

**HONOR THY SOVEREIGN: HOBBS AND HONORING IN MID-
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND**

by

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For Mama, my mother

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List of Abbreviations

- Beh Hobbes, T. (c. 1668). *Behemoth, or the long parliament*.
Citations in the dissertation come from Hobbes, T. (1990). *Behemoth, or the long parliament*. intro. by Stephen Holmes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- EL Hobbes, T. (1640). *Elements of law natural and politic*.
Citations in this dissertation come from Hobbes, T. (1999). *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*. edited by J.C.A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
This text comprises *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*. The text is supplemented by chapters from Hobbes' later work *De Corpore* (1650).
- DC Hobbes, T. (1642). *De Cive*.
Citations in this dissertation come from Hobbes, T. (1991) *Of Man and Citizen*. ed. by Bernard Gert. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co
- DH Hobbes, T. (c. 1657). *De Homine*.
Citations in this dissertation come from Hobbes, T. (1991). *Of Man and Citizen*. ed. by Bernard Gert. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.
- Lev Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan*.
Citations in this text come from Hobbes, T. (1994). *Leviathan*. ed. by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

ABSTRACT

HONOR THY SOVEREIGN: HOBBS AND HONORING IN MID-SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

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The dissertation has four principal ambitions. First, I supply a careful analysis of the social practice and the discourse of honoring in mid-seventeenth-century-England.

Second, I place Thomas Hobbes's account of honoring within its historical context and show where Hobbes's account corresponds to and deviates from familiar mid-seventeenth-century English accounts. Third, I argue that Hobbes's account of sovereign authorization is an account of honoring; authorizing the sovereign is an honoring practice. Finally, I embed Hobbes's justifications for sovereign authorization and obedience into a mid-seventeenth-century honoring narrative.

The third objective challenges current legal-judicial accounts of sovereign authorization. Scholarship on the development of early modern political thought traditionally understands Hobbes's account of the founding of political order as a matter of contract. The dissertation, however, demonstrates that Hobbes's description of the act

through which an individual authorizes a sovereign more closely resembles the Christian relationship constituted by a humble individual *honoring* God than it does a contract between members of a nascent bourgeoisie. Far from assuming independence and relative equality, the discourse of honoring presupposes or constitutes unequal relations between subjects-to-be who humbly give honor and the sovereign who is honored. I thus challenge contemporary accounts of Hobbes that overemphasize the secular underpinnings of his political thought by situating sovereign authorization in a religious discourse and by identifying it as a sacred practice.

In addition, conceptualizing the act of sovereign authorization as an act of honoring has profound implications. It affects our understanding of how early modern subjects conceptualized inequalities and hierarchies, and impacts our understanding of the constitution of unequal power. It influences our understanding of the motivation, on the one hand, of the sovereign to protect and, on the other, of subjects to obey. Finally, the very idea of sovereign authorization as well as arguments justifying obedience shift when we see how they are embedded in the secular and sacred idioms and practices of honoring that I analyze in the dissertation.