

Hobbes, Spinoza, and the Enlightenment Critique of Religion

Steven Smith/Anthony Kronman
PLSC 641b/LAW 21174

Spring, 2007
Tuesday: 1:30-3:20

Course Description:

The theme of this course is the “theologico-political problem” broadly understood, that is, the issue of religion and its relation to public life. The upsurge of religious orthodoxies (Christian, Jewish, Islamic) is perhaps the fundamental political issue of our time. The revival of this theologico-political dilemma takes place against the background of previous efforts to restrict the scope of religion, to remove it from the public sphere, and restrict it to the precincts of conscience and private life. How plausible were these efforts to privatize matters of faith in order to shape a distinctly secular political sphere? These efforts have been central to both the theory and practice of liberal democracy.

This course will approach this issue by examining some of the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) as the two chief architects of the Enlightenment critique of religion. What were the bases of their critiques of Scripture? What kind of politics did their critiques make possible? How did their writings on religion shape the Enlightenment conception of secularization, and religious toleration, and what role, if any, did they imagine religion would play in the public and private lives of citizens given their criticism of the biblical orthodoxies of their day?

The course will proceed by means of a close examination of two books: Hobbes’s **Leviathan** (= LEV) and Spinoza’s **Theologico-Political Treatise** (=TTP). The following editions are available in Labyrinth Book Store on York Street:

Hobbes, **Leviathan**, ed. Edwin Curley (Hackett)

Spinoza, **Theologico-Political Treatise**, ed. Samuel Shirley (Hackett)

Requirements:

The class will be conducted as a seminar so attendance and participation are key. Students will have a choice between writing two papers (10-12 pages each) or one long research paper (20-25 pages) due at the end of term.

Course Outline:

Week One: Introduction

Week Two: Imagination and the “Natural Seed of Religion”

LEV, Author’s Introduction, chaps. 1-12

Week Three: The Laws of Nature and the Scope of Moral Obligation

LEV, chaps. 13-22

Week Four: An “Immortal” Commonwealth?

LEV, chaps. 23-31

Week Five: Hobbes as an Interpreter of Scripture

LEV, chaps. 32-40

Week Six: Hobbes’s Civil Theology

LEV, chaps. 41-43

Week Seven: Hobbes’s Critique of “Aristotelity”

LEV, chaps. 44-46; Review and Conclusions

Week Eight: Spinoza’s Critique of Prophecy

TTP, Author’s Pref, chaps. 1-3

Week Nine: Spinoza’s Hermeneutics

TTP, chaps. 4-7

Week Ten: Spinoza as a Reader of Scripture

TTP, chaps. 8-12

Week Eleven: The Civil Creed

TTP, chaps. 13-15

Week Twelve: The New Jerusalem

TTP, chaps. 16-20

Week Thirteen: Conclusion

TBA

Additional Readings:

The literature on Hobbes and Spinoza, to say nothing of the “theologico-political problem” more broadly, is vast. Below are a few works that you will find of interest. We have only included books written in English or available in English translation that deal directly with the theme of religion and politics and have made no effort to include general studies of their philosophies.

Thomas Hobbes

Curley, Edwin, “I Durst Not Write so Boldly,” *Hobbes and Spinoza: Science and Politics*, ed. Daniela Bostrenghi (Naples, 1992), 497-593

Eisenach, Eldon, *The Two Worlds of Liberalism* (Chicago, 1981)

Farr, James, “Atomes of Scripture: Hobbes and the Politics of Biblical Interpretation,” *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary Deitz (University Press of Kansas, 1990), 172-96

Glover, W. “God and Thomas Hobbes,” ed. K. C. Brown (Blackwell, 1965) *Hobbes Studies*

Hood, F. C. *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, 1964)

Johnston, David, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton, 1986)

Lister, Andrew, “Skepticism and Pluralism in Thomas Hobbes’s Political Thought,” *History of Political Thought* 19 (1988): 36-50

Lloyd, S. A., *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes’s Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1992)

Malcolm, Noel, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002)

Martinich, A. P. *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1992)

Oakeshott, Michael, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis, 2000)

Pocock, J. G. A., “Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes,” *Politics, Language, and Time* (New York, 1971)

- Schwartz, Joel, "Hobbes and the Two Kingdoms of God," *Polity*, 18 (1985): 7-24
- Skinner, Quentin, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996)
- Strauss, Leo, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis* (Chicago, 1963)
- Tuck, Richard, "The Civil Theology of Thomas Hobbes," *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (Cambridge, 1993), 120-38
- Warrender, Howard, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford, 1957)

Baruch Spinoza

- Bayle, Pierre, "Spinoza," *Historical and Critical Dictionary*
- Curley, Edwin, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton, 1988)
- Goldstein, Rebacca, *Betraying Spinoza* (Schocken, 2006)
- Hampshire, Stuart, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford, 2005)
- Harvey, Warren Zev, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 18 (1980): 151-72
- Nadler, Steven *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, 1999)
- Nadler, Steven, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (New York, 2001)
- Pines, Shlomo, "Spinoza's 'Theologico-Political Treatise,' Maimonides, and Kant," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 20 (1968): 3-54
- Preus, Samuel, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge, 2001)
- Rosenthal, Michael, "Why Spinoza Chose the Hebrews: The Exemplary Function of Prophecy in the TTP," *History of Political Thought* 18 (1997): 207-41
- Smith, Steven B. *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (Yale University Press, 1997)
- Smith, Steven B. *Spinoza's Book of Life: Freedom and Redemption in the 'Ethics'* (New Haven, 2003)

Strauss Leo, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago, 1965)

Strauss, Leo, "How to Study Spinoza's 'Theologico-Political Treatise,'" *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago, 1952), 142-201

Wolfson, Harry A. *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning* (Cambridge, 1934)

Yovel, Yirmiyahu, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* vol. 1 *The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton, 1989)