

# **hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy**

Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory Studies in Moral Political and Legal Philosophy

**hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy** open a fascinating window into the foundational questions of authority, human nature, and justice that continue to resonate in contemporary debates. Thomas Hobbes, a 17th-century philosopher, revolutionized political thought by arguing that human beings, in their natural state, live in a condition famously described as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Exploring Hobbes's ideas not only sheds light on the origins of political obligation and social contracts but also informs current discussions in moral and legal philosophy.

Understanding Hobbesian moral and political theory requires delving into his views on human nature, the state of nature, and the necessity of a sovereign authority. These elements form the backbone of his social contract theory, which has influenced countless thinkers and remains a cornerstone in political theory studies.

## **The Foundations of Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory**

At the heart of Hobbes's moral and political philosophy lies a rather bleak view of human nature. Hobbes believed that humans are fundamentally self-interested creatures driven by desires and fears, especially the fear of death. This perspective is essential to grasping why Hobbes thought that without a powerful authority, society would descend into chaos.

### **Human Nature and the State of Nature**

Hobbes's depiction of the "state of nature" is crucial. He imagined a hypothetical condition where there is no government or laws to regulate human behavior. In this state, individuals have unlimited freedom but no security, resulting in a "war of all against all." It's a natural condition where life is precarious and conflict inevitable.

This idea challenges more optimistic views of human nature that emphasize cooperation or innate goodness. For Hobbes, moral concepts like justice and injustice don't exist in the state of nature—they arise only when individuals enter into social contracts to escape this condition.

# **The Social Contract and Sovereignty**

To overcome the perils of the state of nature, Hobbes proposed that individuals collectively agree to surrender some freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for peace and protection. This social contract is not a mutual agreement between equals but a unilateral transfer of power to an absolute ruler or assembly capable of enforcing laws.

The sovereign's authority, according to Hobbes, must be undivided and absolute to prevent a relapse into disorder. This has profound implications for moral and legal philosophy, as it grounds political legitimacy not in divine right or tradition but in the practical necessity of maintaining peace.

## **Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory Studies in Contemporary Moral Philosophy**

Modern scholars studying Hobbesian moral and political theory often focus on how his ideas apply to current moral questions, such as the justification of authority, the nature of rights, and the role of the law in society.

### **The Basis of Moral Obligation**

One key insight from Hobbes is that moral obligations arise from agreements designed to avoid harm and ensure mutual benefit. This contractualist approach contrasts with moral theories based on intrinsic values or divine commands. In effect, Hobbesian studies encourage us to view morality through the lens of social cooperation and practical necessity.

This perspective also challenges us to ask: If the social contract is the basis of morality, what happens when the sovereign fails to protect its subjects? Hobbes's theory invites ongoing debate about the limits of obedience and the conditions under which rebellion might be justified, topics that remain vibrant in political philosophy today.

### **Hobbes and the Modern State**

Hobbesian political philosophy offers a framework for understanding the legitimacy of the modern state. By emphasizing security and order as fundamental political goods, Hobbesian theory explains why individuals consent to legal systems and governmental authority.

In moral political and legal philosophy, this emphasis on order over liberty provides a counterpoint to more libertarian or anarchistic theories. It also raises important questions about balancing authority and individual rights, a challenge that lawmakers and theorists grapple with regularly.

# **Legal Philosophy Through a Hobbesian Lens**

Hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy extend deeply into the realm of jurisprudence. Hobbes's insistence on sovereignty as the source of law shapes how we understand legal authority and the nature of legal obligations.

## **Law as Command of the Sovereign**

For Hobbes, law is essentially the command issued by the sovereign backed by the threat of punishment. This positivist understanding separates law from morality, suggesting that a law's validity does not depend on its moral content but on its origin from the recognized authority.

This viewpoint challenges natural law theories, which hold that laws must conform to moral principles to be legitimate. Hobbesian legal philosophy thus provides a pragmatic framework that focuses on the enforceability and authority of laws in maintaining social order.

## **Implications for Legal Rights and Justice**

Hobbesian theory raises intriguing questions about the nature of rights. In the state of nature, individuals have unlimited rights to do anything necessary for survival. However, these rights are curtailed by the social contract, which establishes legal rights protected by the sovereign.

Justice, then, is less about abstract ideals and more about adherence to the rules set by the sovereign to preserve peace and prevent conflict. This approach influences contemporary legal debates about the scope and source of rights, as well as the role of the judiciary in interpreting laws.

## **Key Debates and Critiques Surrounding Hobbesian Theory**

While Hobbes's ideas have been immensely influential, they have also faced criticism and sparked debate within moral political and legal philosophy.

## **Criticism of Absolute Sovereignty**

Many scholars question Hobbes's advocacy for absolute sovereign power. Critics argue that unchecked authority risks tyranny and oppression, undermining the very peace and security it aims to guarantee. These concerns have led to the development of

constitutionalism and liberal political theories that seek to balance power and protect individual freedoms.

## **Relevance to Modern Democratic Theory**

Another critical discussion involves how Hobbesian theory fits with democratic ideals. While Hobbes emphasizes strong centralized power, contemporary democracies emphasize participation, pluralism, and checks on authority. Reconciling Hobbes's insistence on order with democratic values is a vibrant area of study, exploring how social contracts can be both stable and responsive to citizens.

## **The Moral Status of the Social Contract**

Philosophers also debate whether Hobbes's social contract is genuinely voluntary or just hypothetical. Since entering the contract is often framed as a necessity rather than a choice, some question the moral weight of obligations derived from it. This issue challenges the foundations of Hobbesian moral theory and invites alternative views of political obligation.

## **Why Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory Matters Today**

Studying Hobbesian moral and political theory in moral political and legal philosophy offers valuable insights into the enduring challenges of governance, justice, and human cooperation. It provides a clear-eyed analysis of human nature and the conditions that make political order possible.

Whether one agrees with Hobbes's conclusions or not, engaging with his work sharpens our understanding of the ethical and political dilemmas faced by societies. It encourages critical reflection on the balance between security and liberty, authority and rights—questions that remain at the core of political life across the globe.

In today's complex world, where issues of governance and social contract theory are as relevant as ever, Hobbesian moral and political theory studies continue to inspire, provoke, and inform the ongoing quest for just and effective political institutions.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the core idea of Hobbesian moral and political**

## **theory?**

The core idea of Hobbesian moral and political theory is that in the state of nature, human life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' due to natural human selfishness and conflict, necessitating a social contract and a powerful sovereign to ensure peace and security.

## **How does Hobbes justify the need for an absolute sovereign?**

Hobbes justifies the need for an absolute sovereign by arguing that only a central authority with absolute power can prevent the chaos and violence of the state of nature, enforce laws, and maintain social order.

## **What role does the social contract play in Hobbesian theory?**

In Hobbesian theory, the social contract is an agreement among individuals to surrender some of their freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for security and order, thus escaping the anarchic state of nature.

## **How does Hobbes view human nature in moral and political philosophy?**

Hobbes views human nature as fundamentally self-interested, driven by desires for power and survival, which leads to competition and conflict without a governing authority.

## **What is the significance of the 'state of nature' in Hobbes' moral and political theory?**

The 'state of nature' is a hypothetical condition illustrating life without political authority, characterized by constant fear and conflict, highlighting the necessity of a social contract and sovereign power.

## **How do Hobbesian studies influence contemporary legal philosophy?**

Hobbesian studies influence contemporary legal philosophy by emphasizing the importance of law and authority in maintaining social order and legitimizing the state's power to enforce legal norms.

## **In what ways do Hobbesian theories address the concept of justice?**

Hobbesian theories conceive justice as adherence to the laws established by the sovereign, with justice emerging only within a civil society governed by agreed-upon rules.

## **How do modern scholars critique Hobbesian political theory?**

Modern scholars critique Hobbesian political theory for its advocacy of absolute sovereignty, potential neglect of individual rights, and its somewhat pessimistic view of human nature.

## **What is the relationship between Hobbesian moral theory and legal authority?**

Hobbesian moral theory links moral obligation to legal authority, asserting that individuals have a duty to obey the sovereign's laws to maintain peace and prevent a return to the state of nature.

## **How has Hobbesian theory been applied in studies of international relations?**

Hobbesian theory has been applied in international relations to describe the anarchic nature of the international system, where states act in self-interest without a central authority, resembling a state of nature among nations.

## **Additional Resources**

Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory Studies in Moral Political and Legal Philosophy

**hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy** represent a critical area of inquiry that continues to influence contemporary debates surrounding authority, sovereignty, and the foundations of moral obligations. Rooted in the 17th-century work of Thomas Hobbes, these studies explore the intricate relationship between individual self-interest, social contracts, and the establishment of political order. As modern scholars revisit Hobbesian thought, the implications for moral philosophy, political legitimacy, and legal structures remain as profound and contested as ever.

## **Understanding Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory**

At the core of Hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy lies the notion of the state of nature—a hypothetical condition in which humans exist without political authority or social contracts. Hobbes' depiction of this state as one of "war of all against all" emphasizes the precariousness of human existence absent a common power. This bleak view fundamentally informs his argument for absolute sovereignty as a necessary remedy to chaos.

Hobbes's moral philosophy challenges traditional notions of natural law by grounding

morality in the rational pursuit of self-preservation. Unlike earlier scholastic or natural law theorists, Hobbes argues that moral rules do not exist independently but arise through the mutual agreements individuals make to escape the perils of the state of nature. This contractualist approach reshapes moral and political obligations as contingent on the formation of a commonwealth under an overarching sovereign.

## **The Social Contract and Sovereignty**

Central to Hobbesian moral and political theory studies is the social contract concept. Hobbes posits that individuals willingly cede certain freedoms to a sovereign authority to ensure peace and security. The resultant political body wields absolute power, tasked with enforcing laws that prevent the return to the anarchic state of nature.

The Hobbesian sovereign, whether embodied in a monarch or assembly, is not a participant in the contract but the recipient of the collective authority. This distinction underscores a key feature of Hobbesian political theory: the indivisibility and inalienability of sovereign power. Debates in contemporary moral political and legal philosophy often revisit this principle, weighing its implications against democratic ideals and individual rights.

## **Impact on Moral and Legal Philosophy**

The integration of Hobbesian concepts into moral political and legal philosophy has provoked extensive discourse on the nature of law, obligation, and justice. Hobbes's legal positivism—viewing law as commands issued by the sovereign rather than expressions of moral truth—challenges natural law traditions and informs modern legal theory frameworks.

This perspective prompts critical examination of the rule of law and the legitimacy of political authority. Can laws be morally binding if their validity depends solely on sovereign decree? Hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy highlight this tension, encouraging scholars to explore the balance between legal authority and ethical justification.

## **The Role of Fear and Power**

Another significant theme in Hobbesian analysis is the role of fear as a motivator for compliance with political authority. Hobbes argues that the fear of violent death or punishment compels individuals to obey laws and uphold social contracts. This insight has influenced theories of legal deterrence and the psychology of obedience.

Moreover, Hobbesian studies underscore the centrality of power dynamics in political relationships. The sovereign's capacity to enforce laws and maintain order is not merely a legal fact but a social reality grounded in coercive capability. This realism contrasts with idealistic visions of politics and informs contemporary debates on state sovereignty,

human rights, and legitimacy.

## **Comparative Perspectives and Contemporary Relevance**

Hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy often stand in dialogue with alternative traditions such as Locke's liberalism or Rousseau's republicanism. While Locke emphasizes natural rights and limited government, and Rousseau advocates for popular sovereignty and the general will, Hobbes prioritizes security and order above individual liberties.

This contrast offers valuable insights for current political theory debates, especially regarding the trade-offs between freedom and security. In an era marked by concerns over authoritarianism, state surveillance, and social contract crises, revisiting Hobbes provides a framework for understanding the foundations and limits of political obligation.

## **Pros and Cons of Hobbesian Theory**

- **Pros:**

- Provides a clear rationale for political authority and the necessity of a sovereign.
- Offers a pragmatic approach to social order based on human nature and self-interest.
- Influences modern legal positivism and theories of state legitimacy.

- **Cons:**

- Supports potentially authoritarian governance by endorsing absolute sovereignty.
- Downplays individual rights and democratic participation.
- Relies heavily on fear and coercion, which may undermine genuine moral commitment.

# Hobbesian Theory in Legal Philosophy Debates

Legal philosophers frequently engage with Hobbesian moral and political theory studies to interrogate the source and nature of legal authority. Hobbes's assertion that law emanates from the sovereign's will challenges the idea of inherent rights and moral constraints on legislation. This has direct implications for the interpretation of constitutional law, the limits of legal positivism, and the justification of civil disobedience.

Furthermore, Hobbes's framework encourages a reassessment of legal institutions' role in maintaining social contracts. In pluralistic societies, where moral and political consensus is elusive, Hobbesian insights into stability and enforcement mechanisms remain pertinent. Scholars debate how contemporary legal systems can reconcile the need for order with protections for dissent and minority rights, a tension illuminated by Hobbesian theory.

## Contemporary Applications and Critiques

Modern applications of Hobbesian moral and political theory span various disciplines, including international relations, criminal justice, and political ethics. For example, Hobbes's conception of the international "state of nature" informs realist theories of global politics, emphasizing power struggles and the absence of a global sovereign.

Critiques of Hobbes often focus on the theory's perceived pessimism about human nature and its implications for political authority. Feminist, communitarian, and anarchist theorists challenge Hobbes's assumptions about individualism and the necessity of coercive power. Nonetheless, Hobbes's work remains foundational for understanding the complex interplay of morality, politics, and law.

The ongoing study of Hobbesian moral and political theory in moral political and legal philosophy continues to provoke vital questions about authority, justice, and human coexistence. As societies grapple with emerging political challenges, the insights drawn from Hobbes's legacy offer a rigorous lens through which to evaluate the principles underpinning law and governance.

## [Hobbesian Moral And Political Theory Studies In Moral Political And Legal Philosophy](#)

**hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy:**  
*Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* Gregory S. Kavka, 1986-10-21 In recent years serious attempts have been made to systematize and develop the moral and political themes of great philosophers of the past. Kant, Locke, Marx, and the classical utilitarians all have their current defenders and are taken seriously as expositors of sound moral and political views. It is the aim of this book to introduce Hobbes into this select group by presenting a plausible moral and political theory inspired by *Leviathan*. Using the techniques of analytic philosophy and elementary game theory, the author develops a Hobbesian argument that justifies the liberal State and reconciles the

rights and interests of rational individuals with their obligations. Hobbes's case against anarchy, based on his notorious claim that life outside the political State would be a war of all against all, is analyzed in detail, while his endorsement of the absolutist State is traced to certain false hypotheses about political sociology. With these eliminated, Hobbes's principles support a liberal redistributive (or satisfactory) State and a limited right of revolution. Turning to normative issues, the book explains Hobbes's account of morality based on enlightened self-interest and shows how the Hobbesian version of social contract theory justifies the political obligations of citizens of satisfactory States.

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ökonomische Wissen der Literatur ernst zu nehmen und der poetischen Reflexion von Ökonomie und Ökonomie auf breiter interdisziplinärer Grundlage nachzugehen. Bruckenschläge zur Mikro- und Makroökonomie, zur Spieltheorie und zur Neuen Institutionenökonomie eröffnen dabei neue Deutungshorizonte. Gemeinsame Wissensressourcen zu identifizieren, nachzuvollziehen und zu verstehen, gereicht beiden Disziplinen zum Vorteil: Der Literaturwissenschaft verhilft der ökonomische Interpretationsansatz zu einem erweiterten Textverständnis, während die Ökonomie durch die Literatur Zugang zu überreichem Anschauungsmaterial gesellschaftlich-kultureller Praxis erhält. In diesem Sinne erweist sich Literatur als anschauliche Theorie.

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**Egoismus und Moral** Jean-Claude Wolf, 2007

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Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes S. A. Lloyd, 2009-07-20 In this book, S. A. Lloyd offers a radically new interpretation of Hobbes's laws of nature, revealing them to be not egoistic precepts of personal prudence but rather moral instructions for obtaining the common good. This account of Hobbes's moral philosophy stands in contrast to both divine command and rational choice interpretations. Drawing from the core notion of reciprocity, Lloyd explains Hobbes's system of cases in the law of nature and situates Hobbes's moral philosophy in the broader context of his political philosophy and views on religion. Offering ingenious new arguments, Lloyd defends a reciprocity interpretation of the laws of nature through which humanity's common good is secured.

**hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy:** *Die Naturzustandstheorie des Thomas Hobbes* Daniel Eggers, 2008-12-10 Die Theorie des Thomas Hobbes hat in der Vergangenheit stark abweichende Deutungen erfahren und Anlass zu zahlreichen lang anhaltenden Debatten geliefert. Die Diskussion hat jedoch allgemein darunter gelitten, dass Hobbes' Schriften von der überwiegenden Anzahl der Interpreten wie ein in sich zusammenhängender Textkorpus behandelt und die Unterschiede zwischen den verschiedenen Werken nicht hinreichend gewürdigt worden sind. In besonderem Maße trifft das auf die Naturzustandstheorie zu, die im Zentrum der Hobbes'schen Argumentation steht und in großem Maß für die Entstehung und das Fortdauern der genannten Debatten verantwortlich zu machen ist. Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit ist es, die verschiedenen Fassungen der Naturzustandstheorie endlich einer umfassenden vergleichenden Analyse zu unterziehen, und zwar unter konsequenter Einbeziehung des gerade in der deutschen Hobbes-Forschung kaum beachteten Textes des lateinischen Leviathan. Wie sich eindrucksvoll zeigt, vermag der eingehende Vergleich der Schriften nicht nur einen wichtigen Beitrag zum Verständnis von Hobbes' philosophischer Entwicklung und zur Bestimmung des Stellenwertes des lateinischen Leviathan zu leisten. Er liefert auch einen wichtigen Beitrag zur kritischen Bewertung der vorliegenden Hobbes-Interpretationen und zur Auflösung einiger zentraler Debatten.

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**History of Economic Rationalities** Jakob Bek-Thomsen, Christian Olaf Christiansen, Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen, Mikkel Thorup, 2017-03-21 This book concentrates upon how economic rationalities have been embedded into particular historical practices, cultures, and moral systems. Through multiple case-studies, situated in different historical contexts of the modern West, the book shows that the development of economic rationalities takes place in the meeting with other regimes of thought, values, and moral discourses. The book offers new and refreshing insights, ranging from the development of early economic thinking to economic aspects and concepts in the works of classical thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Karl Marx, to the role of economic reasoning in contemporary policies of art and health care. With economic rationalities as the read thread, the reader is offered a unique chance of historical self-awareness and recollection of how economic rationality became the powerful ideological and moral force that it is today.

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through its emphasis on the Way.

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Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul Leslie Paul Thiele, 2020-12-08 Reading Nietzsche's works as the political biography of his soul, Leslie Thiele presents an original and accessible essay on the great thinker's attempt to lead a heroic life as a philosopher, artist, saint, educator, and solitary. He takes as his point of departure Nietzsche's conception of the soul as a multiplicity of conflicting drives and personae, and focuses on the task Nietzsche allotted himself to make a cosmos out of his chaotic inheritance. This struggle to become what you are by way of a spiritual politics is demonstrated to be Nietzsche's foremost concern, which fused his philosophy with his life. The book offers a conversation with Nietzsche rather than a consideration of the secondary literature, yet it takes to task many prevalent approaches to his work, and contests especially the way we often restrict our encounter with him to conceptual analysis. All deconstructionist attempts to portray him as solely concerned with the destruction of the subject and the dispersion of the self, rather than its unification, are called into question. Often portrayed as the champion of nihilism, Nietzsche here emerges as a thinker who saw his primary task as the overcoming of nihilism through the heroic struggle of individuation.

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**Ethik und Politik ohne Gewissheiten** Jean-Claude Wolf, 2002 Ethik und Politik ohne Gewissheiten setzt voraus, dass niemand im Besitz der sogenannten grossen Wahrheiten über Gott, die Welt und die Werte ist. Das entspricht einer Situation, die als Postmoderne beschrieben wurde. Ethik ohne Gewissheiten manifestiert sich in revidierbaren Regeln der allgemeinen Moral, aber auch der verschiedenen Sonder- und Berufsethiken. Der Autor, Professor für Ethik und politische Philosophie an der Universität Freiburg Schweiz, behandelt diesen Themenkomplex anhand konkreter Fragestellungen: Moralische Regeln und Berufsethik/Experimentelle Ethik, Verantwortung und Berufsethik/Gesundheit - ein Grundwert?/Ist es rational, Egoist zu sein?/Stichworte zum Pessimismus/Demokratie-Thesen und Antithesen.

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Locke's and Lockean political philosophy, such a study is long overdue.

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Hobbes on Legal Authority and Political Obligation Luciano Venezia, 2015-09-01 Hobbes on Legal Authority and Political Obligation develops a new interpretation of Hobbes's theory of political obligation. According to the account developed in the book, the directives issued by the sovereign as introducing authoritative requirements, so that subjects are morally obligated to obey them.

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Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector Liza Ireni-Saban, Maya Sherman, 2021-08-23 This book argues that ethical evaluation of AI should be an integral part of public service ethics and that an effective normative framework is needed to provide ethical principles and evaluation for decision-making in the public sphere, at both local and international levels. It introduces how the tenets of prudential rationality ethics, through critical engagement with intersectionality, can contribute to a more successful negotiation of the challenges created by technological innovations in AI and afford a relational, interactive, flexible and fluid framework that meets the features of AI research projects, so that core public and individual values are still honoured in the face of technological development. This book will be of key interest to scholars, students, and professionals engaged in public management and ethics management, AI ethics, public organizations, public service leadership and more broadly to public administration and policy, as well as applied ethics and philosophy.

**hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy: A Companion to Rawls** Jon Mandle, David A. Reidy, 2015-11-23 Wide ranging and up to date, this is the single most comprehensive treatment of the most influential political philosopher of the 20th century, John Rawls. An unprecedented survey that reflects the surge of Rawls scholarship since his death, and the lively debates that have emerged from his work Features an outstanding list of contributors, including senior as well as "next generation" Rawls scholars Provides careful, textually informed exegesis and well-developed critical commentary across all areas of his work, including non-Rawlsian perspectives Includes discussion of new material, covering Rawls's work from the newly published undergraduate thesis to the final writings on public reason and the law of peoples Covers Rawls's moral and political philosophy, his distinctive methodological commitments, and his relationships to the history of moral and political philosophy and to jurisprudence and the social sciences Includes discussion of his monumental 1971 book, A Theory of Justice, which is often credited as having revitalized political philosophy

**hobbesian moral and political theory studies in moral political and legal philosophy:**  
Humanities , 1987

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**The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes** S.A. Lloyd, 2013-01-03 Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is widely held to be one of the most important thinkers in the history of philosophy. His contributions to ethics, political philosophy and psychology in particular were hugely innovative and he was regarded by his contemporaries as a major intellectual figure. This comprehensive and accessible guide to Hobbes's life and work features 120 specially commissioned entries written by a team of leading experts in the field of seventeenth-century philosophy and political thought, covering every aspect of Hobbes's ideas. The Companion presents a comprehensive overview of the major themes and topics in Hobbes's work, in particular within the fields of language, political philosophy, moral philosophy and psychology, religion, law and science. It concludes with a thoroughly comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources. This is an essential reference tool for anyone working in the fields of seventeenth-century philosophy and political theory.

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