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► To cite this version:

Mogens Laerke. Kenelm Digby's logic of common and natural notions. The Southern Journal of Philosophy, 2024, <10.1111/sjp.12591>. <hal-04739362>

HAL Id: hal-04739362

<https://hal.science/hal-04739362v1>

Submitted on 16 Oct 2024

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INVITED ARTICLE

Kenelm Digby's logic of common and natural notions

Mogens Lærke

Maison Française d'Oxford, Oxford, UK

Correspondence

Mogens Lærke, Maison Française d'Oxford,
2-10 Norham Road, Oxford OX2 6SE, UK.
Email: mogenslaerke@hotmail.com

Funding information

European Research Council, Grant/Award
Number: ERC AdG 101052433

Abstract

In this article, I take a fresh look at the logic of common and natural notions contained in the *Two Treatises* published in 1644 by Kenelm Digby (1603–1665). Digby's doctrine of common notions was an attempt to retrofit Aristotelianism in order to bring it out of the shadows of scholasticism and into the age of the new experimental and collaborative natural philosophy. To achieve that, he argued that natural philosophy began in the world of experience expressed in common language and was structured according to the basic principles he calls common notions. Taking my point of departure in his correspondence with Hobbes and Mersenne, I explore the Epicurean roots of this theory.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In this article, I take a fresh look at the logic of common and natural notions contained in the *Two Treatises* published in 1644 by Kenelm Digby (1603–1665).¹ While still not exactly part of the philosophical canon, Digby has in recent years received renewed attention by historians of philosophy who recognize in him not only an important figure in the first reception of more well-known figures such as Descartes or Hobbes, but also an important philosopher in his own right who, while often aligned with his fellow English Catholic philosopher, Thomas White, still offered a highly original attempt at reconciling the new mechanical philosophy with a reformed Aristotelianism freed from Scholastic metaphysics.

An important part of Digby's reform project is related to the construction of a new method of natural philosophical investigation. In doing that, he proposed to proceed “in imitation of logicians, who by compounding such propositions as of themselves are evident

¹When quoting the *Two Treatises*, I indicate only which treatise and the page number, for example, “I, p. 26” is page 26 in the first treatise, in the original 1644 edition. I employ the following abbreviations: AT=Descartes, *Œuvres*, 13 vols., ed. Adam/Tannery, 2nd ed. (1996); DV=Herbert, *De la vérité*, trans. Mersenne (1639); MM=Mersenne, *Correspondance*, 17 vols., ed. De Waard et al. (1933–1988); DC=Hobbes, *Concerning Body*, ed. Molesworth (1839). I modernize the English spelling. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. All dates are in new style.

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to mans nature as soon as they are proposed, do bring forth new knowledges” (I, p. 26). Between Digby's method of natural philosophy and his logic, we should thus not see any important distinction. This logic faces in two directions, with one face, developed in the first treatise, turned toward the philosophy of language, and the other, developed in the second treatise, turned toward the philosophy of mind. In a nutshell, Digby argues in the first treatise, that natural philosophy must take its point of departure in the world of experience expressed in common language and structured according to basic principles that he calls “common notions.” In the second treatise, where Digby develops his conception of the soul and its immortality, it becomes clear that this logic of common notions is also closely related to his understanding of natural sensibility, apperception, and mind. Digby's basic reasoning is that, if common notions form an appropriate place to begin philosophizing, it is because such notions are grounded in mental faculties that naturally operate in the same way in everyone. Hence, Digby's first principles are, at the same time, *common* in the sense of being commonly accepted, and *natural* in the sense of being grounded in human nature. The first major challenge for a student of Digby's logic is to grasp how exactly these two aspects of his logic—the common and the natural—are connected.

Digby's logic of common notions formed an integral part of his attempt to go behind the “perverted” Scholastic interpretations of Aristotle and recover a more authentic natural philosophy in conformity with the original intentions of the Greek philosopher (I, pp. 259, 346). He attempted to retrofit Aristotelianism in order to bring it out of the shadow of Scholasticism and into the age of the new science. By understanding Aristotle's first principles as those of a “science of bodies” (I, Preface and p. 342), his natural logic sought to accommodate the empirical and experimental natural philosophy promoted by thinkers in the Baconian tradition.² Hence, according to Digby, “experience must be our informer in general: after which, our discourse shall anatomise what that presents us in bulk” (II, p. 387; cf. p. 358). In accordance with this program, when laying down his first principles, the common notions, he thus aimed to lay the epistemological groundwork for analyzing the phenomena we experience, not to articulate ontological principles pertaining to those phenomena beyond our experience of them. This fundamentally descriptive aim is also reflected in Digby's deflationary approach to Aristotle's metaphysics, which, for Digby, was simply “the science above physics” that must merely “declare the principles of physics” (I, p. 24; cf. Levitin, 2015, p. 247).

At the same time, Digby's approach was designed to accommodate the approach to natural philosophical practice that emanated from intellectual circles like those of Hartlib and Mersenne, namely as a coordinated and collaborative effort. Mindful of the role of common agreement in the construction of knowledge, Digby was adamant that whatever “seems [to be so] by all mankind” or “wherein all mankind naturally agrees” was the legitimate starting point in natural philosophical investigation (I, pp. 1, 6). By the same token, Digby also saw his logic as a kind of first philosophy, offering a way to articulate the fundamental epistemological principles common to the different sciences, similar to what Bacon called the “common parent of the sciences” (Bacon, 1857–1874, I, p. 540). Showing how the sciences “result out of few and simple notions in their beginnings,” he argued, should make it possible to take all the “new knowledges” and “intermix and weave [them] together, till they grow into a faire piece,” that is, gather them all into a single, unified body of knowledge (I, p. 26). In other words, the “vulgar” and “unlearned” notions common to all mankind should also serve to structure the “learned” sciences. The second major challenge for the

²Mary Jo Dobbs asserts that Digby knew Bacon personally from the court of James I and notes the existence of a Digby manuscript at the British Library concerned with the *Advancement of Learning* (Dobbs, 1971, p. 13). In the *Two Treatises*, Digby also declares himself particularly impressed with the “two exact experimenters,” Galileo and Mersenne, and with the “experimental proofs and observations” by William Gilbert and William Harvey (I, 73, 180–181; Digby knew them both, see Foster, 1988, p. 42).

student of Digby is to grasp exactly how he envisaged this relation between unlearned and learned common notions.³ The aim of the present article is to address these two challenges.

2 | QUESTIONS OF CONTEXT

Digby's theory of common notions has received important attention in recent, excellent commentary (Adrianssen, 2019; Blank, 2007, 2022; Nauta, 2022). In the following, I will build on and expand this work. I do, however, contextualize Digby a little differently than does previous commentary, and it is important to realize that context is of the essence. Digby's logic of common notions is crucial for understanding his overall philosophical enterprise. However, contrary to the associated philosophy of mind that Digby develops in detail in the second treatise, the aspects of this logic that concern natural philosophical method are not well developed. Their systematic exposition is limited to a few pages in the introduction of the first treatise and scattered remarks throughout the rest of the work. Much can be learned, of course, from how Digby in practice goes about constructing his science of bodies. Nonetheless, to reconstruct exactly how he operates, one frequently has to turn to comparison with other thinkers in his context. But Digby was moving in a plurality of intellectual circles (Adrianssen & Georgescu, 2022, p. 3). Picking the appropriate context for reconstructing Digby's natural logic therefore has major implications for its interpretation.

The difficulty of this task is exacerbated by our lack of clear knowledge about the historical genesis of the *Two Treatises* (Foster, 1988, pp. 45, 101–106; Levitin, 2015, p. 248; Malcolm, 2002a, pp. 828–832). Digby's own indications give the impression that his theory of common notions was primarily elaborated in dialogue with his fellow English Catholic and close friend, Thomas White, to whose treatise *De mundo* he often refers (I, pp. 7, 65, 117; II, p. 353). It is tempting to read Digby exclusively in this context (Krook, 1993, pp. 15–40). There is, however, good reason to think that comparison with *De mundo* will not suffice. White's treatise was published in 1642. Digby's *Two Treatises* were published in 1644. The bulk of the work is often assumed to have been written during Digby's incarceration in 1642–43 (e.g., Levitin, 2015, p. 248n94; Malcolm, 2002a, p. 830). However, as we learn in a February 1639 letter to Mersenne, large parts were already being committed to paper during the first months of 1640 when Digby was convalescent in a castle outside London after a bad fall (Foster, 1988, p. 101; MM, IX, pp. 119–124). Moreover, Digby alludes to his logic of common notions as early as a letter to Hobbes from January 17, 1637, that references in-person discussions that took place in Paris in late 1636 (Hobbes, 2002, I, pp. 42–43), and then again in a well-known letter to Mersenne from March 15, 1640 (MM, IX, pp. 203–207). On simple grounds of chronology, we can thus safely assume that White's book was not the only, or even the most important, context for the elaboration of Digby's logic of common notions. My aim in the following is to study what new or more we will learn when read systematically in the context of these earlier exchanges.

In choosing that context, I place Digby with his logic of common notions right in the middle of the Mersenne circle. I am not the first to do so. I should stress in particular the proximity of my approach to that of Andreas Blank. He has suggested that a better understanding of Digby's logic of common notions can be gained by reading it specifically in the context of the Epicurean theory of knowledge developed by Pierre Gassendi (Blank, 2007). I fully agree that the comparison is

³This is no minor issue. As Peter Dear has shown, a central point that separated modern from premodern natural science was a shift from reliance on common experience as registered in tradition and testimony, to reliance on collegial observation and contrived experiment conducted among natural scientists alone (Dear, 1995).

illuminating. Gassendi is, however, not the figure in the circles around Mersenne that the historical circumstances and available textual evidence first invite us to consider. The work by Gassendi that Blank relies on for his comparative analysis is the *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii*, a book that was not published until 1649. The *Two Treatises* explicitly mention no work by Gassendi of greater relevance to us, but only the 1642 *De motu impresso a motore translato* (I, p. 72; Clucas & Raylor, 2020) and an experiment with dissolving salts in water, which was unpublished at the time (I, pp. 154–155).⁴ Gassendi, of course, had been working on drafts of his Epicurean theory of knowledge since the early 1630s.⁵ But while Digby was in Paris in 1635–37, Gassendi was living in Provence, only to settle in Paris in 1641, after Digby had left. Later, Digby's library contained no works by Gassendi (Foster, 1988, p. 46). But could Digby then not simply have learned about Gassendi's views on Epicurean logic and theory of knowledge from Mersenne or others in his circle? It is not unlikely, but I have found no concrete evidence to corroborate such a claim.

This is why, as compelling as the comparison with Gassendi is, when reconstructing Digby's logic of common notions in the context of the Mersenne circle, I shall take my point of departure in known sources, namely the aforementioned letters to Hobbes (on logic) and Mersenne (on Edward Herbert of Cherbury's theory of common notions, as I will show.) In focusing on those letters, I do not, however, want to downplay Digby's own several references to White or challenge the philosophical pertinence of Blank's comparison with Gassendi. My claim is rather that we gain an even clearer view of Digby's doctrine and its specific character by putting it in the context, not only of what it agrees with or might have been inspired by, but also what it explicitly confronts. And, as we shall see, he confronts his theory of common notions with those of Hobbes and Herbert.

3 | NOTIONS AND CONCEPTIONS, COMMON AND NATURAL

Before turning to our two letters, however, some more general remarks about the status of common notions and conceptions at the time of Digby are required.

Describing Digby's logic as a doctrine of “common notions” is justified, but not entirely unproblematic. First, Digby does not always present his theory exactly in those terms. He also sometimes speaks of “natural and plain notion[s],” “natural conceptions,” “general conceptions,” “plain, easy, and primary notions,” “right conceptions . . . how plain soever they seem to be,” “natural conceptions that all people agree in making,” “natural conceptions which mankind makes,” and “common conception[s]” (I, pp. 5–8, 340–342). Second, explicit occurrences of the term “common notion” in the *Two Treatises* are relatively few, not always favorable, and not always necessarily in conformity with Digby's own understanding of the term. In the first treatise, Digby thus criticizes philosophers who undertake to “frame some common notion to comprehend all the several kinds of being in place, which they imagine” or to “speculate out some common notion of being in place” (I, p. 7). In these passages, concerned with how and why Scholastic philosophers in particular had invented an absurd, abstract notion of “an Entity, which they call an Ubi” in order to accommodate their own common preferences and concerns, Digby seems rather to use the term to describe something like the genesis of misconceptions common to certain philosophers. In fact, the only precise occurrences in the *Two Treatises* that directly support a more positive reception occur in two section titles where he explains that “we must know the vulgar and common notion of quantity that we may understand the nature,” and that “extension or divisibility is the common notion of quantity” (I, table).

To better understand the stakes of these apparent variations and potential conflicts in Digby's terminology, we must briefly outline a somewhat complicated backstory. In many

⁴The experiment is published in Gassendi (1649, p. 174); cf. Henry (1982, p. 215n22) and Bellis (2020).

⁵See for example the so-called *Logique de Carpentras*, written in Aix-en-Provence in 1636 (Gassendi, 2012).

early modern philosophical contexts, especially among the “new” philosophers who today figure most prominently in the canon, “common notions” were loosely associated with common opinions and prejudices. Thus understood, they fell victim to the modern philosophers’ wholesale rejection of arguments from authority, tradition, and established consensus associated with Scholasticism. For example, in the *Novum organum*, Bacon proclaimed that “the worst of all omens in intellectual matters is taken from consent,” concluding that “just how ill-starred is the current condition of human knowledge can be seen from common assertions” (Bacon, 2004, pp. 123, 201). Mersenne, in his *Questions harmoniques*, deemed that “one of the greatest obstacles to science is to rely too easily on universal and general notions that common sense dictates to us” (Mersenne, 1634, p. 210). “Common notions are not sacrosanct principles,” Gassendi wrote, because they “appear differently to different people” and often only serve to “praise [one’s] own opinion” (Gassendi, 1658, III, p. 417). Comparable passages, denouncing common notions and arguments from common consent, can be found in Hobbes, Descartes, Boyle, Locke, and so on.

However, some new philosophers—sometimes even the same ones—also recommended a return to more technical, ancient doctrines of “common notions” as an important tool in their efforts to replace Scholastic theories of knowledge, deemed obscure and hollow, and to reacquire some measure of reflexive equilibrium. As a technical term, the “common notion” (*koinai ennoiai*) has a complicated heritage reaching back to the Stoics, to the Epicureans, and to Euclid, who all speak of “common notions” as the first principles of science but assign them a different origin and grounding. According to Lipsius, the paradigmatic neo-Stoic, common notions are “the principles and foundations of science and wisdom” (Lipsius, 1604, p. 90). They are “seeds” of knowledge implanted in the mind of all human beings by God, “sparks” of divine wisdom or intellectual inclinations that pertain to our very nature as rational creatures. And they are common because, as Cicero writes, they are “imprinted on all minds alike” because “reason . . . is certainly common to us all” (Cicero, 1928, p. 329). For neo-Epicureans such as Pierre Gassendi, by contrast, common notions, also styled “preconceptions” or “anticipations,” are general and very simple principles that all human beings acquire from very early on—“with the mother’s milk,” Gassendi says—through induction from particular sense experiences. Moreover, they are less principles of truth than of meaning, like “definitions and descriptions” (Gassendi, 1649, p. 80). Finally, according to a certain reception of Euclid’s *Elements*, reaching back to Aristotle and Proclus, common notions are self-evident axioms, or propositions that are immediately recognized by the understanding as true in virtue of their own concept or form (MacIsaac, 2014, p. 45; Proclus, 1992, pp. 92, 152). Correctly situating Digby’s logic of common notion in relation to these different, doctrinal contexts is crucial for understanding it.

Other complications stem from the fact that Digby uses “common notions” as synonymous to “common conceptions.” The notion of a *communis animi conceptio*, or “common conception of the mind” also has an ancient pedigree. It first appears in Boethius’s *De Hebdomadibus*, where it is defined as “a statement which anyone approves once it has been heard” (Boethius, 1991, p. 299). In his commentary on Boethius, Thomas Aquinas subsumed these common conceptions of the mind under his original conception of propositions *notae per se*, setting the tone for later Scholastic thinkers (Aquinas, 1954, lectio 1, n. 18; cf. Gilson, 1947, pp. 10–40; Evan, 1977). Leaving here to one side the question of faith-based claims, Scholasticism thus left no room for common sense or consensus arguments in its strict understanding of common conceptions. They were seen as based exclusively on axiomatic self-evidence, grounded in the understanding alone, in accordance with a strict Aristotelian view of *scientia*. However, Katja Krause has shown in recent work how assimilations of common conceptions and common sense became increasingly more widespread in the context of the practical philosophy of later Scholastics. They tentatively opened up an epistemological space where it became possible to justify the truth of “common

conceptions” not just by logical self-evidence, but also by common sense perceptions, “gradually replacing the absolute certainty of *conceptiones communes* with a practical self-evidence of *sensus communis*” (Krause, [forthcoming](#)). Common conceptions came to also include some truths based on shared faculties or even common experience, bringing them closer to the Stoic and Epicurean common notions. These hybrid approaches represented ways of reforming Aristotelianism in order to adapt it to new, more experience-based natural scientific sensibilities. Digby, I suggest, follows exactly such a route in his efforts to reform Aristotelian philosophy when, against the Scholastics who frame “metaphysical and abstracted conceptions,” he encouraged philosophers to content “themselves with those plain, easy, and primary notions, which nature stamps alike in all men of common sense, and understanding” (I, p. 7).

4 | CONFRONTING HOBBS

The earliest clear allusion to Digby's logic of common notions I have found occurs in his letter to Hobbes from January 17, 1637:

In your logic, before you can manage men's conceptions, you must show a way how to apprehend them rightly; and herein I would gladly know whether you work upon the general notions and apprehensions that all men (the vulgar as well as the learned) frame of all things that occurs unto them; or whether you make your ground to be definitions collected out of a deep insight into the things themselves. Methinks you bent this way when we talked thereof; & still I am of opinion it is too learned a one for that which ought to be the instrument of the other sciences. (Hobbes, [2002](#), I, pp. 42–43)

The passage is difficult to interpret for a number of reasons: one is that we do not know what Digby refers to exactly when speaking of Hobbes's “logic;”⁶ another is that it clearly continues previous in-person discussion between them about which we have no further information. Lacking an obviously better alternative, I shall, however, assume that the views Hobbes had communicated were at least somewhat similar to the views on logic, language, and truth that he later exposes in *Leviathan* and, most importantly, *De Corpore*. From that viewpoint, Digby's account of Hobbes's views are far from unproblematic, indeed in many respects read as a series of misconceptions. How Digby situates himself in relation to these misconceptions, however, is very instructive.

First, according to Digby, Hobbes holds that “definitions” must be at the basis of any attempt to “manage men's conceptions” and that they should be “collected out of a deep insight into the things themselves.” He is certainly right to think that Hobbes assigns a fundamental role to definitions. As we can read in chapter 46 of the *Leviathan*:

There is a certain *Philosophia prima* on which all other philosophy ought to depend; and consists principally in right limiting of the significations of such appellations, or names, as are of all others the most universal; which limitations serve to avoid ambiguity and equivocation in reasoning, and are commonly called definitions. (Hobbes, [2005](#), III, p. 1076)

⁶Noel Malcolm, in his editorial notes, suggests that we are dealing with the early manuscript version of *De Corpore* printed in Hobbes ([1973](#), pp. 449–460). Considering the contents of that manuscript, it is not likely. If anything, it would be some pages possibly *missing* from it, dedicated to logic (see the conjectural remarks by Jacquot and Whitmore in Hobbes, [1973](#), p. 82). In any case, the text is of no help in reconstructing Digby's account of Hobbes's “logic.”

Similarly, in *De Corpore*, we learn that “primary propositions are nothing but definitions, or parts of definitions, and these only are the principles of demonstration” (DC, I.3, p. 37) and that to “put . . . definitions for the nature of any thing, as the writers of metaphysics have done, is not right, seeing they be only significations of what we think of the nature of things” (DC, I.3, p. 21). The purpose of definitions is not to explain the nature of anything, but merely to communicate or give “certain signs, by which what one man finds out may be manifested and made known to others.” And such signs are fundamentally arbitrary, chosen “at our own pleasure” (DC, I.2, p. 14). Two steps removed from the world, mediated by both perception and language, our “general notions” thus convey no “deep insight into the things themselves.” Digby was clearly mistaken about Hobbes's view.

Second, Digby complains that Hobbes adopts a conception of logic that is too “learned” to fulfill its purpose as the “instrument” of all the sciences. His worry seems to be that Hobbes's philosophical approach to definitions consigns logic to a self-referential space of technical discourse incapable of structuring any other form of discourse. In order to fulfill this instrumental office, logic must instead be stated in common and communicable terms, drawn from “the general notions and apprehensions that all men . . . frame of all things that occurred unto them.” Digby here joins a set of early modern reformers of logic who followed the lead of thinkers such as Lorenzo Valla and Pierre de la Ramée in their attempts to rethink the Aristotelian categories in terms of commonplaces, understood as descriptive categories that applied equally everywhere, to all things and within all disciplines (Hotson, 2007; Nauta, 2009, pp. 82–124, 2021, pp. 44–70).

In Digby's objection, we can, however, also detect another problem, which concerns not just the relations between the different sciences but also those between the sciences generally and common knowledge. This is the problem Digby addresses with his two-language theory in the *Two Treatises*. According to that theory, “there are two sorts of language to express our notions by,” where “one belongs in general to all mankind . . . and in this, the words express the things properly and plainly, according to the natural conceptions that all people agree in making of them,” and the other “is understood only by those that in a particular and express manner have been trained up unto it” (I, p. 5). However, Digby argues, even if it is different, learned language must not be cut off from common language: “Great errors arise by wresting words from their common meaning to express a more particular or studied notion” (I, table).⁷ Instead, the philosopher's work “is but to explicate and shew the particulars in retail, of what men naturally speak in gross” (I, p. 40). Beginning with the merely descriptive notions of common language, the philosopher must elaborate a learned language through analysis and empirical study, understood by Digby as a form of refinement: “Learned men . . . should refine, and carry higher” (I, p. 33).⁸ Contrary to the vulgar who “sits still with those notions, that are made at the first,” the more refined knowledge of the scholar “grows afterwards out of the diligent observation of what we see: which is that, whereby learned men differ from the unlearned” (II, p. 385). Nonetheless, as Digby proclaims, “the first work of scholars, is to learn of the people! *Quem penes, arbitrium est & ius & norma loquendi*—what is the true meaning and signification of these primary names, and what notions they beget in the generality of mankind of the things they design” (I, p. 8).⁹

⁷ Key examples are the notions of “place” and “body” (see I, p. 6; II, p. 352).

⁸ By contrast, Digby rejects derivation of learned from common language by means of *tropes*. Only perversion results when words “have been by the authors of it, translated and wrested from the general conceptions of the same words, by some metaphor, or similitude, or allusion, to serve their private turns” (I, p. 5). It worth noting in this context that in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes also describes metaphor as a kind of abuse and deception (Hobbes, 2005, IV, pp. 50–51, 62–63). By contrast, in rejecting tropes, Digby is at odds with one his earliest, and otherwise most admiring readers, namely the young Leibniz (see Lærke, 2009).

⁹ Mersenne makes a strikingly similar point: “ignorant people judge very badly because they make use only of common sense, or the first notions that enter their mind, of which the learned are not wanting: but they correct these first apprehensions by several experiments and by reason, through which they establish the maxims and rules of their sciences” (Mersenne, 1634, III, pp. 216–217).

Perhaps Hobbes disagreed? In fact, as Lodi Nauta shows in recent work, passages abound in Hobbes's work where he either appeals to common usage in the definition of terms or explicitly theorizes the necessity of doing so (Nauta, 2021, pp. 180–214). Yet, in some texts, Hobbes's stance is ambiguous in ways that may account for Digby's apparent misconception. If, for Hobbes, common language offered a practical guide to definition, it also, as Nauta puts it, “reflected patterns of thinking that [he] found deeply disturbing” (Nauta, 2021, p. 181). “How fallacious it is to judge of the nature of things by the ordinary and inconstant use of words,” Hobbes exclaims at the outset of chapter 25 of the *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 2005, II, pp. 398–399). These suspicions toward common language are on particularly prominent display in the only passages of *De Corpore* that discuss common notions explicitly: most “common notions,” Hobbes complains there, “are not truly principles,” even “sometimes manifestly false,” and only “thrust on us under the name of principles by the clamour of men, who obtrude for evident to others, all that they themselves think true” (DC, I.3, p. 37). To exclude such false principles, Hobbes doubles down on the arbitrariness of language and recommends that philosophers profit from the freedom of definition to forge their own vocabulary at will:

whatsoever the common use of words be, yet philosophers, who were to teach their knowledge to others, had always the liberty, and sometimes they both had and will have necessity, of taking to themselves such names as they please for the signifying of their meaning, if they would have it understood. (DC, I.2, p. 16)

It was, or so I would suggest, such strategies of definition, insulating philosophers from the “clamour of men,” that Digby had in mind when criticizing Hobbes for taking an approach to the management of man's conceptions that was too “learned” and not attentive enough to “the general notions and apprehensions that all men . . . frame of all things.” Digby was suggesting that Hobbes was too focused on shielding the first principles of logic from common prejudice that he had lost sight of the necessity of maintaining *some* connection between unlearned and learned discourse.

5 | CONFRONTING HERBERT

Let us now turn to the confrontation of Digby's logic of common notions with that of Edward Herbert of Cherbury. The historical justification for making such a comparison is indirect and requires a conjecture. On February 14, 1640, Digby wrote Mersenne from England telling how he had now “well thought and organised in [his] mind all of the *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*; and that [he] now need only one more month of leisure to write it down” (MM, IX, p. 120). Among the topics Digby noted that he would address in this work was the fact that “most people are so full of false principles . . . that they will not form any natural or legitimate conceptions” (MM, IX, p. 120). Mersenne wrote back on February 25. That letter is unfortunately not extant, but on March 15, 1640, Digby replied the following:

I agree with you that, who wants to prove the immortality of the soul or the existence of God, must take recourse to certain common notions which will be like a foundation for any reasoning on this point. But it seems to me that the discourse of your geometers is deficient in that they want this common notion to be like an instinct or confused interior vision of the thing. But this would be the notion (albeit confused) of a particular, and not a common notion. The latter must be evident to the understanding as soon as they are considered whereas the former can be acquired by the application of the latter. Common are such notions as *the whole is*

greater than its parts; if a cause is actual, so is the effect; and similar. On these two points, my treatises rest on such [common notions]. (MM, IX, p. 204)

The heart of the passage concerns Digby's opposition to those he calls "your geometers" and the way in which they understand common notions and their grounding in an "instinct" or "interior vision." Who does he have in mind? Given the absence of Mersenne's letter, some conjectural reconstruction is required.

One possibility would be that Digby is referring to geometers in Mersenne's circle, and Gilles Personne de Roberval in particular, in the same way as Descartes, when writing to Mersenne, frequently refers to Roberval as "your geometer" (AT, II, pp. 30–31, 190, 307, 312, 320, etc.). A comparison with Roberval's texts will, however, not bear out such a conjecture. About the same time, in 1640, Roberval wrote a text entitled *Les principes du devoir et des connaissances humaines* (Roberval, 1992), most likely as part of an ongoing conversation with Hobbes about first principles (Malcolm, 2002b, pp. 178–179). And here Roberval notes that "there are propositions so certain and evident in themselves for the understanding that, simply by thinking of them, and by understanding the language and the term that someone uses to express them, one cannot doubt their truth" (Roberval, 1992, pp. 177–178). Any such "intellectual proposition," he continues, "one can deem true or false by thought and reasoning alone" (p. 182). For Roberval, the first principles of philosophy were thus grounded in the understanding alone, not unlike the axiomatic common conceptions of a Thomas Aquinas. It is very hard to square such conceptions with anything like first principles based on "instinct or confused interior vision of the thing."

A more plausible target of Digby's objections was in fact not a "geometer" at all. My suggestion is that Mersenne had mentioned Edward Herbert of Cherbury and the theory of common notions contained in his 1624 *De Veritate*. There are excellent contextual reasons to think that Mersenne would bring up Herbert. Exchanges of several letters between Herbert and Mersenne about *De Veritate* took place in 1636–37 (MM, VI, pp. 354–357, 356–360, 362–367). Around mid-1639, Mersenne published a French translation of *De Veritate* (DV). And throughout 1639, Mersenne discussed both the Latin original and his own translation with Descartes (AT, II, pp. 566, 570–571, 597–598, 629). The strongest evidence in favor of the conjecture does, however, lie in the way Digby describes the doctrine he had heard of from Mersenne as based on "instinct" and "interior vision."

Herbert favors a Stoic theory of knowledge the basic premise of which is that we recognize truth by universal consent: "*universal consent* will be the sovereign rule of truth" (DV, pp. 51–53). Such universally agreed upon "common notions" are "principles that it is not permitted to dispute," and they provide even "mathematical certainty about things" (DV, pp. 56, 75). Herbert does not, however, argue that common notions are indisputably true because they are evident in and by themselves. Instead, they are hardwired into us through a "natural instinct" that a providential God has given us (DV, pp. 52–53). To become present to mind, they must be "prompted by the senses" (DV, pp. 55–56). Still, experience plays no role in the fact that we recognize them to be true: "the common notions . . . are given by natural instinct and known by themselves without there being any need to use the external senses to prove them" (DV, pp. 74). So, contrary to Roberval, Herbert *did* see common notions as being grasped through something "like an instinct or confused interior vision of the thing." Incidentally, it is also exactly how Gassendi described Herbert's doctrine in a (very critical) 1634 letter to Elie Diodati: "He . . . mostly has recourse to natural instinct and the testimony of the interior faculty that each and everyone possesses to judge about the inner truth of things" (Gassendi, 1957, p. 289).

If Herbert's indeed is the position in question, a reconstruction of the exchange between Digby and Mersenne would go something like this. In his first letter, Digby complained that "most people are so full of false principles . . . that they will not form any natural or legitimate conceptions" of the things he had to say about the immortality of the soul and the existence of

God (MM, IX, p. 221). Next, Mersenne responded with a brief account of Herbert's brighter view on the natural and legitimate conceptions embedded in our consensual common notions rooted in innate "natural instinct." And then, finally, somewhat incongruously confusing Herbert for a "geometer," Digby replied by rejecting those who in that way understand common notions "like an instinct or confused interior vision of the thing."

This reconstruction allows us to rule out certain interpretations of Digby's theory of common notions which otherwise present themselves as options. Most importantly, we can rule out the idea that, for Digby, common notions rely on instinct in the way of the Stoics, that is, that they are hardwired into human nature as innate dispositions. But what exactly does he propose as an alternative? His description of them as "evident to the understanding as soon as they are considered" in the letter to Mersenne echoes the *Two Treatises'* later appeal to "propositions as of themselves . . . evident to mans nature as soon as they are proposed" (I, p. 26). Both formulations could suggest a conception not far removed from Roberval's traditional Scholastic understanding of them as notions we "deem true or false by thought and reasoning alone." But such a reading potentially conflicts with Digby's earlier critique of Hobbes's excessively "learned" (i.e., exclusively logical) understanding of common notions and sits uncomfortably with the general anti-Scholastic tenor of Digby's enterprise in the *Two Treatises*. So is there a way to reconcile the various statements about common notions that we find in the correspondence with Hobbes, the correspondence with Mersenne, and the *Two Treatises*? This will be the topic of the final section.

6 | EMBRACING EPICUREANISM

It is time to recapitulate our reading of the two letters and turn more directly to the *Two Treatises*. What have our analysis of Digby's confrontations with Hobbes and Herbert taught us about his understanding of common notions? It can be summarized in a set of six points. Some are explicitly stated in the letters. Common notions are (1) "like a foundation for any reasoning." They are (2) "evident to the understanding as soon as they are considered." However, common notions (3) do not offer "deep insight into the things themselves" but are like (4) conceptions that "all men, learned and vulgar alike, frame of all things that occur unto them." Others are interpretive options that we can rule out: (5) Digby's common notions are not innate dispositions in the sense of the Stoics, embedded in human nature. This is clear from the fact that he denies Herbert's contention that they are grounded in "instinct" and "inner sense." Moreover, (6) he warns against positing common notions that are too "learned." Scholars are not free to invent their own common definitions separately from the "general notions that all men frame," but must ground the former in the latter. The challenge is to understand how all these doctrinal elements fit together, what kind of doctrine results, and, crucially, how they generate an understanding of the primary notions of philosophy as both common and natural.

To gain some clarity, let us first return to Digby's two-language theory and the method he derives from it. According to this method, "it is the undisciplined multitude that must furnish learned men with natural apprehensions, and notions to exercise their wits about" (I, p. 8). Digby's point is that our scholarly understanding of nature must emerge organically from an already acquired, but cruder conception, which reflects our common ways of identifying and signifying the things we perceive. Only once we have identified the shared descriptive principles according to which all mankind apprehends the world, the learned "may use and order and reflect upon them as they please: but they must first receive them in that plain and naked form, as mankind in general pictures them out in their imaginations" (I, p. 8).

But why exactly does Digby insist that principles embraced by "all mankind" must be privileged? One reason we already know from the letter to Hobbes: the first notions of science must be sufficiently broad in scope and commonly accepted to fulfill their purpose as "instrument[s]

of the other sciences.” Starting with commonly accepted significations ensures communicability of knowledge across disciplines and unity of the natural sciences as a single body of knowledge. However, for this purpose, linguistic convention is, in principle, enough; the common notions need simply be agreed upon among the relevant interlocutors, in this case the natural philosophers, and no one else. As we have seen, this is the kind of approach Hobbes sometimes favors in his doctrine of scientific definition. Digby, however, claims that, in common language, “the words express the things properly and plainly, according to the natural conceptions that all people agree in making of them” (I, p. 6). Agreement about the meaning of terms among the users of a given common language is clearly not just a conventional fact for Digby, but also to some extent a *natural* one, and that natural quality is also part of its privilege. This particularly applies to the first principles of common language, that is, the common notions, which Digby claims are common not just to *some*, but to *all* peoples, that is, to “all mankind.”¹⁰

Now, what Digby understands exactly by *natural* in this context is best explained in terms of the way in which common notions are *not innate*. For Digby as for others, the common notions together form a set of propositions that express such primary concepts and principles as human beings will accept immediately without further justification.¹¹ But why do we accept all such primary notions? To explain it, Digby sometimes appears to appeal to something like a Platonic theory of reminiscence. If we all accept common notions, it stems from our impression that “even before we know a thing, we seem to know it” (II, p. 385). Should we conclude from such passages that common notions are always already in our minds in the form of innate dispositions? This would involve detecting in the *Two Treatises* something like the Stoic understanding of common notions that, in writing to Mersenne, Digby clearly rejects in Herbert. Such a conclusion would however be a mistake. For Digby immediately goes on to specify that such anticipated knowledge has nothing innate about it. In fact, the notions in question are initially acquired through experience: it is “by our sense [that we] have knowledge that such a thing it is, before we know what, or who, or how, it is” (II, p. 385). Rather than being born with us, the common notions are notions “which nature stamps alike in all men of common sense, and understanding” (I, p. 7). Only some notions are so plain and easily acquired that we tend to forget how and when they were thus “stamped” in our common sense, so that they end up *seeming* innate to us, or that “a man in his ordinary course, makes use of those rules and *maxims* . . . without so much as ever thinking of them,” indeed “some of them [being] so far out of the reach of most men, as they cannot think of them, though they would; for they know them not” (II, p. 388).

¹⁰Obvious tensions exist here between particular languages and the universality of human apprehension they are presumed to convey. Digby presumably believed that all natural languages tended to carve up the world of phenomena generally in the same way. But he does not address the issue.

¹¹As the perceptive reader will have noticed, Digby operates with a double understanding of common notions as both general concepts (e.g., notions of “quantity” or “space”) and general principles or axioms (e.g., notions of part-whole relations). One could think that only the latter are propositional items. There are, however, good reasons to believe that Digby would also consider general concepts as something we grasp in propositional form, namely as primary definitions such as “*Place* is bodies being environed and enclosed by some one, or several others that are immediate onto it”; or “*Quantity* is the extension of a thing” (see I, pp. 6, 9). This impression is reinforced by the fact that Digby occasionally uses the term “definition” as synonymous to “notion,” for example, when speaking of “the most plain and evident definition of a *body*” that had been “choked” by the Scholastics (II, p. 353). Moreover, such a propositional understanding of all common notions seems required by Digby’s assertions in the second treatise that all *knowledge*, including of common notions, is knowledge of *relations* (or “respects” in Digby’s terminology) and that relations are expressed by *propositions*: “to understand a proposition which openly carries its evidence with it, is to know it” (II, p. 369); “all true knowledge is respective” (II, p. 426); “setting aside the notion of *Existence* or of *Being*, all our other notions are nothing else, but *comparisons* and *respects*” (II, p. 361). Hence, when Digby at some point describes common notions as “propositions as of themselves . . . evident to mans nature as soon as they are proposed” (I, p. 26), I suspect he refers both to general concepts (expressed by primary definitions) and to general principles (expressed by axiomatic statements). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for prompting me to offer some clarification on this point. However, a more exact account of how Digby incorporates propositional logic into his theory of knowledge is a study in itself and would take us too far afield.

In navigating the world in our everyday lives, we thus have a “secret dependence” on a host of rules and maxims that we once learned, but which have become so embedded in our reasoning that we use them without even consciously realizing that we do, having awareness of them only as “effects of our understanding” (II, p. 389). These “are certain knowledges that formerly [people] have gotten, but that they usually think not of except when violated,” such as, for example, the rules of grammar in speech or of harmony and consonance in music (II, p. 388). The mathematician does not in each of her demonstrations conjure up her knowledge of the “whole book of Euclid”; neither does the grammarian, while using language, constantly conjure up her entire knowledge of the rules of grammar (II, p. 385). Because of this, when, through the analysis of our experience, we are led to once again formulate the most basic rules and maxims we rely on, we merely recover something we already tacitly knew. But such recovery does not occur through reminiscence of innate notions, but through ordinary memory or recollection of once acquired notions that have become like second nature to us. It is only in this sense that “even before we know a thing, we seem to know it.”

One remarkable fact about this account of common notions is that it manages to present them as *natural*, while at the same time not committing Digby to assert that they are necessarily *true* in a deeper sense, or that they represent things as they are in themselves. The “words [that] express our notions” only describe things “according to the pictures we make of them in our own thoughts, and not according as the things are in their proper natures” (I, pp. 5, 2). Admittedly, Digby does affirm regarding one common notion we all have—the notion of “being in a place”—that it is “the natural and true one” (I, p. 6); he also speaks of acquiring knowledge of the “nature” of bodies, including in the full title of the *Two Treatises*, where the first treatise is presented as one in which “the nature of bodies . . . is looked into,” and, moreover, speaks of his efforts to “delive[r] the nature of bodies” (I, p. 153). But we should not infer from such formulations that common notions offer knowledge of things as they “really” are distinct from the way human beings apprehend them. Instead, regarding the application of the common notion of “place” to bodies, Digby claims that “it imports not whether these . . . be truly so, or do but seem so to mankind” (I, p. 34). For, even if man’s “notions being made according to the seeming of the things; he must need make the same notions, whether the things be truly so in themselves, or but seems to be so, when that seeming or appearance is always constantly the same” (I, p. 34). The notion of a body as it always appears to all human beings and the nature of that body are of one piece, so to speak, or they constantly entertain the exact same relation in such a way that exploring the “nature” of bodies can be done simply by analyzing and refining the notions we are naturally given of them in our apprehension. Indeed, this is why Digby envisages no ontology or metaphysics of “things in themselves” beyond physics, but only a metaphysics that encompasses “the principles of physics,” that is, a system of common notions which, by means of definitions and axioms, expresses the way that all human beings have been taught by nature to structure their apprehensions (I, p. 24). In other words, common notions and the common language from which they are derived express the nature of things exactly and only in the sense that they express how nature is always experienced and apprehended by us all.

By contrast, serious error and confusion results when such notions are assumed to express some underlying metaphysical truth about things themselves, as opposed to the way in which our mind apprehends them. In one key example of such “perverted” metaphysics, Digby thus explains how, in their doctrine of qualities, the Scholastics confuse mere properties for separate entities.¹² He partly sees such mystification as a surreptitious way for Scholastic metaphy-

¹²Writing to Mersenne in 1640, Digby already explained how he intended to show how “the entire doctrine of qualities has been ill founded and badly understood, and that it is nothing but a refuge for the ignorance of those who pretend to be ignorant of nothing” (MM, IX, pp. 120–121).

sicians “to serve their private turns” (I, p. 5). However, if such abstruse metaphysics has succeeded, it is only because the human understanding already has a natural “bent and inclination” toward framing different accidents of a single thing as “many several distinct formal conceptions” or to perceive things such as “quantity, figure, colour, smell, taste, and other accidents” as “actual beings” (I, pp. 2–3). The Scholastics have simply tapped into this human inclination, and elevated and systematized such misconception into an artificial metaphysics that serves their private purposes. As Digby puts it succinctly: “they confound and misapply the right use of our natural discourse, with a multitude of precepts drawn from artificial logic” (II, p. 376). By contrast, analyzing natural discourse beginning from common notions, that is, “notions that all mankind (who, as we have said, is judge and master of language) naturally frames,” will afford us knowledge grounded in “apprehensions that nature taught them” (I, p. 33).

This overall analysis of Digby's theory of common notions affords us some important lessons about its exact pedigree and construction. The first relates to Digby's commitment to reforming Aristotelianism. As he explains, “later philosophers . . . have taken the notions, which by our first masters were set for common and confused explications of the natures, to serve for convenience and succinctness of discourse) to be truly and really particular entities” (II, pp. 351–352). In particular, in reifying qualities, “perverters of Aristotle have framed such entities, under that conception which nature hath attributed to substances” (I, p. 345). But in doing that, these “pretenders of Aristotle . . . have introduced a model of doctrine . . . out of his words, which he never so much as dreamed of” for “whereas he called certain collections or positions of things, by certain common names (as the art of logic requires),” they “have imagined, that every one of these names had correspondent unto it, some real positive entity or thing” (I, p. 344). What Digby here styles “collections or positions” are kinds of predicates, exemplified by “qualities,” “actions,” “places,” and “relatives” (I, p. 344). In other words, we are concerned with something like Aristotle's categories or predicaments, the nature of which he analyzes in greater detail in the second treatise (II, pp. 361–362). On that reconstruction, the Scholastic mistake consists not just in confusing properties for things, but on a deeper level in mistaking Aristotle's predicaments for learned accounts of how things themselves are organized; whereas they were never intended to be anything but descriptions of how all human beings, learned and unlearned alike, initially and naturally apprehend the world. As Digby writes, we should “take heed, least reflecting upon the notions we have in our mind, we afterwards pin those airy superstructures upon the material things themselves, that begot them” (I, p. 4). By contrast, his own reinterpretation of the Aristotelian predicaments in terms of common notions turns them into descriptive categories derived from common language use which offer a “sufficient” way of accounting in a systematic and universal way for how human beings experience the world (I, p. 7). They serve, as Digby puts it, to “anatomis[e], and loo[k] narrowly into the nature of such apprehensions, as we daily make of things” by taking our point of departure in the “most plain and easy conception wherein all mankind naturally agrees” (II, p. 358; cf. I, p. 6).

The second lesson relates to the two-language theory. That, too, is of ancient pedigree. Already in *De Hebdomadibus*, Boethius divides his “common conceptions of the mind” into two classes: those that are “common in the sense that it belongs to all men” or that “no one who understands it denies it”; and those that belong “only to the learned, even though it comes from such conceptions as belong to the common understanding” or conceptions “that the learned but not the uneducated acknowledge” (Boethius, 1991, p. 300). Digby's theory does, however, and perhaps more importantly, trace back to *Topics*, where Aristotle argues that we should take common language as a model for establishing the meaning of terms, like the meaning of the term “healthy,” but not when analyzing what things fall under that meaning, that is, “whether the object before us tends to produce health or not.” The latter task is for the learned “doctor” to complete (II, p. 2, 110a1; Aristotle, 1984, pp. 414–415). In other words, for Aristotle, the common use of language offers an initial criterion of meaning, whereas the

discovery of truth requires learned analysis. But this is also exactly what Digby argues when proclaiming that “the first work of scholars, is to learn of the people” in order to gauge “what is the true meaning and signification of [the] primary names,” but after that, the philosopher must “explicate and shew the particulars in retail, of what men naturally speak in gross” (I, pp. 8, 40).

The third lesson, however, brings us to a possible common source of both the previous two; a single possible doctrinal background for the association of the common and the natural that governs Digby's logic. It is the Epicurean understanding of common notions as preconceptions. As we learn in Diogenes Laertius's paradigmatic statement of the doctrine:

By preconception [the Epicureans] mean a sort of apprehension or a right opinion or notion, or universal idea stored in the mind; that is, a recollection of an external object often presented. . . . Thus the object primarily denoted by every term is then plain and clear. And we should never have started an investigation, unless we had known what it was that we were in search of. (Diogenes, 1925, X, p. 563)

On the Epicurean view, common notions or preconceptions are initial consensual nominal descriptions of things as they are commonly perceived. They offer a point of departure for the philosophical investigation of nature only in the sense that they contain the principles according to which human beings ordinarily organize the world they experience, basic descriptive principles that everybody accepts and applies everywhere. Moreover, these principles do not merely have a basis in arbitrary choice or common usage, but also a *natural* one. As Gassendi later formulates the point in the *Philosophiae Epicuri syntagma*, when we form a common notion by “having seen many singulars,” the mind “forms and imprints in herself the anticipation of that which is common to them all, as an universal notion” (Gassendi, 1658, III, p. 8; trans. in Gassendi, 1660, p. 138). In other words, for the Epicureans, common notions are common because nature has “stamped” them upon us all in the same way through experience. All these features of the Epicurean understanding of preconceptions we have seen also reappear in Digby's understanding of common notions, distinguishing him philosophically from Hobbes and bringing him closer to Gassendi.

7 | CONCLUSION

Digby's natural logic of common notions includes an element of social epistemology, because it takes commonly shared conceptions to form the obligatory point of departure for any natural philosophical analysis. Certainly, the universal consensus that exists about such common notions does not point to any mind-independent truth about the things we apprehend. It reflects the nature of the human body and mind, namely, that we all naturally apprehend things in that way. Nonetheless, common notions offer us a descriptive framework upon which we can order and classify whatever we learn from experience in a way that is recognizable and communicable, and that, moreover, can serve as the common basis upon which all the sciences, each in their domain, can elaborate their own respective notions.

I am not the first to see a social epistemology of this kind at work among the circle of English Catholic philosophers that Digby belonged to. John Henry has written an insightful article showing how John Sergeant, in texts from the late 1690s arguing against Descartes and Locke's epistemological “ideism,” defended “a sound theory of knowledge should not be based on the way individual minds work, but on the collective consensus of relevant societies” (Henry, 2014, pp. 95–124; here p. 95). Seeing this as a specifically Roman Catholic trait, Henry offers mainly confessional reasons why Sergeant would propose such a theory. Some of these same confessional reasons surely played a role in the logic of common notions

that Sergeant's older peer, Digby, developed half a century earlier in the *Two Treatises*. In discussing other aspects of Digby's thought, Henry has taken such a general line of argument, depicting his natural philosophy essentially as a confessionalized one (Henry, 1982, 2010).

However, as Digby's exchanges with Hobbes about his "logic" and with Mersenne about Lord Herbert's *De veritate* clearly show, this confessional element is far from being the only relevant context for reconstructing Digby's theory or grasping the philosophical motivations behind it.¹³ Taking my point of departure in these exchanges, I have shown how Digby attempted to reframe the Aristotelian predicaments as common notions in order to make them better suited for the purposes of a natural philosophy that was becoming increasingly focused on experimental and collective practices. The Thomist understanding of "common conceptions of the soul," grounded exclusively in a form of axiomatic self-evidence grasped by individual understanding, had held science proper captive to cognitive ideals incapable of properly accommodating insight gained from collective experimentation. Therefore, rethinking the nature and ground of the common principles or, as Digby also calls them, "primary notions," of natural philosophy became a crucial task. Digby's theory of common notions represents one such attempt at softening the strict epistemic requirements of Aristotelian *epistēmē* or *scientia* by reframing the first principles of knowledge in terms of a descriptive natural logic of phenomena essentially borrowed from the Epicureans. In this respect, Digby's approach to common notions was close to Gassendi's approach to the anticipations or preconceptions of Diogenes Laertius. Contrary to Gassendi, however, Digby did not intend for his neo-Epicurean common notions to *replace* Aristotelian first principles but only to help *reform* them.

In formulating this theory, Digby thus steered a difficult course between other early modern attempts at rethinking the nature of common notions, such as those articulated by Hobbes and Herbert. As we have seen, confronting Digby's views with these other figures is a crucial heuristic tool for reconstructing Digby's theory. What we have learned from doing so is that, for Digby, a reformed Aristotelian "logic" required two things. The first was to give perception and experience weight in the genesis of first principles. This requirement is fulfilled by Digby's understanding of primary notions as "stamped" upon us by nature, that is, as simple and acquired from very early on and by everyone in such a way that they *appear* innate, without in fact being so. The second was to give common knowledge increased epistemic weight. This requirement is fulfilled by Digby's understanding of primary notions as commonly shared significations, concerned with meaning rather than truth. Both these solutions—that is, to posit common notions as natural conceptions and as shared definitions—are also what is characteristic for the Epicurean understanding of common notions.¹⁴

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¹³On this point, I agree with Levitin (2015, p. 246).

¹⁴I am grateful to Katja Krause for sharing forthcoming work, to David Bartha for comments on a draft, and to an anonymous reviewer for some very helpful remarks. Finally, this article would not exist without continued discussion about Digby with Niall Dilucia and a conversation with Andreas Blank some seventeen years ago. Research for this article was funded by the European Union ("The Common Notion. Science and Consensus in the Seventeenth Century" [NOTCOM], ERC AdG no. 101052433, 2023–2027). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the ERC. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Mogens Lærke is senior researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), affiliated at the Maison Française d'Oxford and at the research institute IHRIM at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon. He has published widely on topics in early modern philosophy. His most recent book is *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing* (Oxford, 2021).