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LEVIATHAN (non Illustrated)



LEVIATHAN

THOMAS HOBBES



Synopsis

Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil, commonly called Leviathan, is a book written by Thomas Hobbes which was published in 1651. It is titled after the biblical Leviathan. The book concerns the structure of society and legitimate government, and is regarded as one of the earliest and most influential examples of social contract theory. It is often considered one of the most profoundly influential works of political thought ever written. In the book, which was written during the English Civil War, Thomas Hobbes argues for a social contract and rule by an absolute sovereign. Hobbes wrote that chaos or civil war "situations identified with a state of nature and the famous motto *Bellum omnium contra omnes* ("the war of all against all") could only be averted by strong central government. (non illustrated)

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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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