

Thomas Hobbs (1588-1679)

Leviathan

- One of the most influential philosophical texts produced during the 17th Century
 - Partly a response to the fear experienced during the political turmoil of the English Civil Wars
 - Published in 1651 two years after the beheading of King Charles I
- Hobbes neither transformed the nation nor reformed philosophy as he had envisioned
 - Argument for the necessity of absolute sovereignty – its publication coincided with that of many Republican treatises seeking to justify the regicide to the rest of Europe
- First sustained attempt to submit human society to rigorous science
 - Hobbes is credited with the inauguration of social science in Western culture
 - Argues that civil peace and social unity are best achieved by the establishment of a commonwealth through social contract
 - Ideal commonwealth is ruled by a sovereign power responsible for protecting the security of the commonwealth and granted absolute authority to ensure the common defense
 - Describes the commonwealth as an “artificial person” and as a body politic that mimics the human body
 - Calls this figure the “Leviathan” – word for “sea monster” in Hebrew
- Divided into four books
 - Of Man – contains the philosophical framework
 - Of Common-wealth – details the process of erecting the Leviathan
 - Of a Christian Common-wealth – concerns the compatibility of Christian doctrine with Hobbesian philosophy and the religious system of the Leviathan
 - Of the Kingdom of Darkness – engages in debunking false religious beliefs
- Philosophical method in Leviathan is modeled after a geometric proof, founded upon first principles and established definitions

Book I

- Need for a judge who will settle definitions – appointed by the participants (a sovereign)
- Power and the restless human appetite to achieve it
 - Natural power: faculties of the body or mind – strength, wit, and arts
 - Instrumental power – acquired faculties: riches, friends, and reputation
- These qualities that affect social relations
 - Worth - measure of power in an individual
 - Worthiness – measure of a person’s faculties relative to a specific function
 - Honor – to believe someone to be of high worth
 - Dignity- publicly recognized worth of an individual

- Continual appetite for power is juxtaposed by fear (“Fear of Death, and Wounds”) cause people to seek peace”
- Human nature
 - Mechanic appetites and aversions, mediated by power struggles
 - When people have an appetite for the same resource the natural result is war
 - All people are naturally equal: thus battle is inevitable
- State of nature
 - Natural condition of mankind before society, government, and invention of law
 - One of continuous war and violence, of death and fear
 - In the state of nature no security is possible and life is full of horror
 - Fear makes natural man wants to escape the state of nature
- Proposes 18 Laws of nature – first three most important
 1. Every man should seek peace because to seek peace is to fulfill our natural right to defend ourselves
 2. We must mutually divest ourselves of certain rights in order to escape the state of natural war
 3. We are required to keep the contracts we make
- Two types of persons
 - A “natural person” is one whose words are his or her own
 - An “artificial person” is one whose words are those of someone else - the contract, symbolizing social unity is an artificial person

Book II

- The “Leviathan” – artificial person is a metaphor for the state
 - Leviathan is constructed to combat the fear of the state of nature
 - Must wield fear as its own weapon – thus in Hobbes’s view of things, fear never disappears from human existence
- Leviathan
 - Concept of sovereignty is the soul, while the sovereign is the head
 - Body as a whole is a representative of all the people but is made up of a succession of subordinated systems
- The Sovereign would be established by the people as part of the contract
 - Endowed with the individual powers and will of all
 - Authorized to punish anyone who breaks the covenant
 - Operates through fear – the threat of punishment reinforces the mandates of the laws of nature, thus ensuring the continued operation of the social contract
- Three kinds of sovereign authority instituted by agreement: Monarchy; Aristocracy; and Democracy
- An unhealthy or unstable Leviathan can rise
 - If sovereign lacks absolute power
 - If actions are determined as good or evil by private individuals, rather than by civil law