

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

The Need for Sovereignty

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Hobbes, T. (2007, August). *Leviathan, Part 2: Commonwealth* (J. Bennett, Trans.). Early Modern Texts. Retrieved November 20, 2018, from <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hobbes1651part2.pdf>. (Original work from 1651/1668.) (*Excerpts are from chapters 17–19.*)

Questions

1. In chapter 17, Thomas Hobbes argues that we (unlike, say, bees and ants) need to form a commonwealth.
What is Hobbes' definition of a commonwealth (p. 79)? (Can you explain this in your own words?) Ultimately, what is the purpose of forming a commonwealth?
When comparing us to other animals (like bees and ants, pp. 78–79), what six reasons does Hobbes give to defend the necessity of a commonwealth?
Based on all this, does the commonwealth have intrinsic or instrumental value?
2. In chapter 18, Hobbes discusses a whole host of rights and powers held by the sovereign ruler of the commonwealth.
How is the sovereign chosen? What authority and powers over others does the sovereign have? (Hobbes lists out 12.) Why does Hobbes believe that it is acceptable to give the sovereign so much power?
3. Finally, in chapter 19, Hobbes compares "how serviceable" (p. 86) are different forms of government.
According to Hobbes, how should we assess the serviceability of a commonwealth? (Hint: this is related to the purpose of a commonwealth from question 1 above.) Of the three forms of government he considers (monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy), which one does he seem to believe is generally the best? (He does not seem to come out and actually say this, but the implication should be pretty clear.) Why is that?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.