Write a 750-900 word essay on the following topic. Please include a title (not on a separate page) and feel free to single space and to print on both sides of a single sheet of paper. Your essay is due on MONDAY September 12 by 4pm in the box outside my office (CLA 251).

Does Hobbes have a liberal or absolutist theory of sovereignty?

Be sure to define any key terms, (e.g., liberalism, sovereignty, and absolutism) and include at least one claim-objection-rejoinder sequence.

What do I mean by a micro-essay?

Micro-essays are short (750-900 words) analytical essays in which the writer explores a specific problem or puzzle in a larger text. In the micro-essay, the writer expresses an overall claim about the problem and then proceeds to defend the claim, often by anticipating objections to that very claim or how it is defended. The micro-essay format is designed to improve the student’s ability to focus a reader’s attention on a central claim—a skill essential in almost every other form of writing.

Suggestions for improving persuasiveness in a micro-essay format

1. Setting up the context of the problem. While context is important, keep introductory contextual remarks to a minimum. Try to limit them to the first few sentences, e.g., “Many scholars claim that the Englishman Thomas Hobbes was the first liberal. In fact Hobbes is not a liberal because he defends the sovereign’s power to use fear to compel individual obedience and consent. Reading Hobbes forces liberals to more carefully define legitimate sovereignty. Liberals should argue that forced consent is not real consent and that sovereigns that must resort to force are not legitimate.”

2. Stating your claims about the problem simply. Whatever issue is raised, the micro-essay writer often wants to make a number of claims—either in support or opposition—about how some author has approached or addressed the issue. The choice of claims is an important strategic issue for a writer because persuasiveness is often a function of both the number (quantity) of claims made and their importance (quality). It is not a bad idea to include a brief summary in the introductory paragraph of all the claims to follow in the essay.

3. Using evidence to support your claims. At the very least, each claim should be supported with evidence. In general writing evidence comes in many forms: a personal story (anecdote); survey results; matters of fact; a specific example followed by logical analysis; etc. But in a political theory class, the most important source of evidence is direct quotation from the text. Be sure to include a page reference for each textual citation. Since we are all using the same text, page references can simply be included in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

4. Anticipating plausible objections to your claims. Persuasiveness depends not only on the quality and quantity of your evidence; it also requires acknowledging the potential weak points in your analysis and plausible objections to your claims. Nothing disarms a reader more than encountering their objections fairly and charitably related. Although supplying plausible objections to your own position takes time, and the ability to think outside your usual views, the practice adds invaluable weight and quality to your claims.

5. Delivering the knock-out rejoinder. Once you have provided the objection, proceed immediately to show why it is not in fact so plausible or much of an objection after all. You are not able to offer as many claims when you provide objections and rejoinders, but you more thoroughly cover the ground you do cover. Thus this approach should be considered for at least one claim in every micro-essay you write.