

JON PARKIN
(University of York)

‘Thomas Hobbes and the problem of self-censorship’

Monday 5th March

The Seminar will take place in the Beves Room, King’s College

The author

Jon Parkin read Modern History at St Hugh’s College, Oxford, taking his BA in 1991. He then crossed to Cambridge to pursue doctoral research under the supervision of Quentin Skinner, completing his PhD on the natural law theory of Richard Cumberland in 1995. From 1995 to 1998 he was the Centenary Research Fellow at Selwyn College, and from 1998 to 1999 a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow at King’s College London. He became a lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of York in 1999. He had been led to the study of natural law by an early conviction of the importance of Stoicism to political thinking in the seventeenth century; but to take the measure of Richard Cumberland in particular, he also had to acquire a detailed knowledge of the personnel and intellectual positions of the early Royal Society. A combination of the two informed his doctoral monograph, *Science, Religion and Politics in Restoration England* (Woodbridge, 1999), which he followed with an edition of Richard Cumberland’s thousand-page *Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005). Working on Cumberland in turn alerted him to the complexity of responses to Hobbes in Restoration England: rather than a ‘hunting of *Leviathan*’ – the title of Samuel Mintz’s 1962 study of Hobbes’s reception – the response of many, and especially of Latitudinarian divines, had been to ‘tame’ and adapt that work’s argument for an Erastian Church. The resulting monograph, *Taming the Leviathan* (Cambridge, 2007), represents by far the most thorough analysis of Hobbes’s reception in England, and a major contribution to understanding his achievement. Subsequently Parkin has maintained his interest in Hobbes and early enlightenment natural law theory, addressing particularly the question whether Hobbes was an advocate of ‘toleration’; with Tim Stanton, he is editor of *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment* (London: British Academy, forthcoming 2012). He also has in hand a prosopographical study of the Latitudinarians, challenging the tendency of narrowly religious historians of the Restoration to discount their significance. His major current project, however, is a historical examination of the problem of self-censorship. The paper offered here approaches this question through the thought of Hobbes.

Abstract of the paper

The paper examines some early modern attitudes to the question of self-censorship and considers Hobbes’s work in relation to this theme. Although Hobbes is usually understood to favour self-censorship, Parkin suggests that one of Hobbes’s purposes is to eliminate the problem of self-censorship entirely. As well as offering fresh insight into the character of Hobbes’s project, the paper opens up the wider early-modern discussion of the issue of self-censorship.