

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL THEORY



INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL THEORY AFTER HOBBS

Analysis, Interpretation and Orientation

**Edited by RAIA PROKHOVNIK
and GABRIELLA SLOMP**

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Raia Prokhovnik

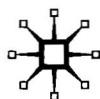
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First published 2011 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-0-230-24114-5 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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Contents

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	vii
1 Introduction <i>Raia Prokhovnik and Gabriella Slomp</i>	1
Part I Analysis	
2 The Politics of Motion and the Motion of Politics <i>Gabriella Slomp</i>	19
3 Hobbes, Public Safety and Political Economy <i>Tom Sorell</i>	42
4 <i>Leviathan</i> and Liberal Moralism in International Theory <i>Glen Newey</i>	56
Part II Interpretation	
5 Hobbes and the Subjection of International Relations to Law and Morality <i>Camilla Boisen and David Boucher</i>	81
6 Kantian Perspectives on Intervention: Transcending Rather than Rejecting Hobbes <i>Howard Williams</i>	102
7 The State of Nature as a Site of Happy Life: On Giorgio Agamben's Reading of Hobbes <i>Sergei Prozorov</i>	123
Part III Orientation	
8 Recasting the Hobbesian Legacy in International Political Theory <i>Michael C. Williams</i>	147
9 Hobbes, Origins, Limits <i>R. B. J. Walker</i>	168

10	Hobbes, Sovereignty, and Politics: Rethinking International Political Space <i>Raia Prokhovnik</i>	189
	<i>Name Index</i>	213

1

Introduction

Raia Prokhovnik and Gabriella Slomp

The theme of 'international political theory after Hobbes' is a timely focus, which allows us to set up dialogues about the legacy of Hobbes in international politics and to raise key questions about international politics in general.

This volume brings together theorists of international relations and political philosophy to discuss a key thinker and engage with some important issues in the current international order. The move by political theorists towards consideration of the international realm, the growth in the attention paid by International Relations (IR) scholars to theorising international politics and acknowledging the role played by a canon of theorists in thinking about international relations, and the consequent blurring of the distinction between domestic and international politics over recent years, have been marked. Political theorists and historians of political thought, as well as IR scholars, have a great deal to offer to the resulting reconceptualisation of international politics. An analysis of the developing links between political theory and international theory, refracted through the lens of Hobbes – a key theorist for both areas of politics – can promote a fruitful dialogue between the two areas.

In the light of these recent developments, a focus on 'international political theory after Hobbes' provides a useful vehicle for examining such central problems of international relations as war and intervention, how the tradition of Realism has been and can be interpreted, how Hobbes's international theory can be understood, and how international politics can be conceptualised. This book develops a dialectical strategy, showing that interpretations of Hobbes, the

history of international political theory, and international theory today are all subject to revision in light of a more focused and refined understanding of Hobbes. Indeed, the book challenges the very notion of a gap between political theory and international theory, and highlights the debate about connections between them by focusing on a theorist taken as pivotal in both traditions.

By re-evaluating Hobbes's international theory – by returning to the texts of his theory, by re-assessing how he was understood by later theorists, by reflecting upon his role in the dominant Realist theory of International Relations, and by discussing the sources in his writings of our ways of conceiving of international politics – we find a rich interpretive field of research on Hobbes. Although the dominant IR reading¹ of Hobbes has been increasingly challenged,² to our knowledge no previous work has attempted to pursue the triple aim of this volume: to subject the dominant IR reading of Hobbes to close scrutiny; to propose new ways of interpreting and evaluating Hobbes's contribution to the understanding of international politics; and to offer an exploration of the questions and issues that international political theory ought to address, taking inspiration from Hobbes and at the same time facing the challenges of a post-Westphalian world.

Given these reference points, the book argues that international political theory both has and has not 'gone beyond Hobbes'. The volume makes an important and distinctive contribution to the argument that international political theory is moving beyond the reading of Hobbes maintained by the orthodox International Relations discourse. That discourse has limited Hobbes's contribution to that of a founding theorist of the modern state in a modern inter-state system. Hobbes need not be seen in such a one-dimensional way, and re-reading Hobbes provides a distinctive lens through which to interpret international political theory today. At the same time this book demonstrates that international political theory has not gone beyond Hobbes, in the sense that his writings are still important resources for imagining and re-imagining international politics.

Specifically we bring together a set of scholars with expertise on Hobbes's views on international relations in the context of the history of political thought, on Hobbesian Realism, and on the place of Hobbes in contemporary international political theory. The chapters deliberately avoid a unilinear approach, and contribute in a range of

ways to opening up a dialogue about the different ways international political theory has and has not 'gone beyond Hobbes'.

We are keen to interpret the title of the book broadly, in order to capture the wide and fertile scope of the project. The book works at several levels: it highlights the overlapping and different methodological issues at stake for political theorists, historians of political thought, and international theorists; it addresses the politics of multiple and competing interpretations; it considers the question of readings, misreadings and re-readings of Hobbes; and it reflects on the reconceptualisation of international politics. The underlying premise is that reading political and international theory requires a flexible set of interpretive tools. The range of approaches taken in the chapters adds to the liveliness of the collection and underscores relevance of the material discussed.

The structure of the book reflects its central aims, which are to analyse, interpret, and consider contemporary orientations. The book is thus divided, after the introduction into three parts of three chapters each. Themes that drive all of the parts and chapters are a concern to address in different ways the questions of the misrepresentation or misappropriation of Hobbes; international theory beyond Hobbes; and new ways of using Hobbes in IR theory.

Each chapter offers an *analysis* of Hobbes, advances an *interpretation* of his understanding of the 'international' and contributes to an *orientation* in conceptualising international political theory. All three of the parts are open in interpreting and destabilising the line between domestic and international politics. Hobbes's is a rich and dense international theory, which can be interpreted in multiple ways.

The balance of the three ingredients – analysis, interpretation and orientation – varies among the three parts of the book. Part I emphasises textual analysis, and proposes new ways of interpreting and evaluating Hobbes's contribution to the understanding of the 'international'. This part sets out the crucial textual basis, in the corpus of Hobbes's work, for debate and interpretation. Directly or indirectly, the three chapters challenge the dominant IR interpretation of Hobbes. The concepts of international political theory highlighted in Part I include self-preservation, anarchy, public safety, the 'common good', cooperation between states, the state of nature, the domestic analogy, and pre-emptive aggression. Slomp shows

that, if we look beyond the fragmentation of his thinking that is a feature of scholarship on Hobbes, we find that his work contains an international theory as well as a domestic one and that neither is one-dimensional. Hobbes's work lends itself to a questioning of the rigid divide between political theory and international theory. Slomp and Sorell demonstrate in different ways that Hobbes has an international theory in its own right, and one that is much richer than the extension of domestic politics that is often attributed to him. Sorell indicates the narrowness of the Realist reading of Hobbes's international theory, and highlights the importance of economic considerations in the duties of sovereigns in an international context. Newey develops a qualified classical Realist interpretation of Hobbes's international theory, renouncing any full analogy between the state of nature and international politics, and rejecting the argument for a universal sanction for pre-emptive aggression by states. Newey's defence of a modified classical Realist reading of Hobbes is strengthened by its engagement with critics of Realism, and thus it recognises the openness of Hobbes's international theory.

Part II engages with significant past, and recent mainstream and post-modern, interpretations and develops insights into uses of Hobbes across the canon of later political theorists. The chapters in this part demonstrate the ways in which later scholars' understanding of Hobbes is open to debate. Concepts central to international theory examined in this part include natural law and the law of nations, the personification of the state, the Westphalian order, international intervention, and the state of nature as the epitome of the political. Boisen and Boucher explore the readings of Hobbes's international theory by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century international jurists, and demonstrate that their preoccupations were very different from those taken as essential to Realism. Like Boisen and Boucher, Howard Williams shows how rigid readings of Hobbes can effectively be destabilised. He indicates Kant's indebtedness to Hobbes, showing how Kant identified features of Hobbes's theory to build his critique of the Westphalian system. Williams's argument shows that it is a mistake to imprison Hobbes in a one-dimensional view, and to see Kant's interpretation as insular and fixed. He demonstrates that our understanding of Kant's international theory gains from a reassessment of Hobbes. Sergei Prozorov traces Agamben's engagement with Schmitt's understanding of Hobbes, so as to endorse a post-sovereign

politics centred on a conception of the state of nature stripped of its transcendence.

Part III addresses central concerns within the reconceptualisation of the 'international' by enlarging the horizons of the Hobbesian imaginary. Two leading IR theorists and a political theorist converge to demonstrate that just as Hobbes and his relation to later scholars in international theory disclose a rich interpretive field, so contemporary international theory is also subject to debate. The concepts of international political theory central to the chapters in this part include war, political modernity, the politics of liberal states, a temporal and historical rather than a spatialised account of international politics, and sovereignty. While acknowledging that the readings of Hobbes by Strauss and Schmitt have important implications for international theory, Michael Williams suggests a reading of Hobbes, via an alternative Oakeshottian lineage, that discloses his wider legacy for international politics. This Hobbesian perspective on international politics recognises state power but also a socially reflexive conception of social action. Rob Walker reflects upon what is at stake if contemporary international political theory makes explicit the character of the modern political order – 'constructed with its own externality' – which has been used to underpin the Realist understanding of international relations, and which Hobbes is understood to have helped to create. Finally, Raia Prokhovnik finds support in Hobbes for an argument for the inter-constitution of the concepts of sovereignty and politics. Prokhovnik makes the case that this insight into Hobbes's theory helps advance the idea of the domestic and international realms as both primarily spheres of politics.

The nine chapters of this work address a number of debates that have attracted the attention of political theorists and international theorists. The book challenges the idea of a one-dimensional and single exemplary explanation of Hobbes's international theory, and instead presents a set of alternative readings of how Hobbes contributes to new ways of understanding international politics. The debates discussed in the nine chapters can be summed up as addressing a number of key questions:

1. How has Hobbes been misinterpreted in mainstream IR? What have international theorists traditionally neglected of Hobbes's

argument that is important to understanding his views on the relationship between national and international politics?

2. In the light of the critique of the narrow stereotype of Hobbes's international theory, and of later phases of the Realist tradition, how does a more accurate reading of Hobbes enrich rather than undermine our understanding of Realism?
3. How has Hobbes been used by later theorists such as Pufendorf, Kant, Schmitt, and Agamben, to conceptualise international politics?
4. What are we to make of international political theory if we supersede Hobbes by moving beyond the sovereign state? What role is there for Hobbes in international theory today? Is Hobbes irrelevant to contemporary international politics?
5. If we have 'gone beyond Hobbes', what is the way forward for international theory? How can international politics best be conceived of under current conditions and current ideas?

Part I: Analysis

In Chapter 2, 'The Politics of Motion and the Motion of Politics', Gabriella Slomp argues that the dominant IR reading of Hobbes must be seen in the context of the 'fragmentation' of Hobbes studies that took place in the twentieth century, namely the tendency to engage with smaller and smaller parts of Hobbes's philosophy and to disregard the rest of his grand theory. According to Slomp, international theorists contributed to the fragmentation of Hobbes by excavating from his theory a selection of his statements and remarks, and disregarding the rest. Slomp claims that if one resists the process of fragmentation, one can recover a notion of the 'international' in Hobbes that is complex and thought provoking. If, for instance, we interpret Hobbes's notion of self-preservation and anarchy in relation to his theory of motion (as developed in the *Elements of Philosophy*), it is possible to trace an argument that challenges the textbook association of Hobbes with Realism. Rather than being a champion of the state, Slomp sees in Hobbes a defender of the individual; rather than pessimism and tragedy, she finds Enlightenment assurance; rather than eternal human nature, she finds belief in the ability of man to develop his future and modify the content of his desires; rather than discrete notions of internal and external, domestic and international,