

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19724-3 - Hobbes on Resistance: Defying the Leviathan

Susanne Sreedhar

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## HOBBS ON RESISTANCE

Hobbes's political theory has traditionally been taken to be an endorsement of state power and a prescription for unconditional obedience to the sovereign's will. In this book, Susanne Sreedhar develops a novel interpretation of Hobbes's theory of political obligation and explores important cases where Hobbes claims that subjects have a right to disobey and resist state power, even when their lives are not directly threatened. Drawing attention to this broader set of rights, her comprehensive analysis of Hobbes's account of political disobedience reveals a unified and coherent theory of resistance that has previously gone unnoticed and undefended. Her book will appeal to all who are interested in the nature and limits of political authority, the right of self-defense, the right of revolution, and the modern origins of these issues.

SUSANNE SREEDHAR is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Boston University. Her main research area is the history of political thought, especially in the early modern period, and her work has been published in *Political Theory*. This is her first book.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19724-3 - Hobbes on Resistance: Defying the Leviathan

Susanne Sreedhar

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# HOBBS ON RESISTANCE

*Defying the Leviathan*

SUSANNE SREEDHAR



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19724-3 - Hobbes on Resistance: Defying the Leviathan

Susanne Sreedhar

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico CityCambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521197243](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521197243)

© Susanne Sreedhar 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*  
Sreedhar, Susanne.

Hobbes on resistance : defying the Leviathan / Susanne Sreedhar.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-521-19724-3

1. Political obligation. 2. Civil disobedience. 3. Hobbes, Thomas, 1588–1679.  
4. Hobbes, Thomas, 1588–1679. Leviathan. I. Title.

JC329.5.s68 2010

172'.1—dc22

2010016802

ISBN 978-0-521-19724-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## *Contents*

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page vi</i>
Introduction	I
1 Hobbes's right of self-defense	7
2 The true liberties of subjects	53
3 Limited obedience to an unlimited sovereign	89
4 Is <i>Leviathan</i> a "rebel's catechism"?	132
Conclusion	168
<i>Bibliography</i>	176
<i>Index</i>	181

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19724-3 - Hobbes on Resistance: Defying the Leviathan

Susanne Sreedhar

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## *Acknowledgements*

This project has benefited from the assistance of many people. Gratitude goes first to my former professors at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: Jerry Postema, Bernie Boxill, Tom Hill, Geoff Sayre-McCord, and Don Garrett. Each provided invaluable guidance and advice not only when I was writing my PhD thesis on this topic, but also in the years since. I am also in debt to my colleagues at Boston University: Aaron Garrett, David Lyons, Amelie Rorty, David Roochnik, and Ken Simons. They formed a reading group to work through the manuscript as a whole, providing substantive comments and suggestions. I count myself lucky to have such generous and supportive colleagues and mentors.

I am especially grateful for the excellent critical feedback that I have received from Kinch Hoekstra, Sharon Lloyd, and Johann Sommerville. Their careful and insightful scrutiny challenged me to think through some of the main problems in greater detail and greatly improved the account that I advance in this book. In doing so, they taught me how much I have yet to learn about Hobbes, and just how much thinking on this topic remains to be done. I doubt that I have provided adequate answers to every challenge they raised, but their criticisms and suggestions have made this a much better book.

I am incredibly lucky to have a small but mighty team of volunteer editorial and support staff, who not only read and then reread large portions of the manuscript as it developed, but also remained an infinitely patient and helpfully engaging audience as I formulated and reformulated my thoughts and arguments. Heather Burke, Katya Hosking, Nancy Lawrence, Colleen Murphy, and Matt Smith have served in this role from the very beginning. Neither the manuscript, nor I myself, would have survived without them. Their willingness to become involuntary Hobbes scholars for so many years is both astonishing and admirable. A special mention goes to Alice MacLachlan, whose help in the final stages of this

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19724-3 - Hobbes on Resistance: Defying the Leviathan

Susanne Sreedhar

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgements*

vii

project was absolutely invaluable. Everyone should be fortunate enough to have friends like these.

I must also thank Bryce Huebner, who has been not only my toughest and most loyal interlocutor, but also, in many ways, my philosophical partner-in-crime. Without his unique combination of deadly analytic precision, delight in all things philosophical, unwavering patience, and dark sense of humor, all of this would not be.

An earlier version of Chapter 1 appeared as “Defending the Hobbesian Right of Self-Defense,” *Political Theory* 6, no. 36 (December 2008): 781–802. I have also presented portions of the manuscript at various conferences and colloquia too numerous to mention. In each case, I am grateful for the thoughtful and insightful challenges that have been offered by members of the audience. This list of acknowledgements, like my thinking on Hobbes more generally, remains a work in progress. To all of you who have helped me along the way, please know that I am grateful. And of course, I take full responsibility for whatever mistakes remain.

I dedicate this book to my mother, Kathy Sreedhar, whose passion and power have always inspired me and whose enthusiasm and abundant pride have continually sustained me.