In the course of the philosophical reflections which constitute the Prolegomena to his De Iure Belli ac Pacis, Grotius singled out two figures of antiquity for particular attack. One was Aristotle, and the anti-Aristotelian character of his work was well-known to contemporaries and has been obvious to most subsequent commentators. But the other was Carneades, the head of the sceptical Academy, and the anti-sceptical thrust of the Grotian enterprise has been less frequently remarked on (though it too was obvious to the early-eighteenth-century 'historians of morality' such as Barbeyrac). In this paper I shall argue that it was this aspect of Grotius's theory which gave it a central importance, and which furthermore linked his programme with Hobbes's: the similarities between their views, which Grotius himself seems to have been uneasily conscious of are genuine, and vital for a full understanding of what Hobbes thought he was doing.

The centrality of the attack on Carneades in the Prolegomena is made quite clear by Grotius himself. As he said,

"since it would be a vain Undertaking to treat of Right, if there is really no such thing; it will be necessary, in order to shew the Usefulness of our Work, and to establish it on solid Foundations, to confute here in a few Words so dangerous an Error. And that we may not engage with a Multitude at once, let us assign them an Advocate. And who more proper for this purpose than Carneades...? This Man having undertaken to dispute against Justice, that kind of it, especially, which is the Subject of this Treatise, found no Argument stronger than this. Laws (says he) were..."

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* Jesus College, Cambridge.

1 See Grotius's remark in the Prolegomena to De Iure Belli ac Pacis XLIII — "Truth, for the Discovery of which Aristotle took so great Pains, is now oppressed by nothing more than the very name of Aristotle". This quotation, and all subsequent quotations from the work, comes from the great English translation of Jean Barbeyrac's edition of De Iure Belli ac Pacis, The Right of War and Peace (London 1738) p. xxviii. For the reaction of contemporaries, see Barbeyrac's notes in ibid, or J. Felden, Annotata in Hug. Grotium, De Iure Belli ac Pacis (Amsterdam 1653).

2 I have enlarged on this aspect of the matter in my paper "Optics and Sceptics: The Philosophical Foundations of Hobbes's Political Thought".
instituted by Men for the sake of Interest; and hence it is that they are different, not only in different Countries, according to the Diversity of their Manners; but often in the same Country, according to the Times. As to that which is called natural right, it is a mere Chimera. Nature prompts all Men, and in general all Animals, to seek their own particular Advantage: So that either there is no Justice at all, or if there is any, it is extreme Folly, because it engages us to procure the Good of others, to our own Prejudice.\(^3\)

Like the confrontation with Aristotle in the same work, Grotius here spelt out in detail a confrontation which had already been present at a central point in his astonishing early work the De Indis (known misleadingly to modern historians as the De Iure Praeda). Already in 1604/5 Grotius concluded his fundamental discussion of the law of nature by remarking,

> the foregoing observations show how erroneously the Academics — those masters of ignorance — have argued in refutation of justice, that the kind derived from nature looks solely to personal advantage, while civil justice is based not upon nature but merely upon opinion; for they have overlooked that intermediate aspect of justice which is characteristic of human-kind. What Grotius meant by this last remark we shall see presently.\(^4\)

To attack Carneades in 1604 or 1625 was not of course simply to attack a long-dead classical philosopher. It was primarily to attack the modern sceptics whose appeal to contemporary intellectuals was profound — and with whom the youthful Grotius himself seems to have had some sympathy. This modern scepticism was embodied in such works as Pierre Charron's Of Wisdom, which first appeared in French in 1601, and was re-issued at least twelve times between 1601 and 1663; it was soon translated into English, and ran through eight editions between 1608 and 1670. There had been elements of scepticism present in humanism from its very beginnings; the repudiation of medieval a priori and demonstrative arguments in all fields, but especially that of ethics, had at times (for instance in the writings of Valla) a highly sceptical tinge. But earlier humanists had been saved from true scepticism by their rediscovery of the classical Aristotle. Aristotelian ethics assumed that there are real moral properties to be perceived and an intersubjectivity of morals, despite the fact that there can be no a priori and demonstrative arguments about

\(^3\) *The Rights of War and Peace* pp xiv/xv (Prolegomena V).

\(^4\) *De Iure Praedae Commentarius* I, A translation by G. L. Williams (Oxford 1950) p. 13. Grotius in his letters about this work always refers to it as e.g. his "De rebus Indicis opusculum" (*Briefwisseling* I ed. Molhuysen, 's-Gravenhage 1928, p. 72).