

HOBBES'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
WINTER 2017
PEG BIRMINGHAM

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Office Hours: Thursdays 1:00-2:30 and by appointment

Course description:

In *De Corpore*, Hobbes is clear that his political theory is rooted in his materialism. He writes, “After physics we must come to *moral philosophy*, in which we are to consider the motions of the mind, namely, *appetite, aversion, love, hope, fear, anger, emulation, envy*, etc.; what causes they have, and of what they be causes. And the reason why these are to be considered after *physics* is, that they have their causes in sense and imagination, which are the subject of *physical contemplation*” (*De Corpore* 6.6, emphasis in original). Hobbes goes on to claim that “principles of politics consist in the knowledge of the motions of the mind, and the knowledge of these motions from the knowledge of sense and imagination” (*De Corpore* 6.7). As these two passages claim, morals and politics come after the physics because they have their material foundations in sense and the imagination. Indeed, Hobbes goes further, arguing that matter in motion produces the mind. The mind, in other words, is qualified by matter in motion, or as he puts it, “degrees and intensities of motion.” It is not too much to claim that Hobbes’ *Leviathan* can be read as a genealogy of political sovereignty or, more precisely, how matter in motion becomes a political subject incorporated into the political body of sovereignty. Questions of authority and authorization, representation, language, the passions and desire are all part of this genealogy. Examining this genealogy in *Leviathan* and two related texts—*On the Citizen* and *Elements of Law*—will be a central focus of this course. One of the claims of the course will be that the standard reading of the Hobbes’ subject as autonomous, powerful, and self-possessed is completely without merit if Hobbes’ materialism is taken seriously.

At the same time, the course will examine the relation between the political and the theological in Hobbes’ political philosophy. As is well known, modernity is often characterized as the disentangling of the theogico-political. Indeed, Claude Lefort suggests that this disentangling opens for the first time the modern space of the political. And to go further, if we take seriously Heidegger’s claim that the end of metaphysics lies in the disentangling of the onto-theological relation, then it does not seem too much to claim that the end of metaphysics is rooted in a crisis of the political. Certainly Hobbes’ political thought can be characterized as the first and perhaps still most important attempt to grapple with the crisis of the relation between the political and the theological. Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, demonstrates this crisis as Hobbes devotes the first two parts of the text to the question of “Man” and the “Commonwealth” and the last two parts of the text to the “Christian Commonwealth” and “The Kingdom of Darkness.” Here we will examine the relation between civil and ecclesiastical power as well as Hobbes’ understanding of the kingdom of darkness. We will also examine the status of history in Hobbes as it tells us quite a bit of how he understands the relation between the political and the theological.

Required Texts

Hobbes: *Leviathan*, edited by Richard Tuck, [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991(1651)].

De Cive (On the Citizen), edited by Tuck and Silverthorne, [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998 (1641)].

Elements of Law (Human Nature and De Corpore Politico), edited by J.C.A. Gaskin, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 (1650)].

Requirements of the Course: In addition to preparing the required readings and participating in each seminar, students are required to write a 9-10-page essay (typed double-spaced) on an aspect of Hobbes' political philosophy.

Course Outline

January 3 *Leviathan* Frontispiece,
Leviathan, Introduction
Elements of Law, Epistle Dedicatory

January 10 *Leviathan*, Chapters 1-5
Elements of Law: Human Nature, Chapters 1-6
De Corpore, Chapter 1 and Chapter 6 (in *Elements of Law*)

January 17 *Leviathan*, Chapters 6-9
Elements of Law, Human Nature, Chapters 7-12
De Corpore, Chapter 25 (included in *Elements of Law*)

January 24 *Leviathan*, Chapters 10-13
Elements of Law, Chapters 12
De Cive, Dedication, Preface to the Readers, and Chapter 1

January 31 *Leviathan*, Chapters 14-16
Elements of Law: Human Nature, Chapters 13-19
De Cive, Chapters 2-4

February 7 *Leviathan*, Chapters 17-21
Elements of Law: De Corpore Politico, Chapters 20-24
De Cive, 5-8

February 14 *Leviathan*, Chapters 22-31
Elements of Law: De Corpore Politico, Chapters 26

February 21 *Leviathan*, Chapters 32-38
De Cive, Chapters 25-26
Elements of Law, Chapters 27-28

February 28 *Leviathan*, Chapters 38-43
De Cive, Chapters 27-28

March 7 *Leviathan*, Chapters 33-47 and “Review and Conclusion”

March 17 **Final Paper due**

