

Topics in Social and Political Philosophy: Thomas Hobbes

1. *Wednesday, January 23* OVERVIEW

The class has two goals. First, I would like to present Hobbes's masterpiece *Leviathan* as a whole project. It is best known as a contribution to political philosophy. But it begins with perception and ends with a polemical history of the church: how does that all fit together? Second, I would like to go into greater depth on selected topics. To this end, we will read a variety of secondary materials.

Natural philosophy and method

2. *Monday, January 28* COGNITION

Hobbes begins with psychological theories of the basis of our knowledge: how we perceive the world, think about it, and speak about it. These are all couched in materialist terms that we would find familiar: objects cause sensations in our brains, and so on. At some points, Hobbes seems to be using his theories to argue for materialist conclusions: for instance, ch. 3, par. 12 and ch. 4, par. 21. That looks like an invalid kind of argument: it seems to move from an assumption that everything in the mind has a material cause to a conclusion that everything is material. Is that so?

Leviathan, ch. 1-4.

3. *Wednesday, January 30* SCIENCE AND REASON

Chapter five defines reasoning as a kind of adding and subtracting; the model is geometry, which begins with stipulated definitions of terms like "point" and "line". Chapter six illustrates this with an account of the passions (we will talk about how). And chapter seven draws distinctions between knowledge of facts, science, opinion, and conscience. It leaves us with a question: if science isn't knowledge of facts, what is it knowledge of?

Leviathan, ch. 5-7.

4. *Monday, February 4* **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**
 It's natural to look for a linear story in *Leviathan*. The material on reasoning and method has some relevance to what immediately follows. But what about the psychological stories about vision and imagination and the materialist metaphysics? Here, it's more helpful to think of the book as having a mirrored structure in which Part I is reflected in Part IV while Part II matches Part III. In Part IV, Hobbes contrasts his views with those who, he claims, have distorted Christian Scripture for their own benefit.
Leviathan, ch. 45-47.
5. *Wednesday, February 6* **MORE COMPLEX PSYCHOLOGY**
 Hobbes introduces social interaction with his remarks on worth and power. He also moves into psychological traits that distinguish us from one another, as opposed to those that we have in common.
Leviathan, ch. 10-11.
- Non-political society**
6. *Monday, February 11* **NATURAL RELIGION**
 Chapter 12 looks like a sudden departure: now we're talking about religion! In addition to talking about what he said, we're going to try to say why this chapter is here.
Leviathan, ch. 12.
7. *Wednesday, February 13* **THE STATE OF NATURE**
 One of the most famous chapters in the book. This is Hobbes's explanation of why life outside the state is miserable. We will concentrate on laying out the argument fairly precisely. In particular, we want to identify features of the state of nature that lead to conflict and that the institution of a state would solve.
Leviathan, ch. 13 and ch. 17, par. 1-12.
8. *Monday, February 18* **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**
 For Hobbes, international relations confirmed his theoretical description of the state of nature. Realist scholars of international relations,

in turn, count Hobbes as having expressed the fundamental theoretical insight of their theory. This is a little curious since, as Hobbes and Spinoza noted, the state of nature among sovereign states isn't nearly as bad as the state of nature among individuals. As Trachtenberg observes, international relations realists give a gloomy description of a world filled with inevitable conflict while prescribing methods for preventing it.

Leviathan, ch. 13, par. 12; Spinoza, *Political Treatise* (selection); Marc Trachtenberg, "The Question of Realism: A Historian's View," *Security Studies* (2003).

9. *Wednesday, February 20* THE STATE OF NATURE IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropologists are split between "Hobbesians," who believe that life in pre-state societies was pretty much like Hobbes described, and "Rousseauians," who think the natural state of human beings was much more bucolic and trace the origins of war to the state. What does social science tell us about Hobbes's speculations about the 'natural condition of mankind'?

R. Brian Ferguson, "The Birth of War" and "Tribal Warfare" and selections from Lawrence Keeley, *War Before Civilization* and Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization*.

Moral philosophy

10. *Monday, February 25* THE LAWS OF NATURE

Hobbes's moral philosophy consists in his account of what he called the right of nature and the laws of nature. We will make a first pass over this material today and return to more detailed questions in subsequent sessions.

Leviathan, chs. 14-15.

11. *Wednesday, February 27* THE RIGHT OF NATURE

The right of nature is stipulated by definition, following the practice of geometry. But is it a useful definition? Kavka criticizes Hobbes's claims about the right of nature. We'll want to ask whether his criticisms are fatal

to Hobbes and also why a *right* matters so much. Would there be less conflict if people did not have the right of nature?

Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*,

ch. 8.

12. *Monday, March 4* INALIENABILITY

In addition to asserting that we have a very strong right of self-preservation, Hobbes also asserts that it is inalienable, meaning it can't be given up. This leads him to make unusual sounding assertions about the rights of criminals to resist punishment. Finkelstein criticizes Hobbes's claim here and, as always, we will want to see how damaging her criticism is.

Claire Finkelstein, "A Puzzle About Hobbes on Self-Defense," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (2001).

13. *Wednesday, March 6* JUSTICE AND OBLIGATION

There are roughly three views about Hobbes's moral philosophy: (1) he didn't have one at all, (2) he thought obligations were limited to contracts, and (3) he thought God handed down the laws of nature. Barry takes the second view while criticizing the first and third. Martinich criticizes Barry while advocating for the third.

Brian Barry, "Warrender and His Critics," *Philosophy* (1968). A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 87-99.

14. *Monday, March 11* JUSTICE AND OBLIGATION, IN MY OPINION

Martinich is right that Hobbes had more than just contractual obligations. At the same time, Barry is right that contractual obligation has an obvious pride of place. I will offer my own interpretation of Hobbes's moral philosophy in order to explain this fact. The central idea is not about obligation, it's about justice. Hobbes wanted to show that justice *as it was commonly understood* was an artificial product of the state. What's special about contracts is there is a contractual sense of justice that is relevant outside the state.

Preface to *De Cive*. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 71-86.

15. *Wednesday, March 13* HUME'S THEORY OF JUSTICE
I believe David Hume developed Hobbes's theory of justice in significant ways. The fact that Hume was astutely reading Hobbes throws light on what he was doing. And his astute readings throw light on what Hobbes was doing. Today, we will lay out Hume's view.
David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 3, part 2, sect. 2.
16. *Monday, March 25* COMPARING HOBBS AND HUME
Having presented Hume's view last time, we will compare it with Hobbes's this time.
Hume, *Treatise*, Book 3, part 2, sections 5, 7-8. Russell Hardin, *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist*, 212-24.

Political philosophy

17. *Wednesday, March 27* HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON ABSOLUTISM
Hobbes is said to have supported an "absolute" state. But what does that mean? Sommerville will tell us what Hobbes's contemporaries meant by that term. We will see how Hobbes matches up when we read his account of the origins and rights of sovereigns.
Johann Sommerville, "Absolutism and Royalism," In *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and M. Goldie (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
18. *Monday, April 1* AUTHORIZATION
Hobbes closes his moral philosophy with a short, dense chapter on what he calls 'authorization' and creating an 'artificial person.' Since the social contract involves authorizing the sovereign, we will have to unpack that. In particular, I'm concerned to point out a problem with the way scholars understand authorization. And, as you might have guessed, I think I have a superior alternative.
Leviathan, ch. 16. David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, (Oxford University Press, 1969), 120-26. A. P. Martinich, *Hobbes*, (Routledge, 2005), 115-20.

19. *Wednesday, April 3* **WHAT ARE THE RIGHTS OF SOVEREIGNTY?**
I would like to impose some order on the rights of sovereignty in ch. 18. I'll be doing so with an eye to my point about authorization: can Hobbes derive the rights of sovereigns without relying on the problematic idea that the subjects extend their rights to the sovereign?
Leviathan, ch. 18.
20. *Monday, April 8* **LIBERTY**
How serious a problem are the "true liberties of a subject"? They appear to give people the right to resist the sovereign in a variety of ways.
Leviathan, ch. 21, "A Review and Conclusion," par. 1-7.
21. *Wednesday, April 10* **PUNISHMENT: THE CRITICS**
It's fair to say that no one thinks Hobbes's derivation of the sovereign's right to punish works. That's unfortunate, because punishment is critically important. We will read Hobbes and two critics today. Next time, we will see if the criticisms can be answered.
Leviathan, ch. 28. Clarendon (selections), Gauthier
The Logic of Leviathan (selections).
22. *Monday, April 15* **PUNISHMENT: ANSWERING THE CRITICS**
Can the critics be answered? As before, it turns on what "authorizing" the sovereign's punishments involves.
Leviathan, ch. 28.
23. *Wednesday, April 17* **TWO SOCIAL CONTRACTS**
Hobbes described two social contracts that he called the commonwealth by institution and the commonwealth by acquisition. We will run through the highlights and try to answer the question: why two?
Leviathan, ch. 17, par. 13-15; ch. 18, and ch. 20.
24. *Monday, April 22* **REPRESENTATION AND "THE PEOPLE"**
There is one last piece of the puzzle to put into place: Hobbes claimed that the subjects' authorization of the sovereign makes him their

representative. The idea was to displace Parliament's claim to serve as the representative of the people. Skinner puts this into historical context.

Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes on Persons, Authors, and Representatives," In *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

25. *Wednesday, April 24* LAW

This chapter gives Hobbes's statement of the view that law is the sovereign's command, a view that was later developed by the legal positivists. We will be concerned with the relationship among three things in this chapter: natural law (the unwritten 'law' that maybe exists prior to the state), civil law (the sovereign's commands), and the common law (laws as interpreted by judges, acting independently of the sovereign).

Leviathan, ch. 26.

26. *Monday, April 29* THE SOVEREIGN'S DUTIES

Sovereigns have duties as well as rights. We will talk about the advantages and disadvantages of deriving them in this way.

Leviathan, ch. 30.

27. *Wednesday, May 1* MIRACLES AND PROPHECY

The theme of Part III is that the Christian scripture shows that God's kingdom on earth will *not* come about until after the second coming of Christ. Part of Hobbes's case involves undermining the claims of prophets and others who can perform miracles.

Leviathan, chs. 32, 36-37.

28. *Monday, May 6* MORTALISM

One of Hobbes's strangest arguments concerned the afterlife. He maintained that everyone will be brought back to life here, on earth.

Those who are saved will live on while those who are damned will die permanently.
That's it: no eternal torments.

Leviathan, ch. 38.

29. *Wednesday, May 8* EXAM DAY
Seniors take the final exam. Juniors too, if you want to.

Materials

Most of the readings are taken from the Hackett edition of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley. It is available from the Huntley Bookstore. Everything else will be available electronically.

Comments on lectures, announcements, and readings will be available through the Sakai website for this course: <https://sakai.claremont.edu>

Instructor

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Fridays, 10-12. My office phone number is 607-0906.

Assignments

Grades will be based on three assignments. Because senior grades are due at noon on Friday, May 10, we have to do some creative scheduling.

1. An outline of a chapter or article to be distributed before class. This should be no more two sides of a sheet of paper. It should identify the major claims and transitions in the reading being outlined. (20%)
2. A 10-15 page paper on a topic of your choice. The expectation is that this will involve some additional research beyond the syllabus. (40%)
 - a. Give me a draft of your paper by Friday, April 12 at 10am.

- b. For seniors, the final paper is due before 10am on Friday, May 3.
 - c. For juniors, the final paper is due before 10am on Wednesday, May 15.
3. An in-class final exam. (40%)
- a. Seniors must take this on Wednesday, May 8. Juniors may do so as well.
 - b. Juniors may take the exam on Wednesday, May 15 from 9-10:15am.

Grading policies

I am committed to seeing that my students are able to do very high quality work and that high quality work will be recognized. I do not employ a curve and there is nothing competitive about grading in my courses.

Grades apply to papers, not to people. They have no bearing on whether I like or respect you. Nor do they measure improvement or hard work: one may put a lot of effort into trying to make a bad idea work or produce a very good paper with ease. Grades communicate where written work stands on an objective scale as we can devise. That is all that they involve, so don't make too much of them.

What the grades mean

- A Work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. The grade of A is given to work that is exceptional.
- B Work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. The grade of B is given to very good work. There is less of a difference between A and B work than you might think. Generally speaking, B papers are less innovative than A papers. This may be because the paper does not attempt to add much or because the attempt made is not fully successful.

- C Work that has problems with accuracy, reasoning, or quality of writing. The grade of C means that the paper has significant problems but is otherwise acceptable.
- D Work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. A paper that is fine on its own may nonetheless be irrelevant. A paper is not relevant to my evaluation of work for this particular course if it does not address the question asked or if it does not display knowledge of our discussions. This sometimes trips up those taking a course pass/no credit.
- F Work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

Final grades will be calculated using the College's 12 point scale as described in the Pomona College Catalog.¹ The numerical average must be greater than half the distance between two grades in order to earn the higher grade.

Late papers and academic accommodations

Late papers will be accepted *without question*. They will be penalized at the rate of one-quarter of a point *per day*, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual is genuinely extremely unusual.

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please contact Dean Dan Tzuang at 607-2147 or dan.tzuang@pomona.edu.

¹ Search for "Letter Grades" here: <http://catalog.pomona.edu/>

Letter	Number	Range
A	12	$11.5 < A \leq 12$
A-	11	$10.5 < A- \leq 11.5$
B+	10	$9.5 < B+ \leq 10.5$
B	9	$8.5 < B \leq 9.5$
B-	8	$7.5 < B- \leq 8.5$
C+	7	$6.5 < C+ \leq 7.5$
C	6	$5.5 < C \leq 6.5$
C-	5	$4.5 < C- \leq 5.5$
D+	4	$3.5 < D+ \leq 4.5$
D	3	$2.5 < D \leq 3.5$
D-	2	$1.0 < D- \leq 2.5$
F	0	$0.0 < F \leq 1.0$

Letter and number grades

April 1