in more than one passage Hobbes characterizes a voluntary free agent as one who has not yet stopped deliberating – as if such an agent is not free once he does stop deliberating (*Treatise*, § 28; *Questions*, § 25; *The Elements of Law* xii.1; *Leviathan* I.vi). Not only does this suggest a different account of freedom; it suggests one that seems to be in conflict with the official definition. Bramhall indeed proposes a pair of counter-examples: 'There may be outward

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impediments even whilst [an agent] is deliberating, as a man deliberates whether he shall play at tennis, and at the same time the door of the tennis court is fast locked against him. And after a man has ceased to deliberate, there may be no outward impediments, as when a man resolves not to play at tennis because he finds himself ill-disposed, or because he will not hazard his money. So the same person, at the same time, should be free and not free, not free and free' (*Defence*, § 25). Hobbes's response does not really dispose of the difficulty. The Bishop is deceived, he writes, in thinking that 'there may be outward impediments even whilst [an agent] is deliberating. For though [the agent] may deliberate of that which is impossible for him to do, as in the example he alleges of him that deliberates whether he shall play at tennis, not knowing that the door of the tennis-court is shut against him; yet it is no impediment to him that the door is shut till he have a will to play, which he has not till he has done deliberating whether he shall play or not' (*Questions*, § 25). There may be some way of resolving this difficulty;<sup>9</sup> but even if so, it is misleading of Hobbes to have introduced this alternative characterization of a free agent into his account.<sup>10</sup>

On the central and fundamental issues concerning the nature of freedom, Bramhall is often reduced, in responding to Hobbes, simply to asserting his own contrary position. And this may be the best and most effective response he could make. For despite all its intricacy and alleged incoherencies, Bramhall's libertarianism is founded on two powerful intuitions. One is an intuition regarding the logical relation between necessity and freedom; it is perhaps an intuition, ultimately, about the meanings of the terms 'free' and 'necessary' as they are applied to human behaviour and to natural events. It is on this intuition that Bramhall's incompatibilism is based; and he is hardly alone among thinkers in having felt its power. The other intuition is the one that, given incompatibilism, drives Bramhall to opt for freedom rather than universal necessitation. This is an intuition regarding the implications of morality, and in particular the preconditions of justice and moral responsibility. Many thinkers for many centuries have joined with Bramhall in holding that an agent cannot do wrong or right, practise justice or injustice, or be accountable for anything done, unless he or she is

<sup>9</sup> I have proposed one myself in my article in the *Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, pp. 1223–5.

<sup>10</sup> He may have done so on etymological grounds, for in *The Elements of Law* xii. 1 he writes 'that deliberation signifies the taking away of our own liberty' (cf. *Leviathan* 1.vi). But Hobbes was wrong about the etymology of 'deliberation'. According to the *OED*, the word is derived from the Latin *librare*, meaning 'to weigh', and not from *liberare*, meaning 'to free'.

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a free agent, free not merely in the compatibilist's sense of being able to act in accordance with his or her will but in the sense of being able to avoid doing what she or he does, of being able to do something other than that.

As for Hobbes's position vis-à-vis these two intuitions, just as Bramhall ultimately simply accepts them, so Hobbes ultimately simply rejects them. Many thinkers have joined Hobbes in rejecting the first: compatibilism has been a popular position in the history of philosophy. But only a few have been with him in rejecting the second. It is true that Hobbes goes to some lengths – more than most others have done – to provide an account of morality that looks consistent with compatibilist freedom. But this account is typically given short shrift – as it is by Bramhall in his controversy with Hobbes – by those thinkers who are antecedently committed to the libertarian understanding of freedom – the very understanding that the Hobbesian moral theorist is seeking to undermine.

On the other hand, there is a fundamental positive intuition underlying the Hobbesian position. This is that everything that happens is dependent on other things that have already happened, the conviction that everything has a cause. If this intuition is taken as primary, as it is by Hobbes and his determinist followers, then the only way to make room for freedom is to conceive it in the compatibilist's manner. For few thinkers have been willing baldly to deny that there is any kind of freedom that human beings possess. Perhaps this conviction too, that humans have some kind of freedom, has the status of an intuition, but it is clear that compatibilism itself does not. That position is widely seen to be one that a thinker is led to adopt by more fundamental considerations.

Because the positions of Bramhall and Hobbes are, each of them, so firmly rooted in convictions which seem so compelling, and yet are so radically opposed to one another, some thinkers have thought it futile to argue about them. And yet argue about them we do. The questions at issue continue to provoke and to fascinate us, and each of the positions themselves continues to find fervent supporters. And so the discussion of liberty and necessity, not begun but powerfully advanced by Bramhall and Hobbes, goes on, even into our own day – or rather especially into our own day. For the free-will problem, as it is now apt to be called, is one of the most actively debated topics among contemporary philosophers, both in classrooms and in professional journals. The Further Reading section below lists several sources designed to help readers learn more about these current heirs to the Hobbes–Bramhall debate.

## Chronology

Most recent scholars agree on most of the information given below. Where they differ, I follow, for Hobbes's dates, Richard Tuck in the revised version of his edition of *Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); and, for Bramhall's dates, the Bramhall article in the *DNB*.

- 1588 Hobbes born at Malmesbury in Wiltshire
- 1594 Bramhall born at Pontefract in Yorkshire
- 1602 Hobbes enters Magdalen Hall, Oxford
- 1603 Queen Elizabeth dies; James VI of Scotland becomes King James I of England
- 1608 Hobbes graduates BA; appointed tutor to the son (also named William) of William Cavendish, Baron Hardwick; goes to live with the Cavendish family at Hardwick Hall and Chatsworth in Derbyshire and Devonshire House in London
- 1609 Bramhall enters Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge
- 1612 Bramhall graduates BA
- 1614 Hobbes begins tour of France and Italy with Lord Cavendish's son
- 1615 Hobbes back in England
- 1616 Bramhall takes MA and enters holy orders; given church positions in Yorkshire
- 1618 Lord Cavendish created first Earl of Devonshire
- 1619–23 Hobbes serves as amanuensis to Francis Bacon (at some time during this period)
- 1623 Bramhall takes BD
- 1625 James I dies; Charles I succeeds to the throne

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- 1626 First Earl of Devonshire dies; his son (Hobbes's former pupil) becomes second Earl
- 1628 Second Earl of Devonshire dies; his son (also named William) becomes third Earl  
 Bramhall appointed subdean of Ripon
- 1628 Hobbes leaves the service of the Cavendish family
- 1629 Hobbes's translation of Thucydides' history published at London  
 Hobbes goes to live with the family of Sir Gervase Clifton in Nottinghamshire
- 1630 Bramhall takes DD  
 Hobbes begins tour of France and Geneva with Clifton's son; returns to England, rejoins the Cavendish family; begins association with William Cavendish, first Earl (later Marquess, later Duke) of Newcastle, nephew of the first Earl of Devonshire, at Welbeck in Nottinghamshire
- 1633 Bramhall becomes chaplain to Thomas Wentworth, Lord Deputy of Ireland
- 1634 Bramhall appointed Bishop of Derry in Ireland  
 Hobbes begins tour of France and Italy with the third Earl of Devonshire
- 1635 Hobbes associates with Mersenne, Gassendi, and other French thinkers in Paris
- 1636 Hobbes visits Galileo in Florence; returns to England
- 1640 Hobbes completes manuscript of *The Elements of Law* (published in two parts 1650); flees England, settles in Paris
- 1641 Bramhall accused of high treason by the Irish House of Commons, imprisoned in Dublin  
 Hobbes writes *Objections to Descartes' Meditations*
- 1642 English civil war begins  
 Bramhall released from prison; moves back to Yorkshire, where he associates with the Marquess of Newcastle  
 Hobbes's *De cive* published at Paris
- 1644 Bramhall flees Britain with Newcastle after the battle of Marston Moor, settles first in Hamburg and then in various cities in Belgium and Holland
- 1645 Bramhall and Hobbes discuss liberty and necessity at the house of Newcastle in Paris; each then states his position in writing;



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- Bramhall writes his *A Vindication of True Liberty* (published 1655 as *A Defence of True Liberty*) in response to Hobbes's statement
- 1646 English civil war ends  
 Hobbes appointed reader in mathematics to the Prince of Wales (the future Charles II) in Paris
- 1647 Hobbes seriously ill
- 1648 Bramhall returns briefly to Ireland, but after several 'dangers and difficulties' is forced to flee again to the Continent; he spends the next several years residing for brief periods at several Dutch and Belgian cities
- 1649 Charles I beheaded in London; English monarchy abolished; Commonwealth established
- 1651 Hobbes's *Leviathan* published at London
- 1652 Hobbes returns to England, resumes service with the Cavendish family
- 1653 Protectorate established; Cromwell becomes Lord Protector of England
- 1654 Hobbes's *Of Liberty and Necessity* published at London by John Davies of Kidwelly
- 1655 Bramhall's *A Defence of True Liberty* published at London  
 Hobbes's *De corpore* published at London
- 1656 Hobbes's *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance* published at London
- 1658 Cromwell dies  
 Hobbes's *De homine* published at London  
 Bramhall's *Castigations of Mr Hobbes* (with *The Catching of Leviathan* as an appendix) published at London
- 1660 English monarchy restored, with Charles II as King  
 Bramhall returns to England  
 Hobbes's *Examinatio et emendatio mathematicae hodiernae* published at London
- 1661 Bramhall made Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of Ireland; elected Speaker of the Irish House of Lords  
 Hobbes's *Dialogus physicus, sive de natura aeris* published at London
- 1662 Hobbes's *Problemata physica* published at London

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- 1663 Bramhall dies in Dublin
- 1666 Hobbes's *De principiis et ratiocinatione geometrarum* published at London  
 Hobbes writes *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* (published 1681)
- 1668 Hobbes writes *An Answer to . . . 'The Catching of Leviathan'* (published 1682)  
 Hobbes's *Opera philosophica* published at Amsterdam
- 1669 Hobbes's *Quadratura circuli* published at London
- 1670 Hobbes writes *Behemoth* (published 1679)
- 1676 Bramhall's *Works* published at Dublin
- 1678 Hobbes's *Decameron physiologicum* published at London
- 1679 Hobbes dies at Hardwick

## Further reading

Hobbes's treatise *Of Liberty and Necessity* was first published at London in 1654. This was followed by Bramhall's *A Defence of True Liberty from Antecedent and Extrinsic Necessity* (1655), Hobbes's *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance* (1656), and Bramhall's *Castigations of Mr Hobbes his last Animadversions* (1658). Bramhall's *Defence* has been reprinted by Garland (New York, 1977), and a French translation of Hobbes's treatise, *De la liberté et de la nécessité*, with excellent introduction and notes by Franck Lessay, was recently published at Paris (Vrin, 1993). Otherwise, these works have not been reissued in separate editions (except for Hobbes's treatise once or twice), but they have been included in various collections.

The most comprehensive collection of Hobbes's works is that published in two series by Sir William Molesworth at London in 1839–45: *The English Works* in eleven volumes, and *Opera philosophica quae latine scripsit* in five. A large selection from the former is included in the Past Masters series of electronic texts edited by Mark Rooks and published by IntelLex (Charlottesville, VA, 1992). A new critical edition of Hobbes's works was started in the 1980s by Oxford University Press, but so far only two works have been published: *De cive*, edited by Howard Warrender (1983); and Hobbes's extant *Correspondence*, edited in two volumes by Noel Malcolm. Malcolm's notes to this edition contain a great deal of useful information about Hobbes's life and times.

Bramhall's collected works were first published in two similar editions at Dublin in 1676 and 1677. A new edition in five volumes was published at Oxford in 1842–5; this is still the standard edition.

Among the other works that Hobbes himself published, the most important are *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (London, 1650); *De cive*

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(Paris, 1642) (translated as *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society* and published at London in 1651); *Leviathan* (London, 1651); and *De corpore* (London, 1655).

A critical edition of *The Elements of Law*, edited by Ferdinand Tönnies, was published at London in 1889. The text of this edition is also included in Rooks's electronic collection of Hobbes's works; and it has been reprinted in a recent Oxford World's Classics edition prepared by G. C. A. Gaskin (1994).

The *Philosophical Rudiments* is one of two works contained in a useful volume edited by Bernard Gert: *Hobbes: Man and Citizen* (Garden City, NY, 1972; reprinted by Hackett (Indianapolis, IN, 1991)). The other work in this volume is a translation (the first ever into English) of the first part of *De homine* by Charles T. Wood, T. S. K. Scott-Craig, and Bernard Gert.

*Leviathan* is currently available in several editions. The best are those edited by Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Edwin Curley (Hackett, 1994). Also worthy of note is the electronic text established by Rooks in his Past Masters series.

Useful research tools for the study of Hobbes include the recent *Hobbes Dictionary* by A. P. Martinich (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) and two bibliographies. *Thomas Hobbes: A Bibliography*, by Hugh Macdonald and Mary Hargreaves (London, 1952) lists editions of Hobbes's works and collections thereof; and William Sacksteder's *Hobbes Studies: A Bibliography* (Bowling Green, OH, Philosophy Documentation Center, 1982) covers the secondary literature up to 1980.

An illuminating commentary on the Hobbes–Bramhall controversy was written by Leibniz in the early eighteenth century. This was originally published as an appendix to *Essais de théodicée* (Amsterdam, 1710). An English version of this work is included in the English *Theodicy* translated by E. M. Huggard and edited by Austin Farrar (London, 1951; reprinted by Open Court (La Salle, IL, 1985)).

Recent articles on Hobbes's views on liberty and necessary (for little has been written on Bramhall's) include M. M. Goldsmith, 'Hobbes on Liberty', *Hobbes Studies*, 2 (1989), 23–39; F. C. Hood, 'The Change in Hobbes's Definition of Liberty', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 17 (1967), 150–63; Graeme Hunter, 'The Fate of Thomas Hobbes', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 21 (1989), 5–20; Cees Leijenhorst, 'Hobbes's Theory of Causality', *Monist*, 79 (1996), 426–47; Quentin Skinner, 'Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. 5, 40 (1990), 121–51; and A. G. Wernham, 'Liberty and Obligation in

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Hobbes', in *Hobbes Studies*, edited by K. C. Brown (Oxford, Blackwell, 1965), 117–39.

The best introduction to Hobbes's life, times, and thought in general is Richard Tuck's *Hobbes* (Oxford University Press, 1989). Other good introductory studies are Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1956), and D. D. Raphael, *Hobbes: Morals and Politics* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1977). More advanced works include G. C. Robertson, *Hobbes* (Edinburgh, 1886); S. I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, 1962); Tom Sorell, *Hobbes* (London, Routledge, 1986); and *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, edited by Sorell (Cambridge University Press, 1996). For historical and philosophical background, respectively, see Christopher Hill's *The Century of Revolution 1603–1714* (Edinburgh, 1961; reprinted New York, Norton, 1966) and *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

There is a huge recent literature on the topics of the Hobbes–Bramhall debate, much of it in the form of journal articles. Good collections of such articles are *Free Will*, edited by Gary Watson (Oxford University Press, 1982); *Moral Responsibility*, edited by John Martin Fischer (Cornell University Press, 1986); *Causation*, edited by Ernest Sosa and Michael Tooley (Oxford University Press, 1993); and *The Philosophy of Action*, edited by Alfred R. Mele (Oxford University Press, 1997). For initial orientation, the following books should be helpful: Anthony Kenny's *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1975); Jennifer Trusted's *Free Will and Responsibility* (Oxford University Press, 1984); Ted Honderich's *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem* (Oxford University Press, 1993); and Peter Van Inwagen's *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983). The first three of these are especially suitable for beginners in philosophy.

## Note on the text

The works and selections contained in this volume have all been newly edited. As copy texts I have, with three exceptions, used the versions included in Molesworth's edition of *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes* (abbreviated *EW* followed by an arabic numeral to indicate the volume thereof) and reissued in electronic form by Mark Rooks in the Past Masters series published by IntelLex. The three exceptions are Hobbes's *The Elements of Law*, *Leviathan*, and *De homine*. Here my copy texts were taken, in the first case, from the 1889 edition by Ferdinand Tönnies (also reissued by Rooks); in the second, from Rooks's own text based on the 1651 first edition; and in the third, from the English translation in Bernard Gert's *Hobbes: Man and Citizen*. Fuller information about these sources is provided in the Further Reading section.

When Bramhall responded to Hobbes's treatise in his *Defence of True Liberty*, he included not only the passages by Hobbes to which he was replying, but also the passages from his original discourse which Hobbes discussed in his treatise. The *Defence* consists, therefore, of three different works printed together. Hobbes followed the same pattern in his *Questions*, with his 'Animadversions' to Bramhall's replies adding a fourth work to the three in Bramhall's book.

Thus it is that Molesworth's (and Rooks's) version of Hobbes's *Questions* could serve as a copy text for Bramhall's discourse and *Defence*, as well as for the Animadversions by Hobbes that it alone contains. Since Bramhall's discourse was not published by itself, I have simply extracted the text of it from the Molesworth–Rooks text of Hobbes's *Questions*. I have checked this against (a) the original 1654 edition of the *Defence* (abbreviated *Def.*), (b) the first edition of Bramhall's *Works (W1)*, and (c) the third edition of