

‘Security as A Norm in Hobbes’s Theory of War:
A Critique of Schmitt’s Interpretation of Hobbes’s Approach to International Relations’

Luc Foisneau

Despite its political origins in Nazi Germany, Carl Schmitt’s approach to international relations still exerts a fascination and claims a right to impose its mark on the reading of Hobbes. One explanation for this fascination is that Schmitt’s theory is supposed to help us consider the double aspect of a classical sovereign state: as a means, on the one hand, of limiting the intensity of war within the frontiers of Europe, and, on the other hand, as an instrument for waging wars of destruction beyond the borders of Europe. Being as it is a geopolitical approach to law and politics, Schmitt’s analysis has been claimed to help us understand Hobbes’s philosophy in what would be its real, that is, geographical, international context.

In the first part of the paper, I shall try to show that the aspect of Hobbes’s foreign politics which is stressed in *The Nomos of the Earth* – a book published in 1950, but whose material is already present in articles and essays of the war period – is part of a broader interpretation of international relations based on sovereign territorial states at war with one another. That international theory is based at the same time on the assumption of territorial sovereignty as the ultimate definition of politics, and on the hypothesis that a plurality of sovereign states is less dangerous for peace than the spiritual competition between various Christian faiths, since it allows for a moderate state of war within the frontiers of Europe.

In the second part, I turn to what Schmitt says about Hobbes’s international relations theory in the context of the division of the earth according to what Schmitt called “global lines”. Global lines theory is used to explain how the Hobbesian state of nature could also

apply to the terrible war of all against all supposed to be raging beyond certain geographical lines secretly agreed upon by the European powers.

In a last part of this essay, I offer evidence for the contradiction between the Schmittian interpretation and Hobbes's international relations theory.

Biography:

Luc Foisneau was trained as a philosopher at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (1983-87), received his Ph.D. from the Sorbonne in 1996 and his Habilitation from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in 2007. From 1987 to 1992 he was a lecturer in the Department of philosophy of the University of Tours. From 2003 to 2006 he was a Visiting Research Associate in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. Since 2006 he has been a CNRS Director of Research at the Centre de Recherches Politiques Raymond Aron in the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

Bibliography:

'A Farewell to Leviathan: Foucault and Hobbes on Power, Sovereignty and War', in : G.A.J. Rogers, T. Sorell & J. Kraye (ed.), *Insiders and Outsiders in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 207–222.

Governo e Soberania. O pensamento político moderno de Maquiavel a Rousseau (Porto Alegre: Linus Editores, 2009) 200 p.

'Personal Identity and Human Mortality: Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz', in: S. Hutton & P. Schuurman (ed.), *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008) 89–105.

(ed.), *Dictionary of Seventeenth-Century French Philosophers* (London/New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2008) 2 vols, 1314 p.

<http://www.continuumbooks.com/books/detail.aspx?BookId=122974&SearchType=Basic>

[ic](#)

‘Omnipotence, Necessity and Sovereignty: Hobbes and the Absolute and Ordinary Powers of God’, in: P. Springborg (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 271–290.

With T. Sorell (ed.), *Leviathan After 350 Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

Hobbes et la toute-puissance de Dieu (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000)

422 p.

For a comprehensive bibliography see:

<http://crpra.ehess.fr/document.php?id=79>