Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times (Cambridge University Press, January 2018)

This book traces the responses of three canonical political realists—Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Hans Morgenthau—to eruptions of apocalyptic rhetoric, imagery, and politics. I treat apocalypticism as a very particular kind of utopianism that is premised on a belief in the imminent end of the known world and the arrival of a radically new future. Contemporary realists tend to position their pragmatic approaches to politics against “utopian” alternatives, which they reject for being at best unrealizable and at worst profoundly dangerous. However, in tracing the historical engagement between political realism and apocalypticism, I find a more complex and troubled relationship. Through an historical and textual analysis of the work of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau, I argue that these thinkers’ responses to apocalypticism take one of two forms. The first is rejection—a principled and considered turn away from apocalypticism and toward a tragic worldview that emphasizes the ease with which virtuous actions can produce terrible consequences, insists on the limits to effective political action, and warns of the impossibility of final and enduring political settlements. This is the approach taken by Machiavelli in his later work and Morgenthau in
his earlier work. The second response is redirection—an attempt to draw on the rhetorical, visual, and imaginative resources of apocalypticism to combat its enthusiastic excesses. This approach fights apocalypse with apocalypse. This is the tack taken by Hobbes in order to make his case for the Leviathan state and by Morgenthau in his later writings on nuclear weapons. Taken together, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau’s responses to hopes and fears about the end of the world offer us a series of meditations on how best to respond to ongoing and prospective catastrophes.

**Absolving God: Religion and Rhetoric in Hobbes’s Political Thought** (in progress)
My second book will explain changes in Thomas Hobbes’s (1588-1679) strategies of religious argument across his major political works. While there is a growing literature on the importance of Hobbes’s religious arguments to his political project, there has been virtually no work on how his persuasive strategy changes over time. My book will show that Hobbes changes his strategy in three major ways—with an increasing focus on Scripture, with a turn toward the Old Testament, and with the embrace of a multi-layered religious argument—directly in response to patterns of popular religious and political discourse in England. Hobbes was not merely an armchair philosopher engaged in abstract debates with scholars. He was a polemicist who wanted to make religious faith safe for political order and civil peace. To make this case, the book will use a methodology that is new to this area of political theory. I will use the tools of automated text analysis (e.g. topic modelling and meme tracking) to identify shifts in religious discourse in the pamphlet literature of seventeenth-century England.

**PUBLISHED OR FORTHCOMING PAPERS**


ESSAYS, REVIEWS, AND SHORTER PIECES


- Selected by *Foreign Affairs* as one of the best pieces of 2016.


- An extended version of this essay will appear in Thom Brooks (ed.), *Political Emotions: Towards a Decent Public Sphere* (Palgrave MacMillan, under contract).


WORKING PAPERS

“The Wages of Fear and the Possibility of Hope: How Should We Feel When We Talk About Climate Change” (for inclusion in *Philosophy and Climate Change*, eds. Mark Budolfson, Tristram McPherson, and David Plunkett, under contract with Oxford University Press).


SELECTED CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

**Presenter**

“The Wages of Fear and the Possibility of Hope: How Should We Feel When We Talk About Climate Change?”
- Safra Center Anniversary Conference, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, May 2017 (invited)
- SSRC Anxieties of Democracy program, Working Group on Climate Change Workshop, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, November 2016 (invited)

“Absolving God’s Laws: Thomas Hobbes’s Scriptural Strategies”
- Western Political Science Association Conference, Vancouver, BC, March 2017
- Political Theory Workshop, UCSD, February 2017 (invited)
- American Political Science Association Conference, Philadelphia, PA, September 2016
- Princeton Graduate Political Theory Conference (keynote, invited), April 2016

“Mosaic Leviathan: Religion and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes”

11/27/2017
• Western Political Science Association Conference, San Diego, CA, March 2016
• Political, Legal, and Moral Theory Workshop, UC-Berkeley, September 2015
• American Political Science Association Conference, San Francisco, CA, September 2015
• LSR Seminar, University Center for Human Values, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, March 2015

“Thomas Hobbes: ‘At the Edge of Promises and Prophecies’”
• Wars of Religion: Past and Present Conference, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, April 2015 (invited)
• Harvard Political Theory Colloquium/Program on Constitutional Government, Cambridge, MA, February 2015 (invited)
• Political Theory Workshop, Columbia University, New York City, NY, December 2014

“Hans Morgenthau and Nuclear Catastrophe”
• Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, April 2015 (invited)
• Climate Futures Initiative, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, February 2015 (invited)
• Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, May 2014 (invited)
• Permanent Catastrophe Workshop, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, April 2014 (invited)

Presenter/participant, “Rethinking Sovereignty,” Kandersteg Seminar, Remarque Institute (New York University), Kandersteg, Switzerland, March 2015 (invited)

“Machiavelli’s Savonarolan Moment,” University of California—Davis, Davis, CA, April 2014 (invited)

“Political Realism and Moral Corruption”
• Political Philosophy Colloquium, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, April 2014 (invited)
• Western Political Science Association, Seattle, WA, April 2014
• Political Theory Workshop, Yale University, New Haven, CT, September 2013 (invited)
• Classical Realism Workshop, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, May 2013 (invited)
• Political Philosophy Workshop, Brown University, Providence, RI, March 2013 (invited)

“Mirrors for Princes and Sultans” (with Lisa Blaydes and Justin Grimmer)
• Political Methodology Society, Athens, GA, July 2014
• American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, August 2013

“Hans Morgenthau and the Postwar Apocalyptic Imaginary”
• Central European University Summer Lecture Series on Realism and Religion, Budapest, July 2013 (invited)
• Department of Political Science Workshop, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, March 2013 (invited)
• Western Political Science Association, Portland, OR, March 2012


“Feigning the World to be Annihilated: Thomas Hobbes and the Apocalyptic Imaginary”
- Political Theory Workshop, Stanford University, December 2011
- American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2010
- Canadian Political Science Association, Montreal, QC, June 2010
- Association for Political Theory, College Station, TX, October 2009

Speaker, “Roundtable: Realism and Rights,” American Political Science Association, Seattle, WA, September 2011

Organizer
Roundtable co-organizer (with Daniel Levine) and participant, “Why does Morgenthau Matter Now?” International Studies Association, Toronto, ON, March 2014

Discussant
Discussant, “Morgenthau in America,” International Studies Association, Toronto, ON, March 2014
Discussant, “Society Through Contemporary Lens,” American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, August 2013
Discussant for Martha Nussbaum’s “Tragic and Comic Festivals,” Political Theory Workshop, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, February 2012

SELECTED FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND HONORS
Internal Faculty Fellowship, Stanford Humanities Center, Stanford University, 2017-18
Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Faculty Fellow, University Center for Human Values, Princeton University, 2014-15
Brown Faculty Fellowship, Stanford University, 2013
Dean’s Award for Achievement in the First Years of Teaching, Stanford University, 2013
American Political Science Association’s Leo Strauss Award for the best doctoral dissertation in Political Philosophy, 2012
Janice N. and Milton J. Esman Graduate Dissertation Prize, Department of Government, Cornell University, 2012

Mellon Fellowship, Department of Government, Cornell University, 2010-2011

Doctoral Fellowship, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, 2008-2009

LaFeber Award for Teaching Excellence, Department of Government, Cornell University, 2008

Summer Language Training Grant, Cornell University School of Graduate Studies, 2008

Travel Grant, Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 2008

Sage Fellowship, Department of Government, Cornell University, 2005-2006

**TEACHING**

*Department of Political Science, Stanford University*


POLISCI 238T/ INTNLREL 136: History of International Relations Thought (2014)


POLISCI 435R/PHIL 372R: Political Realism (2011)

*Department of Government, Cornell University*

GOVT 100.03: Evil in International Politics (instructor) (2007)

**DEPARTMENT AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

*Department of Political Science, Stanford University*

Member, Senior Political Theory Search Committee (2015-2016)

Chair, Graduate Admissions Committee (2014)

Co-organizer (with Josh Cohen), Political Theory Workshop (2011-2013)

Political Theory Field Convenor (2011-2012, 2015-2016)

*McCoy Center for Ethics in Society*

Faculty advisory board (2014-present)

*Program in Modern Thought and Literature, Stanford University*

Faculty committee (2012-present)

*Department of Government, Cornell University*

Organizer, Political Theory Workshop (2010-2011)

*Anonymous Journal Review*


*Manuscript and Proposal Review*

Harvard University Press, Chicago University Press

**REFERENCES**
References available upon request.