

Governing Evil

BA Level

**From the Renaissance to the Age of
Enlightenment**

Matthias Lemke | Université Sidi Mohammed ben Abdellah, Fès | Nov. 3, 2023

Agenda

1 | Perspectives

2 | Machiavelli

3 | Hobbes

4 | Conclusion

5 | Reading

1 | Perspectives

Learning from the History of Ideas?

“Cambridge School” (1)

“[W]hen we use language for purposes of communication, we are always doing something as well as saying something”.

— Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 1 (2002).

“Cambridge School” (2)

History of Ideas as a source for understanding how politics was done in the past.

Governing Evil? (1)

“Today, however, we have to say that **a state** is a **human community** that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”

“We must be clear about the fact that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an ‘ethic of ultimate ends’ or to an ‘**ethic of responsibility.**’”

— Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf* (1919)

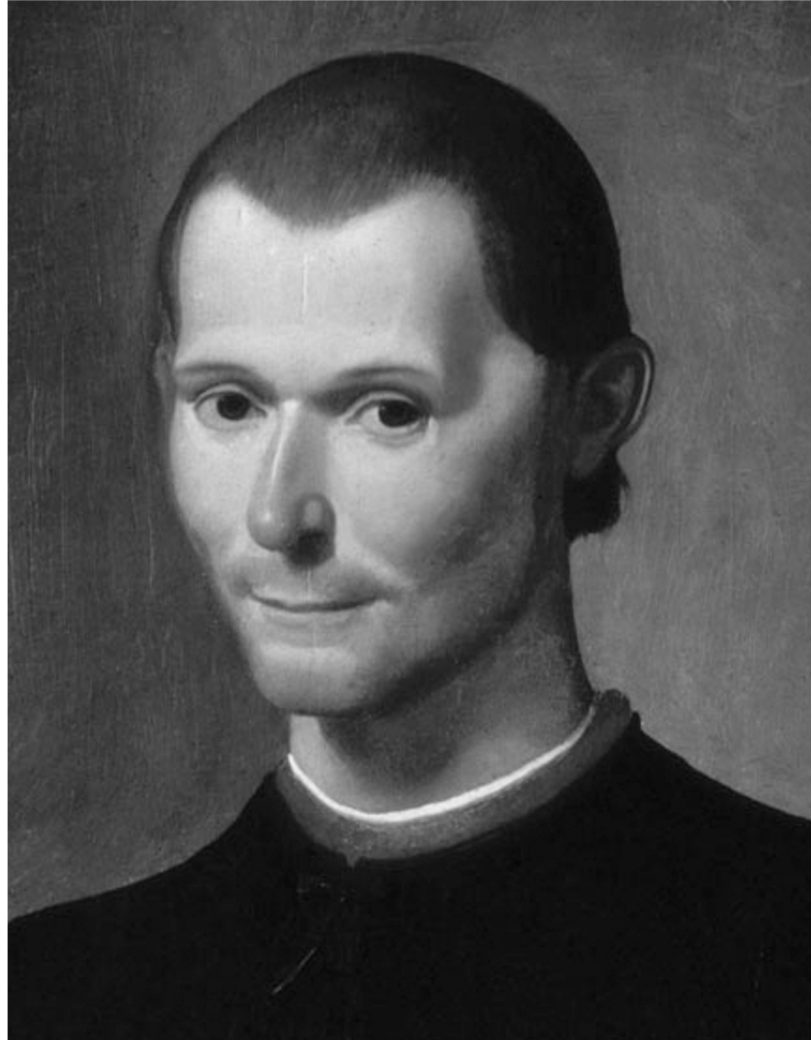
Governing Evil? (2)

Political Theory looks into collective entities dealing with challenges undermining the existence of these entities (=the State).

2 | Machiavel

Strengthening the Republic

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)



Italy in early 15th century



Research task (1): Situation in Italy

What was the general political situation like in Machiavel's contemporary Italy?

Who was Cesare Borgia?

Time: 15 Minutes.

Political Rationality

Il Principe (1531)

On **leadership** (i.e. personal dimension of government):

How to govern a State? Or:
Who should govern how?

virtù / fortuna / occasione /
necessità

Discorsi (1517)

On the **constitutional principles** of a Republic (i.e. institutional dimension of government):

How should a Republic be organized? What can contemporary Republics learn from the Roman Republic?

Raison d'État: State of exception

“And therefore concluding I say, that those Republics which in urgent perils do not have resort either to a Dictatorship or a similar authority, will always be ruined in grave incidents.”

— Machiavel, Discorsi (1517), Chap. XXXIV.

Research task (2): Roman dictatorship

What can be understood by the Roman legal institution of 'dictatorship'?

Time: 15 Minutes.

State of exception

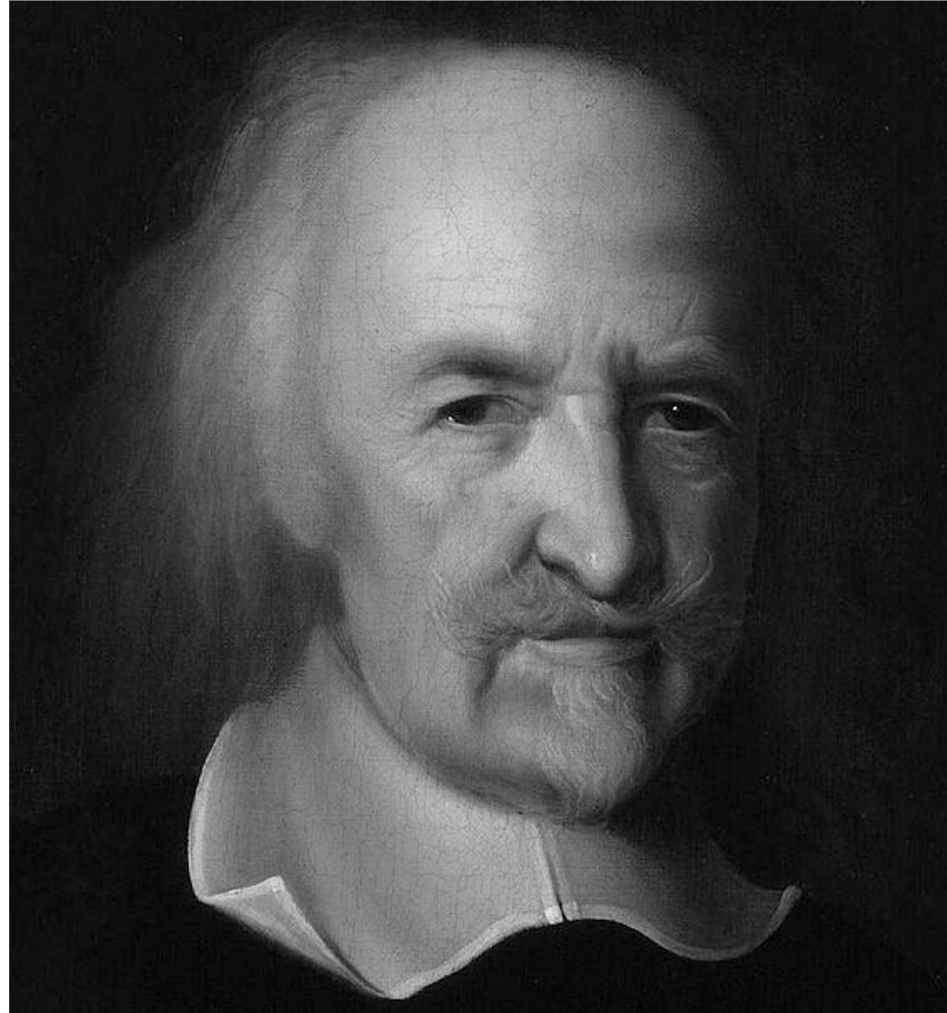
“And therefore concluding I say, that those Republics which in urgent perils do not have resort either to a Dictatorship or a similar authority, will always be ruined in grave incidents.”

— Machiavel, Discorsi (1517), Chap. XXXIV.

3 | Hobbes

Freedom to choose submission

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)



Sebastien Vrancx (1573–1647), “Looting of a village” (1615–20).





The English Civil War, 1642 – 52, painting by John Barker (19th century).



Château Vaux-le-Vicomte, Île de France-Region, France (built 1656–61)

Leviathan (1651)



State of nature

“Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called War; and such a war as is of every man against every man. In such condition there is no place for Industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continual Fear, and danger of violent death; And the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

Social contract

“I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition; that thou give up, thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner.”

— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

Commonwealth

“THE final cause, end, or design 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 necessarily consequent, as hath been shown, to the natural passions of men when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants.”

— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

Leviathan (1651)



4 | Conclusion

Governing top-down

More State!

- a strong State is the most important remedy when it comes to dealing with existential crisis situations
- in a crisis situation, the question of whether or not the State has to stick to legal rules, becomes opaque
- however: the State shall not kill it's citizens (at least in Hobbe's view...)

Research task (3): Social contract

What other authors used the Social Contract-Argument and in what design?

Time: 20 Minutes.

More State?

What are the drawbacks of of a strong, centralized State?

How can possible drawbacks be balanced out institutionally?

5 | Reading

Some texts ...

Texts that might be worth reading ...

Lemke, Matthias (2018), What does state of exception mean? In: Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, 28 (4), 373–383.

Skinner, Quentin (2000), Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford.

Tuck, Richard (2002), Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford.