



Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill

Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679)

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The title of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* is drawn from the biblical figure of a gigantic sea monster, an apt symbol for the challenge of governing a body politic. A classic work of statecraft and political philosophy on the order of *The Prince*, the book is divided into four parts. Part 1, Of Man, is a lucid description of human nature, material and psychological, in which he famously describes the state of nature as a war of all against all in which "the life of man (is) solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". Part 2, Of Common-wealth, is an articulation of the social contract that gives rise to an effective government and social order. Part 3, Of a Christian Common-wealth, delves into the problem of the relationship of church and state, arguing for the

supremacy of civil over divine law as the only way to resolve the issue of authority. Lastly, Part 4, Of the Kingdom of Darkness, describes four causes of the "darkness of ignorance" that suppress the light of true knowledge. While Hobbes advocates for an absolute monarchy on rational grounds, he also introduces aspects of the social contract that have become fundamental to liberal political philosophy: the artificial nature of any political form, the right of the individual, the natural equality of all, the notion of political power as "representative" of the people and the corresponding need for the consent of those governed. In retrospect one wonders at the course history might have taken without Hobbes' masterpiece.

Thomas Hobbes (April 5, 1588 – December 4, 1679) was an English philosopher considered a key founder of the political philosophy upon which much of western civilization depends. He was born in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, England, raised by a wealthy uncle and educated at Oxford, after which he worked as a tutor to aristocratic families, which gave him freedom to study as well as the privilege of lengthy European excursions. His first areas of study were physics and Greek and Latin classics. His first major work was the first English translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* in 1628. He did not consider himself a philosopher until his late 40's. His unpublished 1640 treatise, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, was circulated during the period of discontent preceding the English Civil War. Fearing disfavor, he fled to Paris, where he spent 11 years. *Leviathan* appeared in 1651 to immediate controversy. Anglicans and Catholics objected to its secularist spirit, royalists bristled at elements of the social contract, while others hailed it. He was accused of heresy but managed to escape prosecution so long as he published nothing related to human conduct. As a result his works were published overseas or, like *Behemoth*, his history of the English Civil Wars, were not published until after his death. His enduring ambition was to develop a system of thought that encompassed three major spheres: the doctrine of body; the doctrine of man; and the doctrine of society and its organization and regulation.