

COL 5118H SOVEREIGNTY: HOBBS AND HIS 20TH AND 21ST

SUCCESSORS

In discussing sovereignty, contemporary political theorists inevitably refer to Hobbes, reference to whom often legitimates or critiques contemporary conceptions of governmentality or power. Known as an apologist for royal absolutism in his own time, Hobbes is now usually regarded as the first theorist of the modern state and of liberalism. What is the significance of this often tacit re-evaluation? Further questions to be explored include, what understanding of “liberty” and the “political” do various 20th and 21st century theorists bring to their readings of Hobbes’s texts? What specific textual interpretations, if any, do they provide for their readings? What do later philosophers make of Hobbes’s view that sovereignty originates within the household, where it is held by the father, and/or slave-master? Is recent interest in “sovereignty” in any way connected with 9/11?

In this course, we will read Hobbes’s major political treatises alongside the major 20th and 21st theorists who have drawn on him. Efforts will be made to situate Hobbes’s treatises historically with reference to seventeenth century debates on sovereignty and selected contemporaneous political theorists. Throughout the course, we will explore tensions between the readings produced by historical contextualization and those presupposed or developed by modern theorists.

17th Century texts to include Thomas Hobbes’s *Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, *Leviathan*; Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*; John Milton, *Political Writings*.

Contemporary theorists to include (alphabetically) Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”; Jacques Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign*; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* and *Political Theology*, and Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. Recommended: Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death*

Course Work and Evaluation

Seminar facilitations	20%
Oral Report on article or chapter	10%
Essay on one seminar facilitation	10%
Essay on article or chapter report	10%
Participation	20%
Final Essay	30%

Participation and Facilitation

A facilitation schedule will be drawn up during the first meeting and finalized by the second. For each class, there will be two groups of one or two facilitators each. Each facilitator (or team) will lead discussion of one-half of the class (roughly one hour): the first hour on Hobbes, the second hour on a contemporary theorist who draws or comments on Hobbes. Facilitators are responsible for selecting for discussion specific sections from the Hobbes text or contemporary theorist assigned for that particular session. In the latter case, you will have to reproduce the selected materials for the class at least a week in advance of the facilitation date; it will be best if the materials are made available in a pdf. For the class itself, you will be responsible for facilitating discussion of the selected passages or materials

Facilitators are to prepare questions and to isolate interesting or problematic passages for intensive discussion. The facilitation is to aim at focussing, encouraging, and directing intellectually productive class discussion. The following materials can be concisely presented in photocopied hand-outs to be distributed to your colleagues: relevant historical or political contexts; pertinent editorial issues; interesting critical discussions or debates; important bibliographical information. Be sure that all sources are properly documented.

In addition to the facilitation itself, students who will be (co-)facilitating are responsible for (1) meeting with one another beforehand to organize and coordinate tasks and objectives (2) announcing any additional, suggested readings to classmates at least a class in advance (3) informing me at least one day before the scheduled facilitation what you

have decided to do. I am available for consultation by e-mail or by appointment in my office.

A tentative schedule for oral reports will be drawn up on the basis of the facilitation schedule, so no one will end up doing both a facilitation and a report on the same day. For your report, you are to choose an article or a chapter from a book which focuses on a political, philosophical, terminological, or literary issue of significance to our course. Ideally, you will read extensively on the topic the article or chapter engages so as to be able to situate its contribution in critical or historical context. The piece you choose should be sufficiently challenging and interesting. It should also be made available to your colleagues in a PDF on the day of or immediately following your report. (Email it to me and I'll upload it on Blackboard if you have trouble doing so). For this, you will also want to do your own sleuthing.

As for participation, it includes, but is not limited to, contributing one's own insights or ideas to class discussion. Ideally, participation also entails respectful listening and a commitment to involving others in the learning process. Your participation mark also includes any discernible improvement in the skills you employ for this course.

Please check Blackboard periodically for new postings and announcements, and use for exchanging information among yourselves

Essays

The week following **one** of your two (co-) facilitations, you are to submit a written essay that summarizes and in places extends your facilitation (which includes reflection on any issues or questions raised in discussion). If you wish, you could reflect on how the discussion affected your own views. In any case, your essay is to hang together, whether by means of an argument or an exploration of a central concern. Formal end- or foot-noting is required as is a list of works consulted, if relevant. Length is to be approximately 1500 words.

These are also needed for the essay you write after reporting orally on an article or a chapter in a book. This, too, should be handed in the week following the class in which you give your report. Since your colleagues will be interested in the content of the text you choose, you will need to employ your expository skills in your oral presentation. But

a critical or analytical perspective may also be called for. If you think of your essay as a review, it's worth recalling that a good review includes both expository and evaluative components. Length is to be approximately 1500 words

Your final essay is to be on issues or of your own choosing, with the stipulation that it be directly related to work we have done in class, which means that it engage in some way with sovereignty as it is conceptualized by Hobbes and his successors. You may want to develop ideas that arise from one of your co-facilitations or your report. Before beginning your essay, you should arrange to discuss your topic with me to make sure it is manageable or that I have sufficient knowledge of the author(s) in question. Ideally, especially for those of you doing or hoping to do a Ph.D., this essays could be the basis of an article for publication.

Length of final essay: 3000 – 3500 words (Late essays will not be accepted.)

Due 18st December

Course Outline

1	17 Sept.	Introduction	
2	24 Sept.	Elements of Law	Schmitt, <i>Leviathan in State</i>
3	1 Oct.	Rights of War & Peace	Strauss, <i>Pol. Phil. Hobbes</i>
4	8 Oct.	Milton, Political Writings	Benjamin, "Critique"
5	15 Oct	De Cive	Benjamin
6	22 Oct.	De Cive	Arendt
7	29 Oct.	Leviathan 1	Foucault
8	5 Nov.	Leviathan 1 & 2	Foucault
9	12 Nov.	Leviathan 2	Agamben
10	19 Nov.	Leviathan 2 & 3	Derrida
11	26 Nov.	Leviathan 3 & 4	Derrida
12	3 Dec.	Leviathan 4	Žižek
X	?	Wrap-up	