Hobbes is commonly associated with the following views:

- **Empiricism**: all knowledge (indeed, all thought) is ultimately derived from *sense experience*
- **Materialism**: all that exists is nothing but *matter* (i.e., what is studied by modern physics)
- **Determinism**: everything that happens is *necessarily determined* by what happened before (i.e., cause and effect)
- **Egoism**: all voluntary action is ultimately based on *self-interested motives*

**Leviathan, chapter-by-chapter**

1: Each individual thought is a sensory appearance caused by material objects pressing on our senses and communicating motion.

2: Imagination and memory are just “decaying sense”: the inertial motion remaining from one episode of sensory observation and gradually fading away in the wake of new observations.

3: So-called “mental discourse” is either unguided (letting our thoughts “wander”) or guided by some desired end making a strong impression on us (only humans are naturally curious). Prudence is just conjectural reasoning from past experience. Sense, imagination, and mental discourse are the only naturally implanted features of human psychology.

4: *Language* enables humans to transfer mental discourse into verbal discourse (private memory aids or interpersonal communication). There are four special uses and abuses. Language is also what enables us to engage in general reasoning and arrive at truth or falsehood.

5: *Reasoning* is “nothing but reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names”: human curiosity can lead us to general conclusions, and also to “absurdity”. Knowledge of fact comes from “sense and memory”, but knowledge of consequences is called *science*.

6: Animals experience both *vital motion* and *voluntary motion*: the latter begins with tiny motions called “endeavour” and the simple passions (“appetite, desire, love, aversion, hate, joy, and grief”) are all endeavours or appearances thereof (with all passions being versions of these simple passions).

Hobbes seems to endorse individual relativism: The terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are “used with relation to the person that useth them”, so that I call what I desire ‘good’, I call what I’m averse to ‘evil’, and different people will use the terms differently.

Hobbes gives an egoist reinterpretation of certain passions: laughter is caused by sudden glory (e.g., rejoicing in another’s flaws), weeping is caused by sudden dejection (e.g., reconciling with an enemy and putting aside thoughts of revenge), pity and compassion are caused by the thought that I might suffer too, etc.

*Deliberation* is just wavering between different desires and aversions, and the *will* is just whichever appetite in deliberation ultimately leads to action (Hobbes thinks the technical term “free will” is an absurdity). *Felicity* is just satisfying one desire after another (contra Aquinas, the Scholastic term “*beatifical vision*” is “unintelligible”).

7: *Doubt* is just wavering between different opinions, and the *judgment* is just whichever opinion we end up with. *Science*, to be more than just opinion, must be based on definitions. Beliefs based on human authority alone are not faith in God, but “faith in men only”.

8: *Natural intelligence* consists in quickness of imagination and steadiness of thought, with the ability to make distinctions (good judgment) much more important than the ability to notice similarities (good fancy). Differences in intelligence result from differences in the passions (some innate, some cultural), and *insanity* is nothing but excessive passion, with the madness of crowds caused by runaway passion (thus insanity is not caused by demons).

9: *History* (knowledge of fact) is divided into natural history and civil history. Likewise, *science* (knowledge of consequences) is divided into the study of natural bodies (natural philosophy) and the study of artificial bodies (civil philosophy).

10: *Power* is just the ability to get what you want: like reputation, it tends to ‘snowball’. My social *worth* is just how highly others value my power, *honoring* or *dishonoring* me.
11: Manners are personal characteristics which bear on social peace. Since there is no ultimate end (contra Aquinas), but only satisfying one desire after another, all humans have “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death”—not necessarily to get more, but often only to keep what we already have. This can lead to conflict over finite resources (including reputation). Idiots who overestimate their own power or intelligence cause trouble through reckless aggression and ambition. Ignorance leads to blindly following others, blindly following custom, blaming the messenger, gullibility, and superstition.

12: Human curiosity, combined with ignorance, leads to perpetual fear about the future, which ends up forming the seed of religion: (1) believing in spirits, (2) ignorant superstitious thinking, (3) worshipping spirits, (4) superstitious prognostication. Religious authorities lose power when (1) contradictions make them look stupid, (2) scandals make them look insincere, (3) greed makes them look unloving, (4) new requirements are introduced without new miracles to back them up.

13: Humans are naturally equal: we can all kill each other, and we are equal in our natural mental abilities. This lack of natural subordination leads to competition for resources, mutual distrust (made worse by the power-mad), and fighting over perceived disrespect: competition, diffidence, and glory. Thus the state of nature is a state of war: without a powerful government in place, humans naturally fall into a condition of violent conflict or the constant threat thereof. This is confirmed by experience: we lock our doors even with a government, Native Americans currently live this way, international relations work this way. In this condition, justice and injustice do not apply. Fear of death, desire for pleasant living, and hope of ending the violence all incline us to peace.

14: Everyone has one natural right: a right to everything which may prove useful in self-preservation. In a state war, this means a right to everything there is. This is unrestricted liberty: “the absence of external impediments”. Natural laws require us to do whatever it takes to survive. So, in a state of war, the first law of nature is: (1) Seek peace when it’s feasible (otherwise practice total war). And from this follows: (2) When others are willing, lay down your right to everything and settle for equal terms. Because voluntary actions aim at one’s own self-interest, there are some rights you can’t lay down (i.e., inalienable rights): the right to defend your own life, the right to defend yourself against violence, the right to basic security. Covenants (i.e., mutual ‘first me, then you’ rights-transfers) are void in the state of nature.

15: The third law of nature is: (3) Perform valid covenants. This is the basis of justice (which does not yet exist in the state of nature, since all covenants are still void). The Fool says that when you have performed your part of our covenant, it’s then irrational for me to perform my part: why should I? But Hobbes says cheating is a really bad idea: since I won’t be able to survive without allies, and since known cheaters tend to get kicked out of alliances, I’m playing a really risky game with my life.


You must always be willing to follow these laws (they always bind in foro interno), but don’t actually follow them unless others do so as well (they don’t always bind in foro externo). This is true moral philosophy: we differ on what we call ‘good’ and ‘evil’, but all can agree that peace is good and that following the laws of nature is therefore good. These aren’t really ‘laws’—they’re merely rational rules for survival—unless you bring God into it.