



## *Book Review*



Mónica García-Salmones Rovira, *The Necessity of Nature: God, Science and Money in 17th Century English Law of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 504 pp., ISBN: 9781009332163, £120.00.

The project of the book is stated at the outset. Three main theses are developed in this book. The first of these states that a deep understanding of the history of natural law will facilitate the task of addressing the current issues of the Anthropocene era with respect to the period of modern Europe. The second thesis regards the metaphysics of human nature, and of nature more broadly, and analyses the consequences of the disappearance of nature as a sacred space. The third thesis refers to the new concept of natural law in England during the 17th century and says that the leading scientists and natural lawyers supported their liberal ideology on the ground of a doctrine of necessity and necessities. This is probably the most significant result the innovative inquiry of Mónica García-Salmones Rovira puts forward, because it introduces a novel interpretation of classic writers in the history of political thought, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

The result is reached through an analysis of the impact that the philosophy and theology of the scientific revolution has had on European natural law, political liberalism, and political economy. In this way the importance is shown of narrowing the distance between legal reasoning and the methods of scientific thinking.

Also extremely significant is the comparative approach that García-Salmones Rovira has taken in resorting to Avicenna's philosophy and theology. The innovative aspect of this book comes through, in the first place, in its interpretation of Hobbes's thought, whose philosophy of natural law is conceived on the basis of the doctrine of necessity.

The book accurately reconstructs the debate that took place between Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall, who was a prominent clergyman in the Anglican

church, linked to William Laud, and whose theology was therefore aligned on Arminian positions. This was a debate about the question of liberty and necessity. In his first answer to Bramhall, in the treatise *Of Liberty and Necessity*, Hobbes argues that voluntary action is necessitated by necessary causes: 'Natural efficacy of objects does determine voluntary agents, and necessitates the will, and consequently the action.' This is where we find the important novelty of García-Salmones Rovira's book, which establishes the centrality of natural necessities for the foundation of Hobbes's political philosophy, instead of the traditional centrality of natural rights. Moreover this approach allows to clearly understand the continuity between Hobbes's and Spinoza's philosophy.

The introduction of this new perspective is enriched with an account of the 'similarities' existing between Hobbes's philosophy and Avicenna's necessitarianism. In particular, in Avicenna's philosophy we have the distinction between the 'Necessary Existent', which has no cause, and the 'possible existent', which is necessitated by another cause (*The Metaphysics of The Healing*, Book One, Chap. 6).

García-Salmones Rovira rightly comments that she is not trying to draw a line of textual continuity from Avicenna to Hobbes, but only to use the ideas of both philosophers about the concept of necessity. Indeed, as some scholars comment, among them Jules Janssens, much research is needed to clarify how the Western Latin authors received Avicenna's ideas about necessity. Moreover, as Raimon Panikkar argues, we have to be aware that the meanings of a culture cannot be transferred as such into another one, and that one culture's *topoi*, its fundamental concepts, cannot be used to understand the constructs of another.

García-Salmones Rovira uses Avicenna's and Hobbes's interpretation of necessity as a metaphysical category that grounded religious, moral, and political theory. In this way she can argue that these scholars introduced a theological perspective, but theirs was a theology without God, a 'secularist theology'. Thus the doctrine of necessity makes it possible to also reinterpret the fundamental secularisation process in the 17th century. This new paradigm for understanding necessity and necessities traces a path that leads to the establishment of a sovereign with a supreme legislative authority.

Even the interpretation of *Leviathan*, Hobbes's fundamental work, proves to be highly innovative. Hobbes's political philosophy was grounded in a philosophy of nature, and the method he adopted was that of 'necessary causality'. The method was the expression of a metaphysics of body that reduced all natural rights to natural necessities. The preservation of the human body and the commonwealth's body alike lies at the foundation of absolute sovereignty in a commonwealth.

In Section I, chap. XIV, of *Leviathan*, Hobbes introduces the concept of *jus naturale*, which is the liberty that each man has to use his power to preserve his own nature. It is here that, as García-Salmones Rovira points out, ‘the concept of necessity in *Leviathan* appears in relation to the rights of nature.’

God has established that no one may renounce one’s right to self-preservation, and as a consequence each individual can decide what is necessary for her/his survival. In this sense, the necessities of nature can reinterpret the rights of nature.

On these premises the author discusses the concept of sovereignty according to the doctrine of necessity. In the sovereign’s ability to decide ultimate necessity lies the essence of sovereign power. In chap. XVIII of *Leviathan* the sovereign judges the needs of the commonwealth to preserve peace and security. The doctrine of necessity gives a new meaning to the concept of sovereignty.

In Bodin’s *Les Six Livres de la République* the concept of sovereignty was analysed through four categories: *imperium in magistratibus*, *auctoritas in Senatu*, *potestas in plebe*, and *maiestas in populo*. In Thomas Hobbes the concept of sovereignty is analysed through the dialectic of *auctoritas* and *potestas*: *auctoritas* belongs to the representative sovereign actor, who is authorised by his subjects and holds the *summa potestas*. In García-Salmones Rovira’s book, the doctrine of necessity gives new significance to the representation and authority of the sovereign.

Through the lens of necessity she also interprets Part III of *Leviathan*, ‘Of a Christian Commonwealth’, where Hobbes says that if we are to clarify the nature and rights of a Christian Commonwealth, the ground of our discourse ought to be not only ‘the Naturall Word of God, but also the Propheticall’ (*Leviathan*, chap. XXXII).

In this way the civil law is made a divine law and the commonwealth’s sovereign is conceived as the representative of God on Earth. This is Hobbes assimilating the civil sovereign to God, lending support to Carl Schmitt’s claim about the *secularised* theological matrix of the most significant concepts of the modern theory of the state.

Moreover, Hobbes identified two articles *necessary* ‘for a Mans Reception into the Kingdome of Heaven’ (chap. XLIII): Faith in Christ and obedience to laws. The first article—*unum est necessarium*—will be reiterated by Hobbes in his critical, posthumously published answer to John Bramhall’s *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes His Last Animadversions in the Case concerning Liberty and Universal Necessity, with an Appendix concerning the Catching of Leviathan or the Great Whale* (1658).

So in the metaphysical principle of necessity we have an original and innovative interpretation of Hobbes’s political philosophy.

The book's originality can also be found in its analysis of the influence which the Scientific Revolution's philosophy and theology exerted on the political philosophy of the 17th century. This makes it possible to bring out the centrality of the philosophy of Robert Boyle.

On García-Salmones Rovira's interpretation, the work of Robert Boyle (1627–1691), known as the 'the father of chemistry', is best seen as an attempt to connect nature, theology, and economics through science.

From a theological point of view Boyle sought to express God's governance of the system of the natural world. At the same time, the peculiarity of his work consisted in separating the philosophical or natural explanation of nature from moral or religious considerations.

Boyle's theory describes two opposites: God on the one side, and the system or *oeconomy* of physical nature, on the other, over which the human being exercised his dominion. It was a perspective characterised by the separation of moral natural law from the system of natural philosophy.

García-Salmones Rovira demonstrates that Boyle conceived a practical science strongly connected with the development and fortunes of the empire, and with the welfare of the country. Thus knowledge and the exploitation of nature constituted a unity, as Boyle wrote in his famous *The Origine of Formes and Qualities (According to Corpuscular Philosophy)* (1666).

García-Salmones Rovira clearly reconstructs the connection between scientific knowledge and its utility for economic purposes in the second half of 17th century, and in this frame she appropriately underscores Boyle's concept of science and his intent to make scientific knowledge profitable, despite his economics of science not usually being taken into adequate consideration.

Boyle was primarily a scientist in the field of chemistry, where he introduced the theory of atomistic corpuscles. From a metaphysical and an experimental point of view, he set his own corpuscular theory in opposition to the Aristotelian doctrine of matter and form. It was in fact maintained by the Aristotelians that the properties of bodies—such as the brightness of light or the hardness of iron—were such by virtue of their innate character. Against this doctrine, Boyle's corpuscular theory held that the qualities of the bodies were the result of mechanical actions and reactions mutually exerted between the various bodies. In this way Boyle could develop a natural philosophy where, as García-Salmones Rovira points out, the laws of nature were laws of motion and not moral laws. Her complex reconstruction of Boyle's thought concludes by coherently attributing the decline of moral natural law theories to the project of experimental science and the industrial exploitation of its results.

Furthermore, the book highlights just how much influence Robert Boyle exerted on John Locke's intellectual life. Over the course of three chapters, the book makes progressively clear the relevance in Locke's thinking of the

question of necessities such as they pertain to the human being and to the state. Locke's studies and work with Boyle, as well as his practice of observation and clinical experience in medicine, were instrumental to him in developing his political and philosophical theory.

García-Salmones Rovira reconstructs the complexity of Locke's theory from his early writings, clearly outlining their continuity with his two main mature works: His *Two Treatises of Government* and his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

The juvenile eight *Essays on the Law of Nature*, thought to have been written between 1662 and 1664, offer a unitary and fairly complete treatment of the main discussions of the time on the question of natural law. In the first essay we have a definition of the law of nature (*Ordinatio voluntatis divinae lumine naturae cognoscibilis*) that is still cast in the mould of a voluntaristic conception of natural law. The most interesting discussion in the essays is the one he devotes to the question of how we come to have a knowledge of natural law. In the fourth essay Locke refutes the theory of innate ideas and argues that the only way by which knowledge of natural law is acquired by reason is through the sense-experience (*per res a sensibus haustas*).

In a lucid analysis of Locke's reflection, García-Salmones Rovira compellingly argues that his main achievements lie in his naturalist conception of the law of nature and his naturalist epistemology. She deepens this perspective through an analysis of Locke's *Essay on Toleration*, where the role of magistracy consists solely in ensuring the self-preservation of people. In the *Essay on Toleration*, as well as in the subsequent *Epistola de Tolerantia*, Locke says that the church's function must be completely distinguished from that of the state. And García-Salmones Rovira points out that in Locke's thought the magistrate ought to have great care that no laws be made 'for any other reason but because the necessity of the state, and the welfare of the people called for them.'

This interpretive line becomes the innovative key to understanding all of Locke's works that followed *An Essay on Toleration*. Thus in Locke's writings on money, economic relations are akin to the facts of nature. According to García-Salmones Rovira these studies are no longer to be situated in the field of moral natural law, but in that of the emerging science of economics, despite the contradictory position of Locke, who as Keynes emphatically stated, stands 'with one foot in the mercantilist world and with one foot in the classical world.' Locke analysed the economic relations as purely economic phenomena, and the concept of 'necessities' was the fundamental instrument for examining these relations.

What mainly interests García-Salmones Rovira is the fact that these writings align private and public interests, paving the way for introducing the theory of public good in Locke's masterpiece, *Two Treatises of Government*. Her thesis is

that Locke's studies on philosophy, money, and medicine were the ground for introducing a new concept of natural law centred on the necessities of humanity and the nation.

Locke's focus on 'necessities', rather than on rights, shows his originality and allowed him to develop his theory of the public good. In García-Salmones Rovira's reconstruction, the public good lies at the heart of the act of constituting both a nation and its government and can be interpreted as the political expression of the moral theory of man's self-preservation.

Thus, in an original way she can illustrate the unity of Locke's theoretical system using the concept of the necessities of human nature as (i) the instrument that sense and reason use to perceive the outside world; (ii) the ground of the preservation of human nature; and (iii) an economic concept that explains the cycle of trade and money.

In this system there remains unresolved Locke's contradictory stance on colonialism, and García-Salmones Rovira clearly points out this contradiction in Locke's thought: On the one hand, he rejected slavery and the dominion of a human being over another, but on the other he sought to legitimise the appropriation of the immense uncultivated American lands to exploit them for the benefit of all humanity, and on this basis he justified the acquisition of the lands of the native Indians. As she argues, the primacy accorded to the empire's economy could rationalise, (but not justify), Locke's engagement with the colonial enterprise.

Correctly, in my estimation, García-Salmones Rovira states that for the first time in her book the doctrine of necessity in Locke's theory has been laid out. The book does so by analysing the impact the principle of necessity and necessities has on the theory of modern natural law.

She argues that the contemporary age, marked by the absence of a government capable of regulating the global economy, shows the need to develop a moral law of money, and a good starting point in doing so might very well be the model predicated on 'human necessities, rather than interests'.

Thus it is fair to conclude that this book contributes innovatively and originally to clarifying the complexity of the debates on natural law in the 17th century, showing how we might stand to benefit from them in the present day.

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