ETHICS OF LEADERSHIP

The Necessity of a Leader

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Hobbes, T. (1994). *Leviathan* (E. Curley, Ed.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. (Original work published 1651/1668).
- *Optional:* Curley, E. (1994). Glossary. In T. Hobbes (Author) & E. Curley (Ed.), *Leviathan* (pp. 550–559). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Optional: Libya: Return of the Strongman. (2017, February 17). [Radio series episode]. In O. B. Jones (Host), *Newshour Extra*. United Kingdom: BBC World Service. (D. Gray, transcription).

Background

Thomas Hobbes was an English philosopher who witnessed first hand the ravages of the English Civil War of the seventeenth century. Indeed, his classic text, *Leviathan*, was written during this conflict, and the book displays its influence on Hobbes' thoughts about political rule and a group's need for a strong leader (whom he calls the "sovereign" and "common power"). Like Niccoló Machiavelli, Hobbes appears to endorse a form of **psychological egoism**, claiming that a person primarily acts according to prudential reasons. However, Hobbes recognizes that prudence leads to a destructive *individual* ethic of "I ought to do whatever I can to survive". In response, Hobbes seeks to show how decisive leadership creates the possibility for a *group* ethic (embodied by the "Leviathan") of reciprocity and peace.

Questions

1. In the first section on "On the Differences of Manners", Hobbes wants to look at the different things that psychologically motivate people to act. According to Hobbes, what is the "general inclination of mankind"? What other desires does Hobbes discuss? Which of these desires cause people to compete with each other? Which lead us to cooperate?
2. In the next section, "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, As Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery", Hobbes applies his claims about human motivation to what happens "during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe" (p. 76). Hobbes thinks this time is pretty bad. Why? In particular, why are people generally equal according to Hobbes, and why does this radical equality—combined with our competitive desires—cause problems? Hobbes ends this section claiming that our cooperative desires, nonetheless, have us seek peace. Why is that? (You might look at the optional reading about the ongoing civil war in Libya to see a modern version of Hobbes' "State of Nature" and how difficult it is to leave.)
3. For the third section, "Of the First and Second Natural Laws and of Contracts", Hobbes wants to show how our cooperative desires, along with our prudential use of reason, lead us recognize and accept two *laws* of nature. What are these two natural laws? Why accept them? How are they different from your *right* of nature?
4. Finally, in the last section, "Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth", Hobbes concludes that the only way to truly satisfy these laws of nature is "the multitude so united in one person" (p. 109), whom Hobbes calls the sovereign. What is Hobbes' justification for this? What does Hobbes seem to think will happen without such a leader?