



Smithsonian Associates

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Contemplating Hobbes

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

6:45p.m. - 8:15 p.m. EDT

Professor Joseph E. Hartman

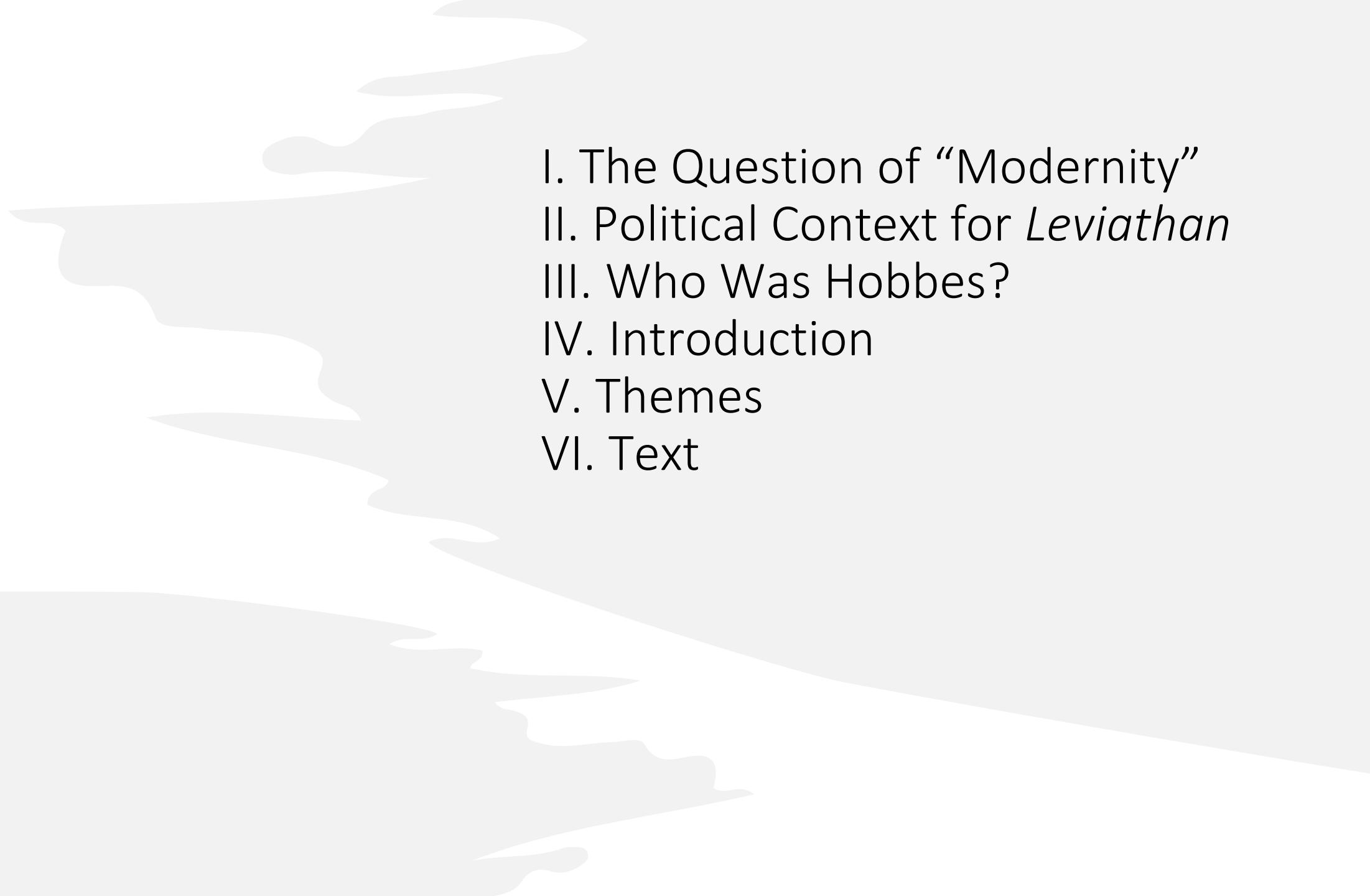
Georgetown University



On the History and Influence of Ideas

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.

—John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936)



- I. The Question of “Modernity”
- II. Political Context for *Leviathan*
- III. Who Was Hobbes?
- IV. Introduction
- V. Themes
- VI. Text

I. The Question of “Modernity”

- **Distrust of Inherited Authority (Tradition, Religion):** Rejection of Aristotle, Secularization (Church/State) Nature/Convention
- **Rationalist/Empiricist Epistemology:**
 - **Inductive**, not Deductive (Bacon)
 - **Enlightenment** “Age of Reason” (Kant)
 - **Material**: Real, Not Ideal, but Real (Machiavelli, “useful” truth)
- **Philosophical Anthropology:** Rethink “Human Nature” as Indeterminate – Equality, Freedom, Individualism
- **Ontology/Nature:** Materialist/Mechanistic
- **History—Confidence in Progress:** (Science, Technology, Arts)

II. Political Context

English Civil War: (1642-1651) “The disorders of this present time

New Government: A Protectorate (Oliver Cromwell) a kind of military dictatorship

Other Key Dates

- 1658: Cromwell dies
- 1660: Stuarts return Charles II (Restoration)
- 1680's: James II abdicates in favor of William & Mary (bloodless revolution)

II. Political Context

Audience: Sovereigns and Subjects

- Sovereign is intended to be taught directly and indirectly
- Hobbes may address subjects indirectly through sovereign's agency
- Presented in language of counsel or guidance

University Instruction: Hobbes anticipates the use of his text in universities

A Quest for Certainty – note lack of ἀπορία

A portrait of Thomas Hobbes, an English political philosopher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared robe over a white ruff-collared shirt. His hair is powdered and receding. The background is dark and indistinct.

THOMAS HOBBES (1588-1679); *Leviathan* (1651)

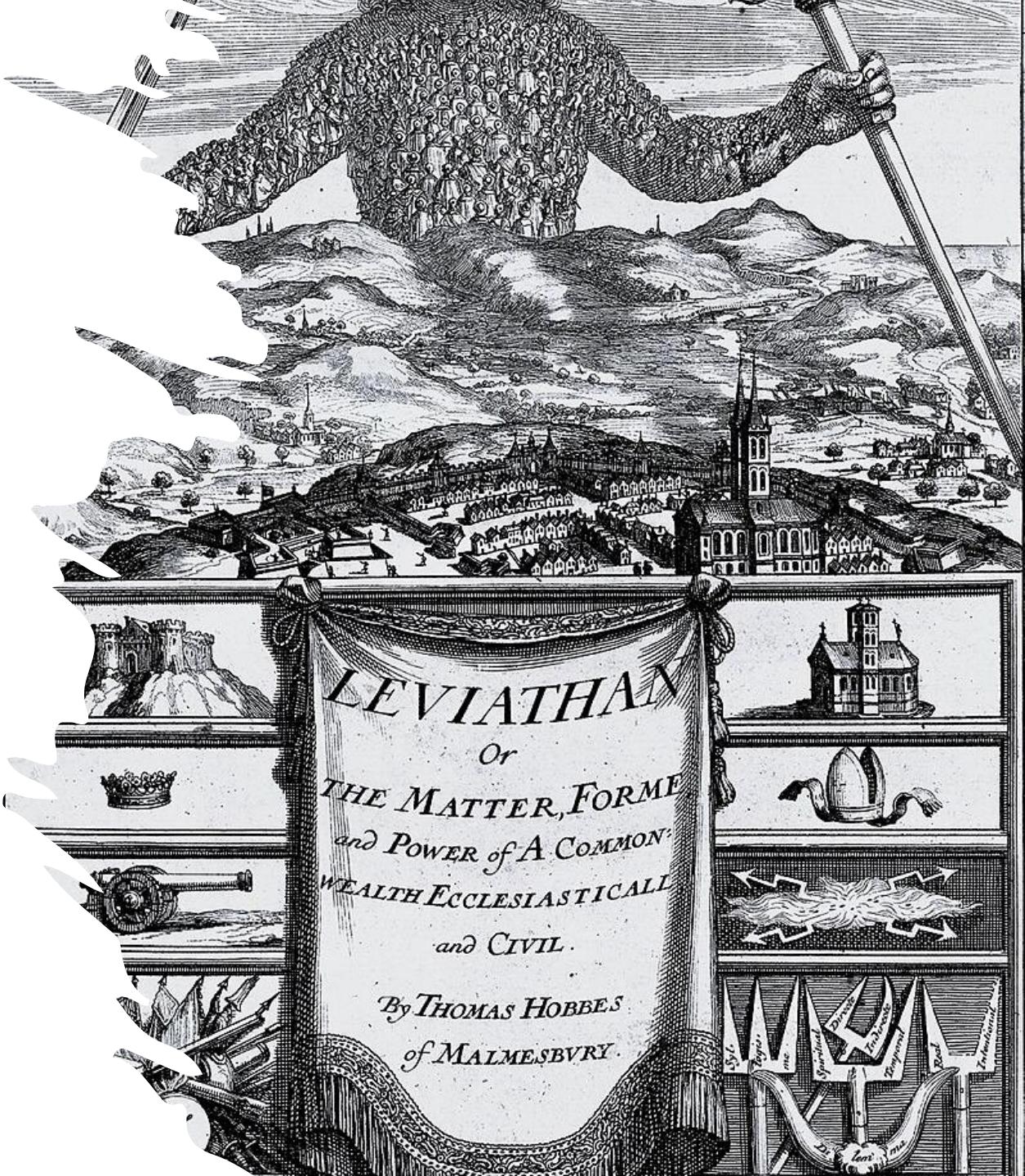
- **Biography:** English political philosopher, minister's son, classicist, translated Aristotle and Thucydides (1628) as well as Homer; served as Francis Bacon's scribe and tutor to Charles II; founder of modern political theory and social contract theory.
- **Historical Context:** English Civil War (1642-1651)
- **Purpose:** To address *sovereignty* and *order*. How can we maintain *peace*?
- **Text:** Treatise—systematic “political science.”

IV. Introduction

The Problem: What are the conditions under which civil peace is possible?

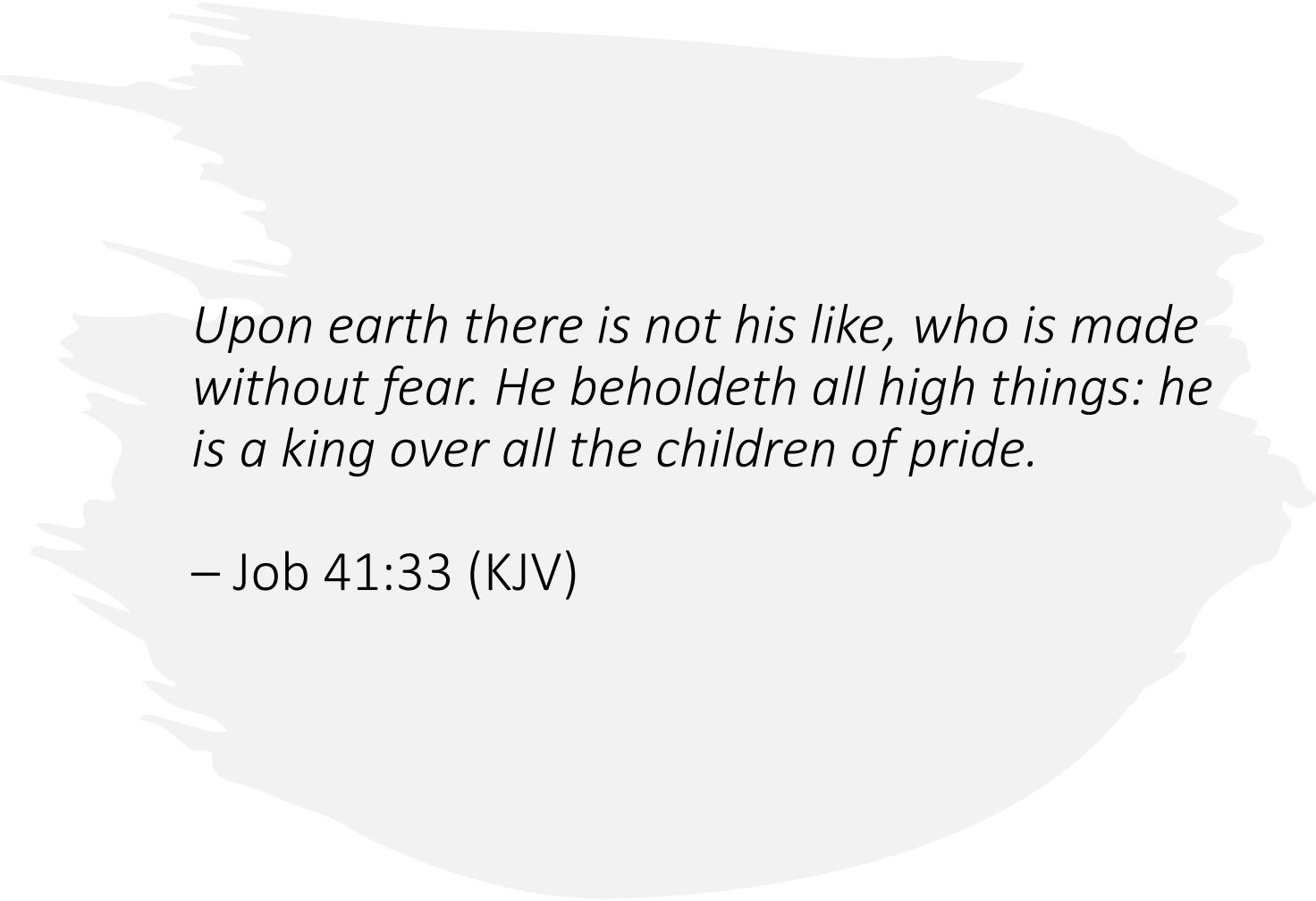
The Solution: Social contract in which individuals consent to an absolute sovereign

Reception: Roundly condemned, Hobbes seen as an atheist;



V. Themes

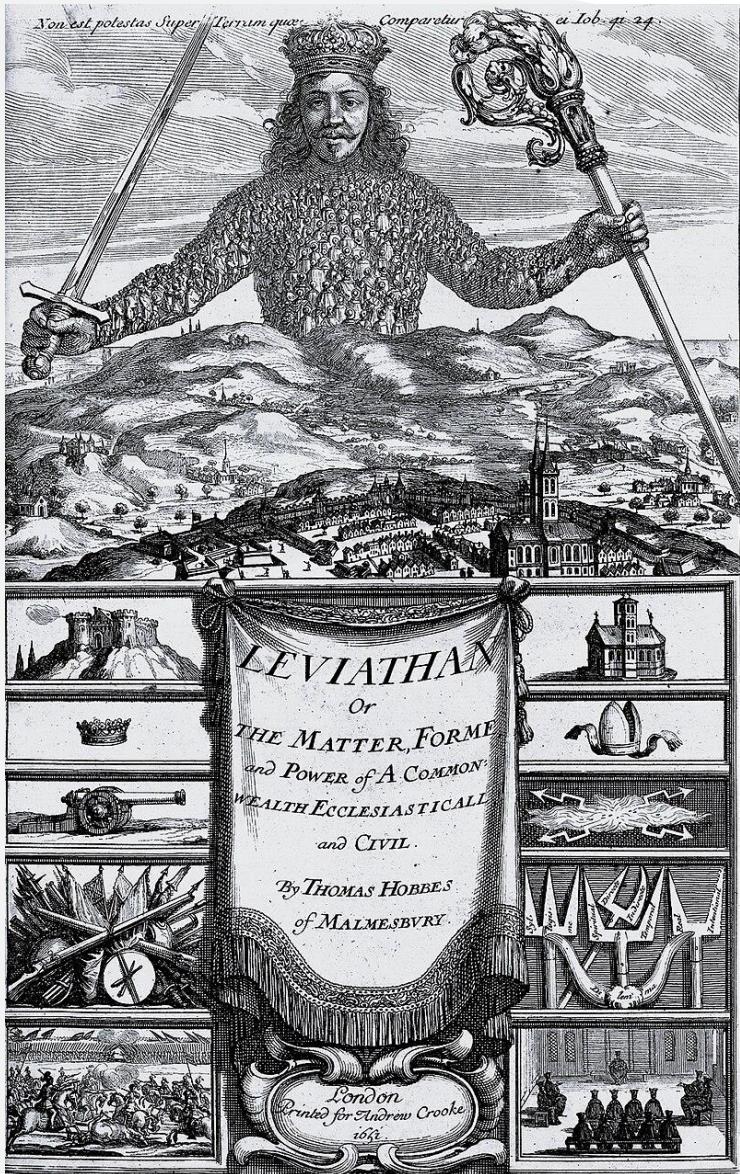
- **Human Nature:** *Mechanistic Anthropology*, Passion over Reason (Fear and Pride)
- **Knowledge:** *Skeptical/Empiricist* Epistemology
- **Morality:** *Nominalist Ethics*
- **Politics:** as *Artifact*
- **Authority:** *Social Contract Theory*
- What is *Sovereignty*?
- **Religion:** Man-made, an *Artifact*
- **The State of Nature:** *Bellum Omnium*
- **Natural Equality**



Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

– Job 41:33 (KJV)

V. Text



FRONTISPIECE

- Title: Job 41:33-34: The “king over all that is proud”
- Crowned figure with political and religious authority
- Two Columns: Symbols of political (Left) and ecclesial (Right) authority
- Columns Supporting town and country
- Two tools of authority (Sword and crozier)
- Sovereign is made up of individuals – remember, origin of the sovereign is a covenant among individuals
- Reinforces the idea that sovereign’s first foundation/purpose is the **preservation of community**

Outline of *Leviathan*

- Part 1: Of MAN (Chs. I – XVI)
- Part 2: Of COMMONWEATH (Chs. XVII – XXXI)
- Part 3: Of a CHRISTIAN COMMONWEATH (Chs. XXXII – XLVII)



Part 1. OF MAN



Chapter 1. Of Sense

MAN AS MACHINE

“All which qualities called sensible are in the object that causeth them but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely.”

Chapter 2. Of Imagination

- Use Your Imagination!
- Of Finitude and Infinity
- I Went to See the Doctor of Philosophy...



Chapter 4. Of Speech

THE NAME'S THE THING

- What's In a Name? Everything.
- The Utility of Speech
- You Want the Truth
- The Writing of Many Books is Endless



Chapter 11. Of the Difference of Manners

DISENCHANTMENT AND RESTLESSNESS

- There is no *summum bonum*
- Happiness is simply “progress of desire”

“I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death”

Chapter 12. Of Religion

A GENEALOGY OF RELIGIOUSITY

- Religion as Artifact
- *"Seeing there are no signs nor fruit of religion but in man only, there is no cause to doubt but that the seed of religion is also only in man"*
- Anticipating Feuerbach?
- *Homo Religiosus?*

"For such is the nature of men that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent, or more learned, yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves."

Chapter 13. Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, As Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery

THE STATE OF NATURE

- All Men Are Created Equal
- Three Causes of War: (1) Competition (Pride);
(2) Diffidence (Fear); (3) Glory
- Not Good Times?
- Nature as Thought Experiment
- No Justice, No ~~Peace~~ Justice?
- A Chicken in Every Pot?

Chapter 14. Of the First and Second Natural Laws of Contracts

THE LAWS OF NATURE

- Natural Right: Self Preservation
- Liberty: The absence of external impediments
- Right: Liberty to do or forbear
- Law: Obligation to do or forbear

Chapter 14. Of the First and Second Natural Laws of Contracts

THE LAWS OF NATURE

- Peace Through Strength? The First Law of Nature: Seek Peace but Prepare for War
- Beating Swords into Plowshares—The Second Law of Nature: The Social Contract



Part 2. OF COMMONWEALTH



Chapter 17. Of the Causes, Generation and Definition of a Commonwealth

The final cause of men (who naturally love liberty and dominion over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves in which we see them live in commonwealths is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war; which is consequent to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe.

Chapter 17. Of the Causes, Generation and Definition of a Commonwealth (cont.)

SOVEREIGNTY

- No Law Without Enforcement—Covenants Without the Sword are “Mere Words”

Leviathan is “*that mortal god to which we owe, under the IMMORTAL GOD, our peace and deference.*”

Chapter 17. Of the Causes, Generation and Definition of a Commonwealth (cont.)

SOVEREIGNTY: CONTRACT OR COERCION?

- Commonwealth by Acquisition
- Commonwealth by Institution



Chapter 20. Of Dominion Paternal and Despotsical

ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

- THAT is Why I Am Your King
- Ye—or He?—Shall Be As Gods
- Well, It Could Be Worse

though of so unlimited power men may fancy many evil consequences, yet the consequences of the want of it, which is perpetual war of every man against his neighbour, are much worse.

Chapter 26. Of Civil Laws

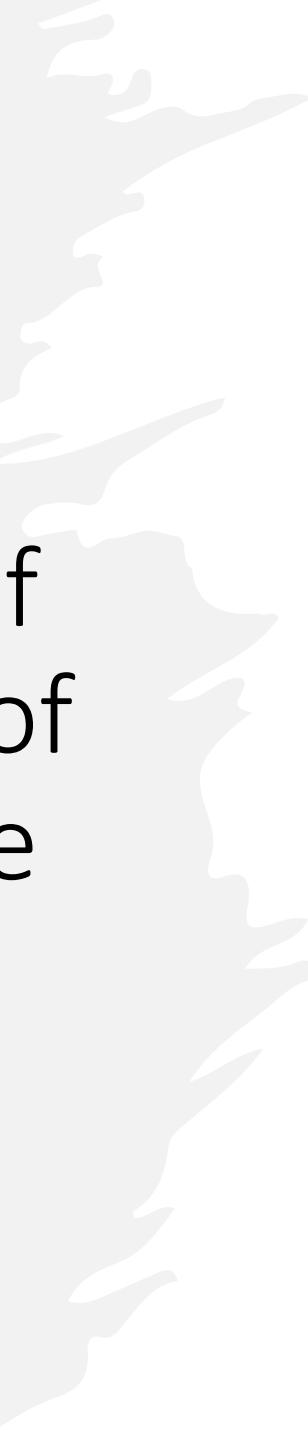
- Interpretation—Says Who? The Sovereign
- What about “Natural Law” Even more so...
- Rights and the Law
 - The RIGHT (*jus*) is *liberty*
 - The LAW (*lex*) is *obligation*



Chapter 29. Of Those Things that Weaken a Commonwealth

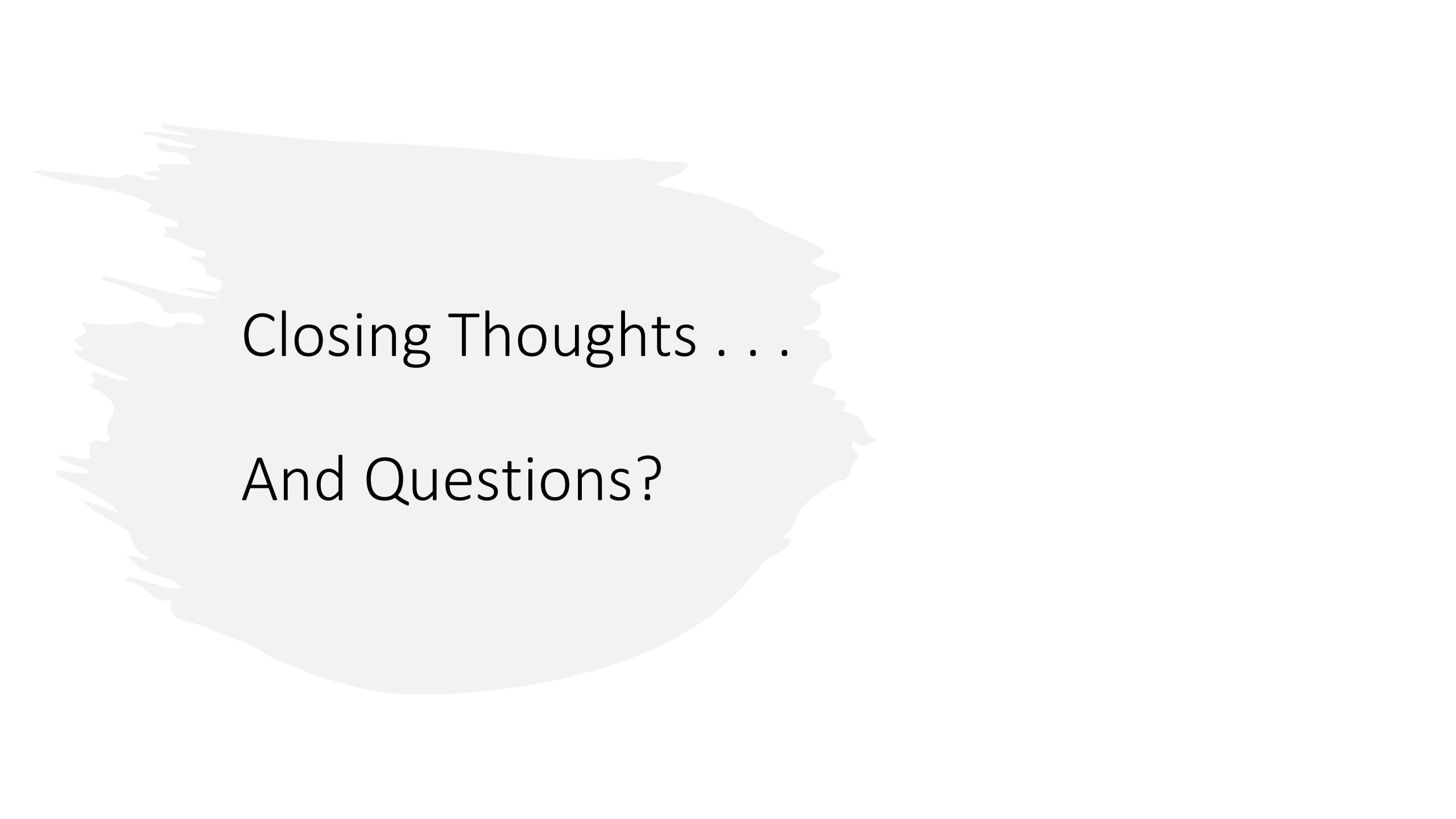
THINGS FALL APART

- I Just Can't Do It – I Don't Have the Power!
- Hath God Said? The problem of *private judgment*
- An Unjust Law is No Law at All?
- No Person is Above the law?
- Separation of Church and State?



Chapter 31. Of the Kingdom of God by Nature

- Peace/Safety – Expansive Definition
- Education – Basic Requirements (Revision of the 10 Commandments)
 1. Don't love another form of government (#1)
 2. Don't admire fellow subjects (#1)
 3. Don't speak ill of the sovereign (#2)
 4. Require a Sabbath (#3)
 5. (4 – 10) Same
- Equality in Administration



Closing Thoughts . . .

And Questions?