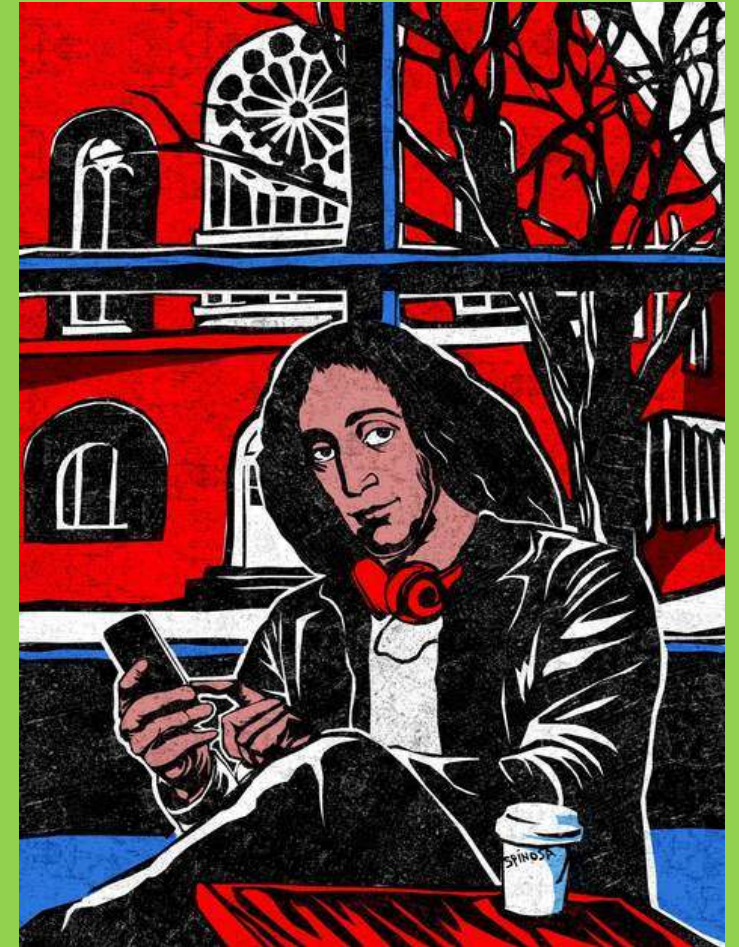


# PHILOSOPHY FOR BEGINNERS

**MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

**Week 8. The state of Nature  
and the social contract  
6<sup>th</sup> March 2019**







VOGHIETE GLIOCHI AMIRAR COSTEI VOCHI DECRETI CHE IN FIGURATI E PSICHELLOI CARONATI LAUNEL SCOPRI CHESCI SNO



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**CAPITALISM**

**WE RULE YOU**

**WE FOOL YOU**

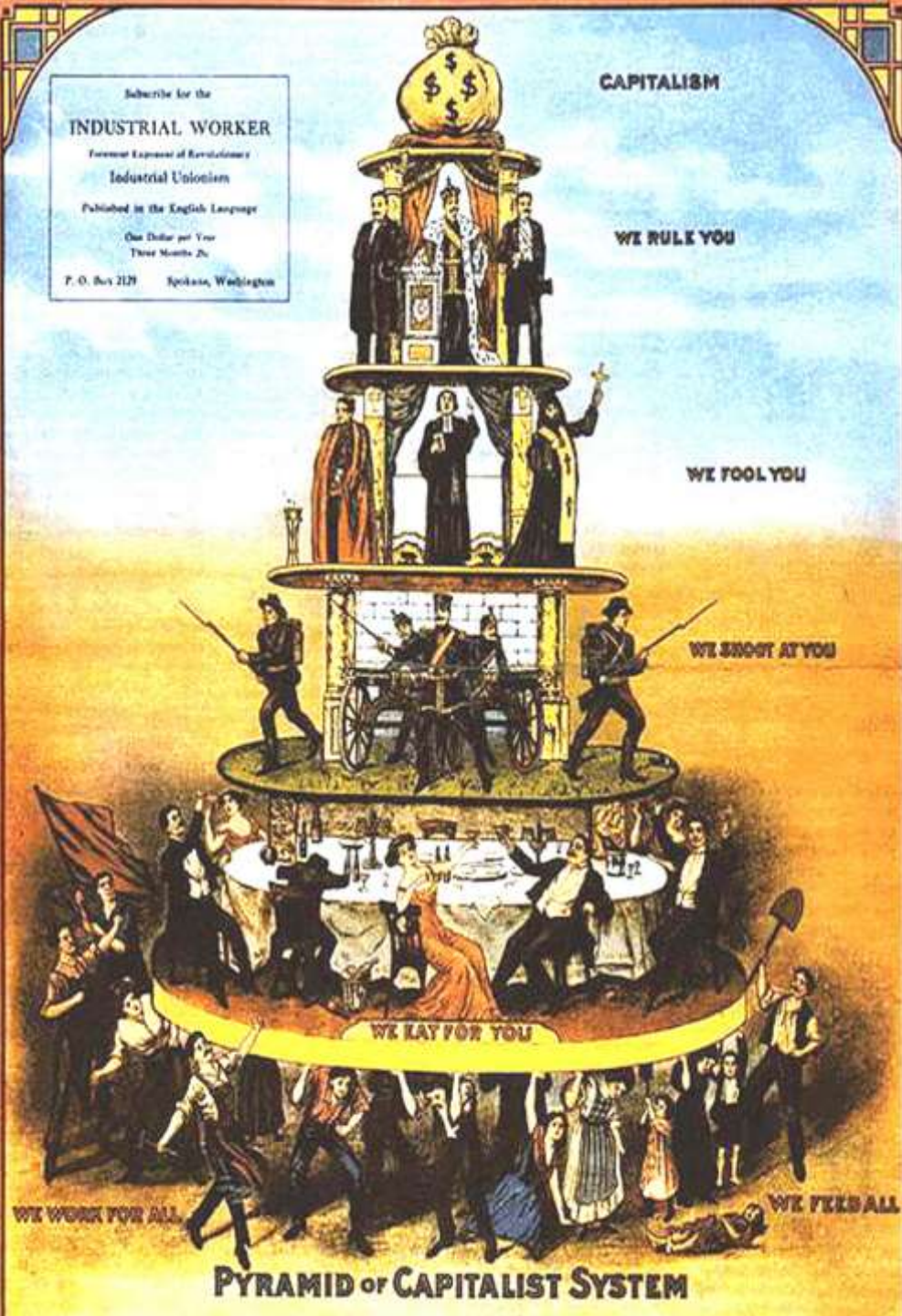
**WE SHOOT AT YOU**

**WE LAY FOR YOU**

**WE WORK FOR ALL**

**WE FEED ALL**

**PYRAMID OF CAPITALIST SYSTEM**









# Class recap

- Introduce political philosophy
- Understand the approaches of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Machiavelli
- Question what the true basis of politics is, and how philosophy can enrich it
- Explore the role of the state



# Class aims

- Do we need government?
- The 'state of nature' and the 'social contract'
- Understand Hobbes' arguments for natural law and the necessity of obeying the sovereign
- Introduce Spinoza's argument for democracy







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IMMUNISATION UNIT

















# Do we need government?

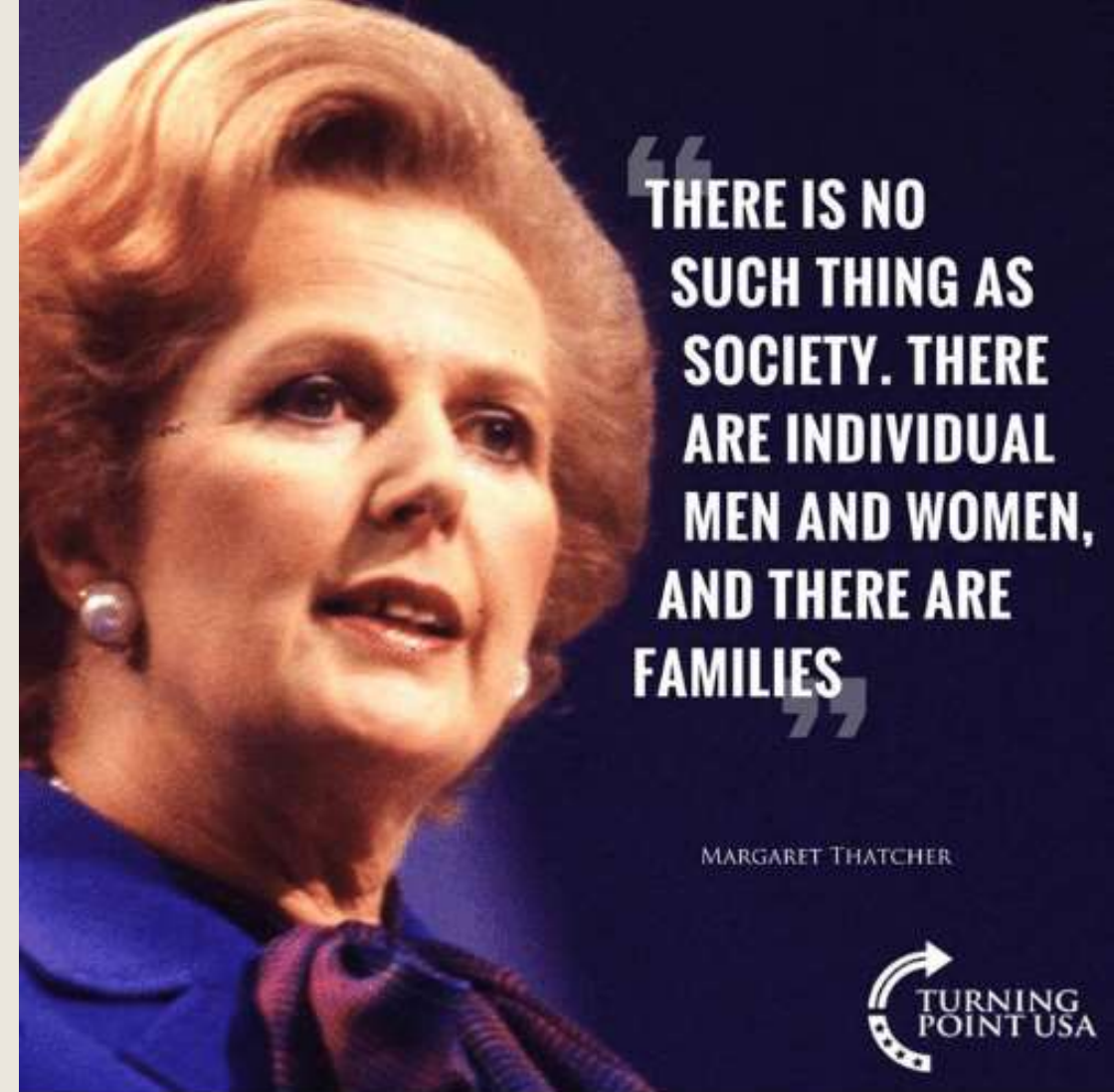
- From 'cradle to grave', we've each grown up with the influence of government throughout our lives
- Think for a moment of how the state has impacted your life...



# Do we need government?

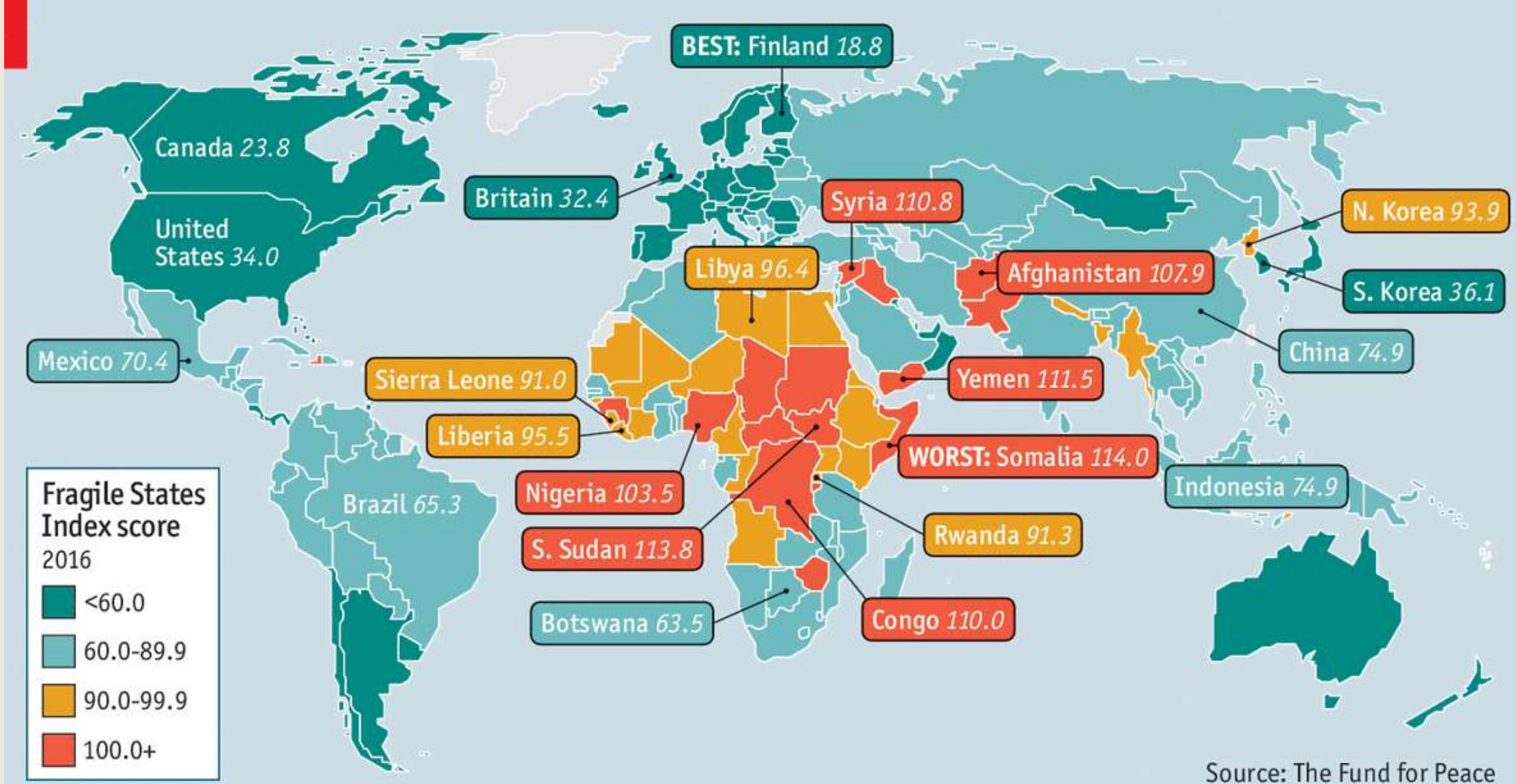
- From national health systems in which we were safely born, to birth registries, vaccinations, schooling, national insurance, work, to old age pensions...
- Then there is the role of the state in providing a basic infrastructure through which we can live and work together
- In return for taxes, obeying the laws, perhaps jury service, we have police, a justice system, social care, roads, national cultural events and institutions, freedom from foreign invasion, to rubbish collection...
- *But do we really need it, or is it a great con?*
- Read and discuss the three quotes in small groups





Conservatives Want To  
Empower The Individual!  
#BigGovSucks





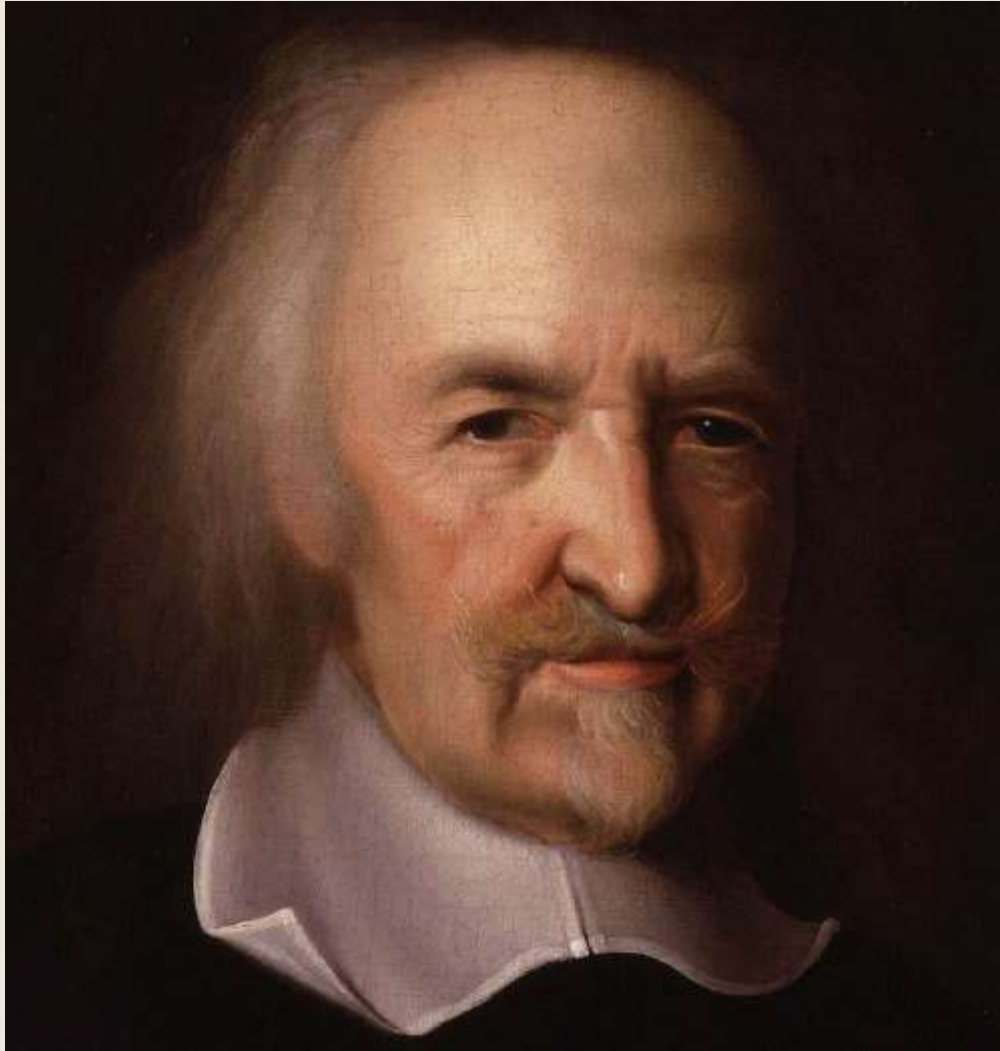
Source: The Fund for Peace



# Do we need government?

- The question of whether we need governments to secure life's basic advantages is a key one for political philosophy
- In Plato's *Republic*, morality was only possible for the individual through the kind of society she/he lived in
- For Martha Nussbaum, we can only cultivate a capability for morality through the society we live in
- But the problem is presented most famously in Thomas Hobbes
- Without a state, there can be no trust, and all we have left is a *war of all against all...*

# Thomas Hobbes







## A True Narrative of the Horrid Hellish Popish-Plot.

The Spanish Armada of 1588

The Popish Plot (1678 – 1681)

‘fear and I were born twins together’

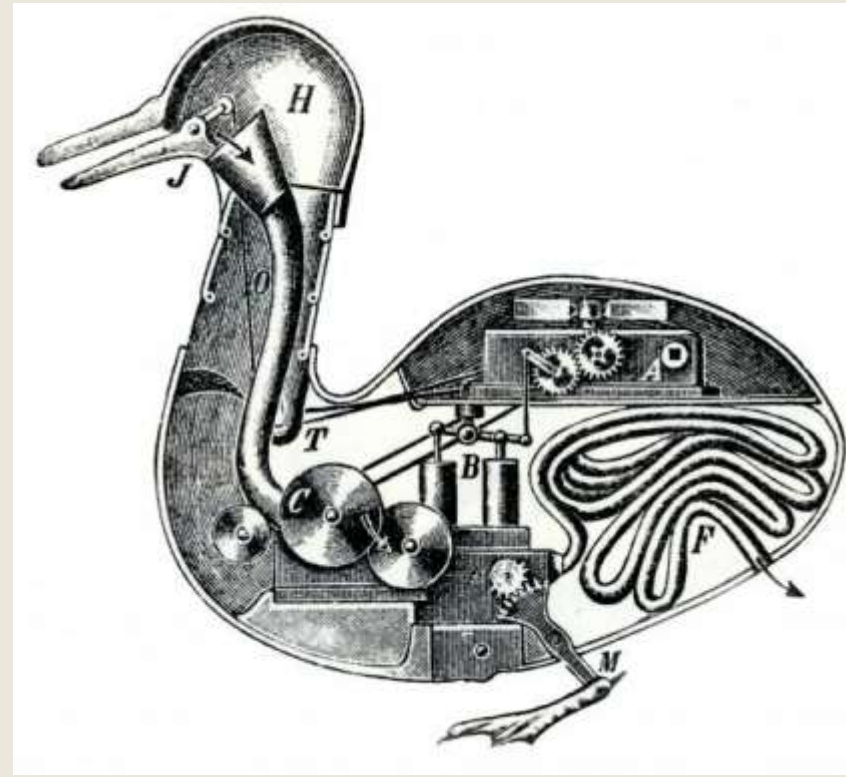
# Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

- English philosopher, historian, translator and political theorist
- *Leviathan* (1651) written during English Civil War – dispute between monarchists and parliamentarians
- Dispute over the purpose of the State and obedience to its authority - the Divine Right of Kings



# Hobbes on human nature

- Empiricist, atomist, and materialist
- All human action is the work of the mechanical “laws of nature”
- We are all driven by nature to pursue our own desires, what he calls our ‘natural right’
- Judgements and values are ultimately subjective, and we are essentially self-centred and individualistic







# Social Contract Theories

- Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679)
- Benedict de Spinoza (1632 – 1677)
- John Locke (1632 – 1704)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788)

# The State of Nature

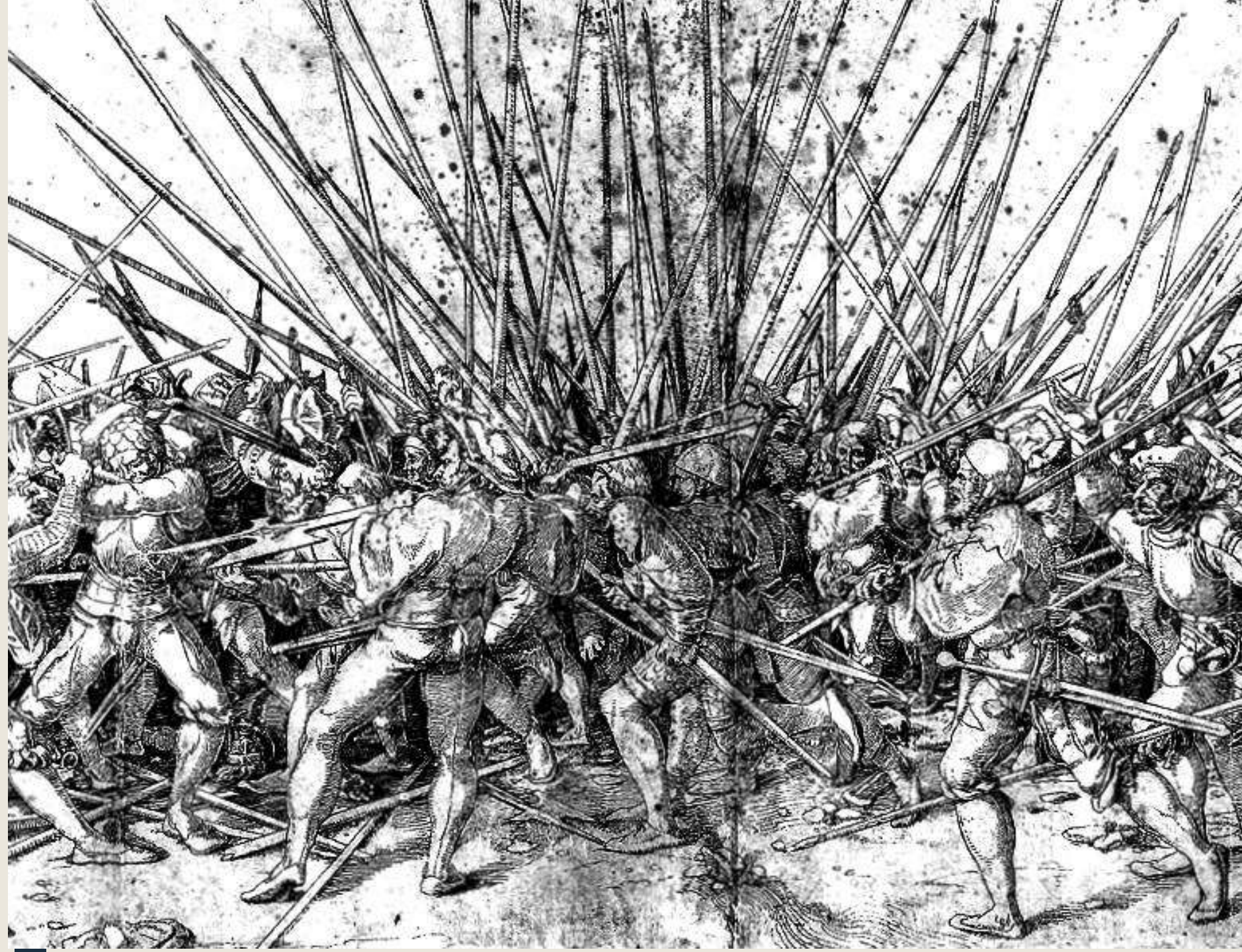
- Social contract theory usually begins with “the state of nature”
- ... What society would be like without laws, enforced by a state
- Ask why we would agree to the formation of a State from this state of nature
- Grounds legitimacy of the State in this agreement, supplying a rational basis for the existence of the State



# The State of Nature

- Take a look at the excerpt for Hobbes and think about...
- How does Hobbes justify the necessity of having a state?
- What is human life like without it?
- How convinced are you?

*Discuss in small groups*





# Nasty, brutish and short

- In nature all are equals, pursuing their natural right
- In this free-for-all, the problem is the inevitability of conflict with other people's freedoms
- The state of nature would be a 'war of all against all', an ongoing civil war; there would be no civilisation, arts, or security because everyone would be living in a constant fear of violence and death
- There is no morality or system of law
- Hobbes rejects the 'natural law' associated with God's benevolence, being universally binding
- Instead there is just one law of nature, self-preservation

# What is the solution?

- For Hobbes, it is clear that only some kind of strong government will protect us from each other
- A social contract, in which we agree to respect each other's rights and obey the law
- The only way to enforce this law, and provide trust, is by transferring our right to a sovereign authority to rule over us
- The disagreement is in how much power we should hand over to this authority...





# Creating a civil authority

- Read Hobbes' case for the kind of government he considers necessary...
- Discuss: why would Hobbes propose such a model?
- What are the dangers of accepting such a system?
- How would you characterise Hobbes' view of human nature?







# Creating a civil authority

- We are endowed with reason, and our duty towards self-preservation means we desire peace and order
- We can rationally recognise that it is in our interests to give up our liberty in exchange for security
- We contract with one another to give up our liberty in exchange for a sovereign political authority which will treat us equally and provide us with protection
- The sovereign power retains absolute liberty and can do whatever it likes; our duty is to obey the sovereign power
- As an absolute power, there are no divine, moral or theoretical constraints on this sovereignty



# Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-77)

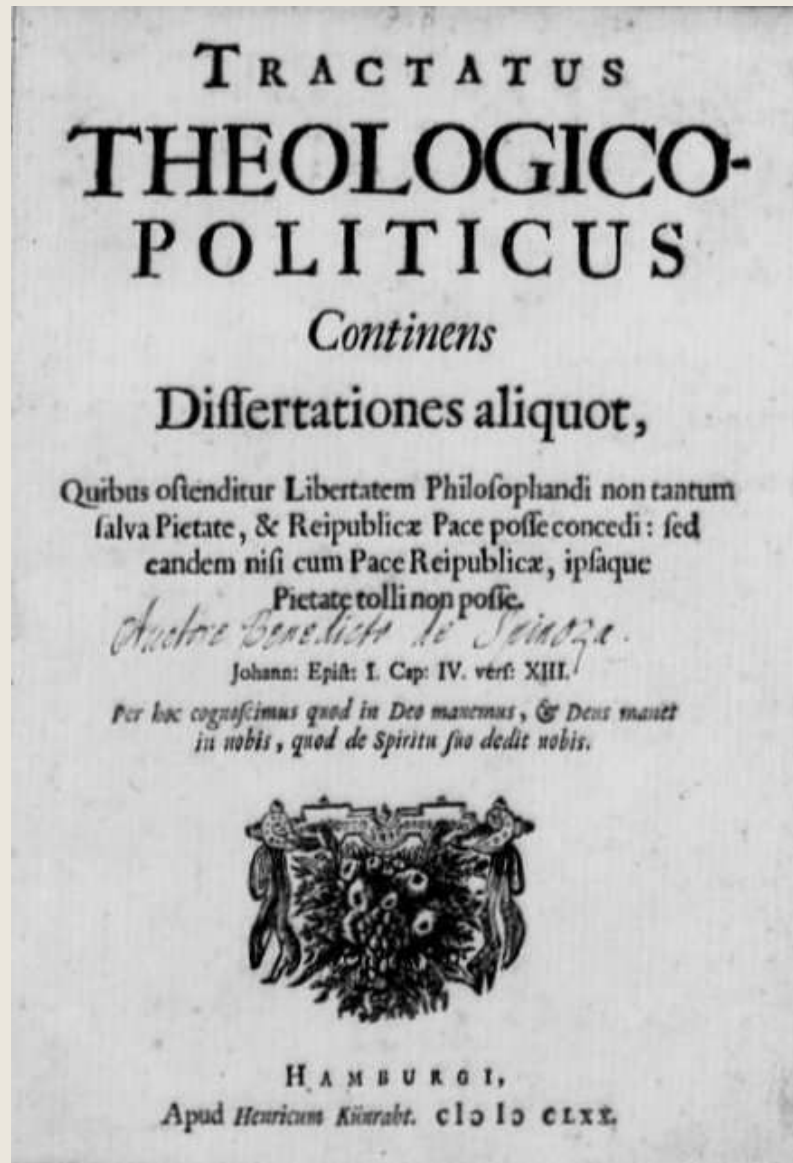


# Natural right and conatus

- Similar to Hobbes, the essence of all beings is self-determination: a striving to persevere in their own being (*conatus*)
- In human beings this conatus is *desire*
- Human values of 'good' and 'evil' are relative to what end we think we desire
- Emotions (affects) are experiences of an increase or decrease in our power of acting
- 'Nothing is more useful to man than man' (*Ethics* 4p18)
- Freedom consists in understanding the causes of our affects and determining how to live most joyously, via reason



# Theological-Political Treatise (1670)



‘In which the freedom to philosophise may not only be allowed without danger to piety and the stability of the republic but cannot be refused without destroying the peace of the republic and piety itself’. – Title-page.

- Humans naturally susceptible to fear, which is manipulated by monarchs and religious groups
- Defend intellectual and religious tolerance against growing hostility
- Prioritise freedom of speech and democracy
- Place religious belief under sovereign power



Konstantin Kapidagli, *Enthronement Ceremony of Selim III*, 1789





Domenico Garguilo, *Piazza del Mercato during the Revolt of Masaniello* (Naples 1647)

- For Spinoza, obedience is not the mark of an advanced civilisation...
- It is more likely to result in the collapse and destruction of a society
- Take a look at the remarks under 'Voluntary Servitude' and discuss in groups...
  
- *How have the ruling powers managed to deceive people into obedience?*
- *What kind of model might Spinoza prefer?*



# Spinoza's social contract

- Like Hobbes, human beings share a natural state defined by self-interest and inevitable conflict, which we inevitably leave for the sake of our safety and security
- Communities are formed out of agreements to give up one's natural right for the common good and protect each other
- But we *cannot* give up our own right to think, speak and judge
- This is a good thing: by bringing together citizens in a democracy, the widest set of arguments can be heard and the best view will be put forward
- Freedom of speech and democracy are not only natural, but the most effective way of ensuring a society's security and well-being

‘the democratic republic ... seems to be the most natural and to be that which approaches most closely to the freedom nature bestows on every person. In a democracy no one transfers their natural right to another in such a way that they are not thereafter consulted but rather to the majority of the whole society of which they are a part. In this way all remain equal as they had been previously, in a state of nature.’ (16.11)

‘How pernicious it is for both religion and state to allow ministers of things sacred to acquire the right to make decrees or handle the business of government. ... Government is bound to become extremely oppressive where [dissident] opinions which are within the domain of each individual, a right of which no one can give up, are treated as a crime. Where this happens, the anger of the common people tends to prevail.’ (18.6)



‘Were it as easy to control people's minds as to restrain their tongues, every sovereign would rule securely and there would be no oppressive governments. ... This is why a government which seeks to control people's minds is considered oppressive, and any sovereign power appears to harm its subjects and usurp their rights when it tries to tell them what they must accept as true and reject as false ... For these things are within each person's own right, which he cannot give up even were he to wish to do so.’ (20.2)

‘the purpose of the state is not to turn people from rational beings into beasts or automata, but rather to allow their minds and bodies to develop in their own ways in security and enjoy the free use of reason, and not to participate in conflicts based on hatred, anger or deceit or in malicious disputes with each other. Therefore, the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom.’ (20.6)

# Rounding up on the state of nature





# Rounding up

- The *state of nature* is a concept to describe how humans live before organised societies emerged
- This state is violent, amoral and defined by self-interest, struggle and conflict
- It leads to the necessity of a *social contract*, in which people agree to cooperate and trade individual freedom for state protection
- For Hobbes it requires absolute obedience to a sovereign monarch, including giving up our right to free speech and religious belief
- For Spinoza and others following, it leads to free speech, democracy and liberalism

# Class recap

- Explore why states collapse
- Discuss the 'state of nature' and the 'social contract'
- Understand Hobbes' arguments for natural law and the necessity of obeying the sovereign
- Introduce Spinoza's argument for democracy
- *Next week:* Locke and Rousseau on the state of nature and social justice