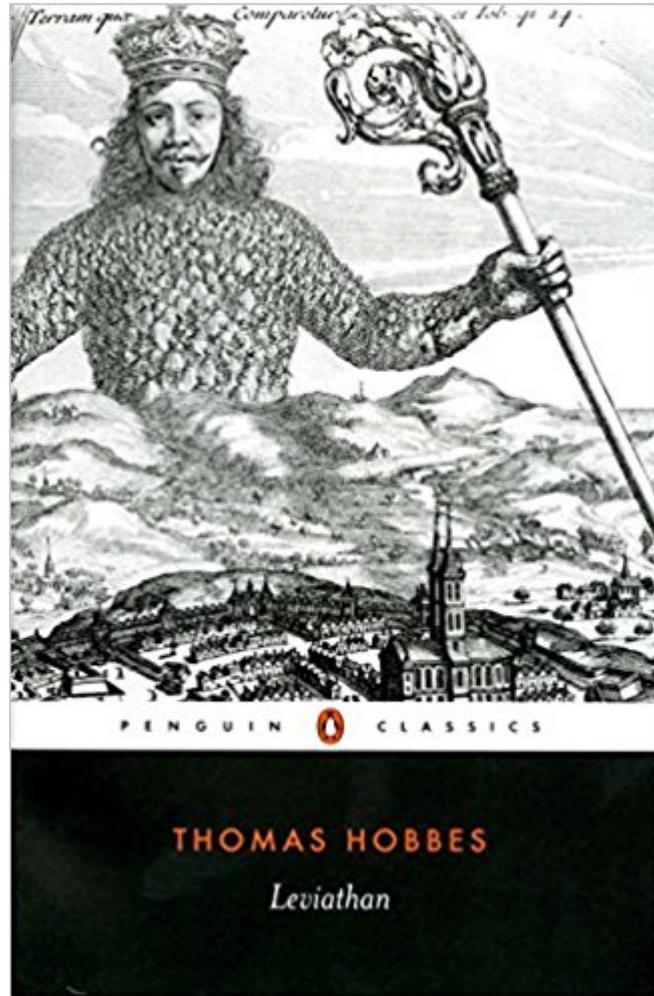




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Leviathan (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

"During the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre"Written during the turmoil of the English Civil War, *Leviathan* is an ambitious and highly original work of political philosophy. Claiming that man's essential nature is competitive and selfish, Hobbes formulates the case for a powerful sovereign "or *Leviathan*" "to enforce peace and the law, substituting security for the anarchic freedom he believed human beings would otherwise experience. This worldview shocked many of Hobbes's contemporaries, and his work was publicly burnt for sedition and blasphemy when it was first published. But in his rejection of Aristotle's view of man as a naturally social being, and in his painstaking analysis of the ways in which society can and should function, Hobbes opened up a whole new world of political science. Based on the original 1651 text, this edition incorporates Hobbes's own corrections, while also retaining the original spelling and punctuation, to read with vividness and clarity. C. B. Macpherson's introduction elucidates one of the most fascinating works of modern philosophy for the general reader. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I finished reading Leviathan a couple months ago, but cringed every time I thought about writing a review. The book is large at over 700 pages and covers so much ground, a review would have to be a book in itself to do it justice. Due to Leviathan's philosophical content and somewhat antiquated language, it's very slow going. Each page needs time to digest. So I'm not going to bother writing a real review. I will just say that Leviathan is a 5-star classic and worth your time, if you can deal with reading political philosophy. Hobbes divides the work into four major sections: Of Man, in which he discusses human nature and why civilized people prefer peace to war. Here Hobbes establishes the primary reason that people form a government to rule over them: to safeguard them from enemies, both external and internal. Of Common-wealth, in which Hobbes first talks about the several forms of government and the pros and cons of each. He then explains the rights that a government has over its people; according to Hobbes, the government can do pretty much anything it wants to. Finally he goes into the things that tend to weaken or dissolve a government. Of a Christian Common-wealth, the longest section, in which Hobbes accepts the Bible as the word of God and quotes from it numerous times to bolster his position in support of a powerful government. Of the Kingdome of Darknesse, the shortest and strangest section, in which Hobbes veers away from the topic of government and instead focuses on religious practices and beliefs of the day that he deems improper and inconsistent with the Bible. It took me months to read this, but I came away with great respect for Hobbes and a better understanding of politics.

Being a free Kindle edition there is no introduction and no notes - but you do get most of the text and all the passages that matter. The main difference from the original is that there are fewer capitals and italics. Hobbes used them for emphasis very much more than a modern writer would, and their pruning in this edition makes the text easier to read. Modern political philosophy begins with Hobbes. Before Hobbes, writers for centuries had accepted the divine right of kings or did not think much about the origins of government. Hobbes provides reasons as to how and why men come together to form government. He starts with the assumption that the organized state is a choice. The alternative is the "state of nature", where there is both a "right" of nature and "laws" of nature. Hobbes uses these terms in a very individual way. The "right" of nature is "the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power...for the preservation of his own Life". The "laws" of nature dictate that each person should seek to live with others in peace, and should only retain the right to as

much liberty as he is willing to permit others. These "laws" are found by reason, and are utilitarian rather than moral. Hobbes is simply saying that if men think about their situation, reason tells them that giving up their natural rights in exchange for others doing likewise is the best means of self-preservation, even though actually doing it is contrary to human nature. On human nature Hobbes is cynical. Reason suggests advantages stem from co-operation, but unless men are constrained by an external authority this is outweighed by instinct. Men are fundamentally competitive and selfish.

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