THOMAS HOBBES (1588-1679)

IPT, chapters 3 and 4, on Hobbes [69-83 and 103-110]

- The role of **historicity** in understanding the *Leviathan* (in this case: British **gradualism**)
- Hobbes, Locke, (Kant,) and Rousseau: the **social contract**
- Basic outline of the *Leviathan* (75): the **state of nature**, the **laws of nature**, and **sovereign authority**
  - "Reason, Hobbes argues, is a vital part of human nature but it is harnessed to our desire for power and naturally outweighed by our passions…if passion does outweigh reason…then we have to find an artificial way…to bring the passions in line with reason. This is politics" (77)
  - Justifying the **Leviathan**: "we need…stable incentives to move beyond our natural right to everything" (79)
- Hobbes' **resolutive-compositive method**: 'take it all apart and put it back together'
  - What are some of the strengths of using this approach? Some possible weaknesses? (In other words, what is the possible utility of presenting the state of nature as a "hypothetical pre-political condition…that 'resolved' society down to its basic parts so that we can see what drives it" (77) [see *MPT* 46 on patriarchy]
- Elsewhere in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes quite a compelling case that "natural liberty and equality are just not compatible with 'commodious' and peaceful living." (83) Do you agree? Who, historically, has disagreed? Agreed?
- Why does the Leviathan need absolute power, according to Hobbes? Within the logic of his own argument, is his reasoning compelling? Why or why not? (106-8)
  - "Hobbes's reasoning proceeds in a series of straight steps from his claims about natural liberty all the way to his claim that we choose to be obliged to an absolute sovereign…For some commentators (who often brand themselves 'realists') all contemporary talk about rights and liberties is either a danger to political authority or, more likely, a mask for the realities of power politics.." (109)

Hobbes' *Leviathan* [MPT, 43-64]
Chapter XVII: Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth: "covenants, without swords, are but words"

- Six reasons why Aristotle's 'political animal' is different from the social animals (bees, ants, etc.) [50]
- As a result, "the only way to erect such a common power [as would protect each individual from foreigners and mutual aggression] is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will…and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment." [50]

Chapter XXVI: Of Civil Laws

- Distinguishing **common law** from **civil law**, **natural law** from **positive law**
- What, according to Hobbes, is the sovereign's relationship to the civil law? The laws of nature (which "are not properly laws, but qualities that dispose men to peace and obedience" such as 'justice, equity, & mercy'
- Is this definition of justice satisfying?…"performance of covenant and giving to every man his own" [53]
- The importance of **framing**: "the right of nature, that is, the natural liberty of man, may by the civil law be abridged, and restrained: nay, the end of making laws, is no other, but such restraint; without the which there cannot possibly be any peace." How is this a conception of negative rather than positive freedom?
  - Similarly, how could the golden rule be written differently than "*do not that to another, which thou thinkest unreasonable to be done by another to thyself*"? (55)
- "Where men build on false grounds, the more they build, the greater is the ruin"…any modern examples?
- See p. 56 for the argument defending the force of the social contract between generations: are you convinced?
- On the many nuances of legal interpretation [57
- In religious affairs, the sovereign must demand *orthopraxy*, but cannot expect *orthodoxy*. What does this mean?

Q) What are some other disciplines or discourses that adopt a generally negative view of human nature? A positive view?