

# 17th Century Political Philosophy: Hobbes and Spinoza

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**Meeting Times:** This course is expected to meet in-person, Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00 am to 12:20 pm, Central Time.

**Student Hours:** The times are Tuesday, 9:00 am to 10:50 am, in Stuart 222 (knock if the door is closed), and Friday, 1:00 pm to 2:50 pm, on Zoom.

## Summary:

This course is an examination of the political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza, two controversial thinkers of the 17th century. Each thinker wrote embedded in contemporary political crises—Hobbes in the wake of the English Civil War, and Spinoza in the turbulent Dutch Golden Age. Perhaps partly in response to these crises, each thinker emphasized the role for the passions in human action, and developed a political philosophy which appears to emphasize the absolute sovereignty of the state. However, many interpreters have also found currents of democracy located in these thinkers.

This course has two parts. The first is a close reading of the primary texts of these thinkers, with a focus on Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Spinoza's *Political Treatise*. We will examine their different theories of passion, and the conceptual conditions for the formation of the state. The second part of the course is an examination of some recent secondary literature on these thinkers. We will focus on their accounts of popular sovereignty and explore whether either thinker has room for the possibility of radical democracy.

This course has no prerequisites.

**Texts:** I have ordered the following two texts for purchase at the Seminary Co-op. All other readings will be posted on Canvas.

- Thomas Hobbes (1994) *Hobbes Leviathan, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668*, ed. E. Curley, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett
- Benedict Spinoza (2016) *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume 2*, ed. E. Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press

There are many other editions of these works available. I strongly encourage you to buy Curley's edition of Hobbes, since I will be referencing passages using his section numbers.

We will also be reading significant parts of the following book. It's available through the library, but you may wish to purchase a physical copy:

- Sandra Leonie Field (2020) *Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

## Course Requirements:

1. 20%: Participation. Participation in this course has two elements.
  1. I expect everyone to participate regularly in seminar discussion.
  2. I ask you to complete 3, brief, reading responses over the course of the term. Please email me no more than a paragraph raising a question or point about

something in our reading. These are due at 9 pm the day before our next class. **Please complete one during weeks 1–3, one during weeks 4–6, and one during weeks 7–9.** It's up to you when to do this.

2. 35%: Midterm Exam: A take-home midterm exam during Week 5, covering Hobbes.
3. 45%: Final Exam: A take-home final exam, during Finals Week, covering all of the material in our course.

#### **Policy Statements:**

1. Late Papers and Extensions: For each day that a paper is late, it will be penalized 2/3rds of a letter grade. Late papers will only be accepted up to three days after the assignment is due. For reasons of fairness, extensions will only be granted in cases of clear need. Please contact me as soon as you think that you may need an extension so we can work out an appropriate plan.
2. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy. It is also your responsibility to make sure you have turned in a readable pdf or docx for all paper assignments.
3. Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
4. COVID: Unfortunately, the University of Chicago has refused to decide on a general set of policies to manage COVID cases and quarantining in our classrooms. This means that all your classes will have a patchwork of different policies, chosen by people who are not experts! Tentatively, I intend to approach it in the following way: Per university policy, mask-wearing is required. I will hold a mixture of online and offline office hours, but may move them all online if that seems wise. If you are quarantining, I will do my best to set up an option for you to join class remotely; if you are sick, you are not obligated to join us live. If a critical mass of us have to quarantine, or if I have to quarantine, the class will move online for a one-week period.

#### **Tentative Schedule:**

1. Course Introduction
2. The Rationalist Background: Zara Jacob
  - The Treatise of Zera Yacob.
3. Hobbes on Passions and Manners
  - Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 1, 6, 10, 11, 13.
4. Hobbes on Natural Law and the Commonwealth
  - Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 14–18, 21.
5. Hobbes on the Commonwealth
  - Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 17–22 i
6. Hobbes on Institutions
  - Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 23–26, 29–30
7. Hobbes on Religion
  - Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 12, 31–33, 44
8. Hobbes and the People

- Sandra Leonie Field (2020) *Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapters 4 and 5.
9. Spinoza on God and the State
    - Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Preface, Chapters 1–6
    - Spinoza, Letter 50 to Jelles (pp. 406–407 in Curley’s edition)
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, Appendix to Part 1
  10. Spinoza on Scripture
    - Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Chapters 7–11
  11. Spinoza on Religion
    - Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Chapters 12–15
  12. Spinoza on the State
    - Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Chapters 16–20
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p37s.
  13. Spinoza’s Mature Politics
    - Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, Chapters 1–5.
  14. Spinoza on Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy
    - Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, Chapters 6–end.
  15. Spinoza and Hobbes on Contract and the State
    - Don Garrett (2010) ‘“Promising” ideas: Hobbes and contract in Spinoza’s political philosophy’ in Yitzhak Y. Melamed & Michael A. Rosenthal (Eds.) *Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 192-209.
    - Alexandre Matheron (2020) ‘Passions and Institutions According to Spinoza’ in *Politics, Ontology, and Knowledge in Spinoza*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 136-162.
    - Chantal Jaquet (2018) ‘Longing (desiderium) for Vengeance as the Foundation of the Commonwealth’ in Yitzhak Y. Melamed & Hasana Sharp (Eds.) *Spinoza’s Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 78-92
  16. The Multitude
    - Ericka Tucker (2015) ‘Multitude’ in Andre Santos Campos (Ed.) *Spinoza: Basic Concepts*, Exeter: Imprint Academic, pp. 129-141.
    - Sandra Leonie Field (2020) *Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapters 8 and 9.
  17. Freedom, Religion, and the State
    - Justin Steinberg (2009) ‘Spinoza on Civil Liberation’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, 35-58
    - Susan James (2012) ‘When Does Truth Matter? Spinoza on the Relation between Theology and Philosophy’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 20, 91-108
    - Recommended: Carlos Fraenkel (2008) ‘Could Spinoza Have Presented the Ethics as the True Content of the Bible?’, *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 4, 1-50