

Phil 114, January 25, 2012
Hobbes: *Leviathan*, Ch. 13, 17

Hobbes's aim in Ch. 13: to show that the state of *nature*—the state in which a certain *artifact*, namely a *sovereign*, is missing—is a state of war.

Natural equality

- Of course, there are physical and intellectual differences.
- But all men are equal in the sense that that none of us is *so vastly* superior to the rest of us in his physical or intellectual abilities that he can be reasonably assured that he will *not be killed* by the rest of us. Even if I cannot win a fair fight with you, I can win through deception or number: “secret machination” or “confederacy with others.”
- By “men” here, Hobbes does *not* mean, as many of his contemporaries would have meant, “male human beings.” Hobbes rejects the Aristotelian view that men are naturally superior to women and hence have legitimate authority over them. Why? Because no man can be reasonably assured that women won’t kill him!
- Hobbes also rejects Aristotle’s defense of natural slavery.

Competition

- People often desire the same things.
- If there were obvious, significant differences in natural ability, then the weak would surrender to the strong without a fight.
- But there are no such differences. Everyone has reason to think that he might win.
- So people “attempteth,” and attempteth to repel attempts.

Diffidence

- Even if I haven’t yet faced competition, I recognize that I might in the future.
- Should I wait for an attack, or should I make a preemptive strike = “anticipation”?
- If I sit back, then my adversaries can only grow stronger, by subduing others.
- But if I go on the attack, then my initial adversaries will be relatively weak,
- and by subduing them and exploiting their resources, I will be at an advantage with respect to my subsequent adversaries.
- My adversaries will think the same way.
- So, I can expect them to go on the attack = mutual distrust, or “diffidence.”
- So, the best I can do is to beat them to it.

Glory

- Those given to (vain)glory will attack because they overestimate their abilities,
- and because they enjoy the experience of subduing others,
- and because they are easily dishonored.
- The presence of such people in our midst only reinforces our decision to anticipate.

These three causes—competition, diffidence, and glory—make the state of nature a state of war, with the famous consequence that human life within it is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

To leave this state of war, we need to leave the state of nature. If *no natural* man has is so vastly superior to the rest to effectively deter them from going on the attack, we need to devise an *artificial* man who has this power: the *sovereign*.

Interpretation 1: Knowledge and desire for survival suffice for war

Why does it raise each person’s chances of survival to go on the attack? After all, if *no one* goes on the attack, then *everyone’s* chances of survival will be better than if *everyone* goes on the attack. So how can it *improve* each person’s chances of survival to contribute to a situation in which his own chances of survival are *definitely worse*?

State of Nature Game: Interpretation 1

	<i>If the other guy sat still</i>	<i>If the other guy went on the attack</i>
<i>If you sit still</i>	+\$50, +\$50	-\$20, +\$100
<i>If you attack</i>	+\$100, -\$20	+\$1, +\$1

You should go on the attack *no matter what* the other guy does.

How does the sovereign remedy this situation? By changing each person’s situation so that it no longer promotes his self-preservation to go on the attack. In particular, by credibly threatening to punish anyone who gets out of line.

The Commonwealth Game

	<i>If the other guy obeys</i>	<i>If the other guy rebels</i>
<i>If you obey</i>	+\$20, +\$20	+\$10, -\$100
<i>If you rebel</i>	-\$100, +\$10	+\$1, +\$1

Interpretation 2: Glory is necessary for war

Why should the state of nature game have the payoffs described? After all, if you *know* that the other guy is your natural equal, then you know that you risk your self-preservation in attacking.

State of Nature Game: Reinterpretation of 1

	<i>If the other sat still</i>	<i>If the other went on the attack</i>
<i>If you sit still</i>	+\$20, +\$20	-\$40, +\$10
<i>If you attack</i>	+\$10, -\$40	+\$1, +\$1

- You should go on the attack *only if* the other guy went on the attack.
- Why should *this* state of nature be a state of war?
- Because of diffidence? But why expect that the other guy *will* go on the attack?
- Because of competition? But why is there competition?
- Because of the insatiable “desire of power after power”? But why is there this desire?
- Because of competition? But why is there competition? Because there is the insatiable desire for power after power.
- How does the vicious cycle get started?

Because some people are afflicted with glory. They (i) desire something other than self-preservation, such as the thrill of victory or not being dishonored, and (ii) believe that they are more powerful than you. To them, the payoffs look different:

State of Nature Game: Interpretation 2

	<i>If the other guy sits still</i>	<i>If the other guy goes on the attack</i>
<i>If you sit still</i>	+\$20, +\$20	-\$40, +\$50
<i>If you attack</i>	+\$10, -\$40	+\$1, +\$1

Now other guy is inclined to go on the attack, *no matter what you do*.

Although the other guy attacks because he desires something other than survival and does not know that you are just as powerful, you may go on the attack even though—indeed, because—you desire your survival and you know that you are just as powerful. The root of the problem is glory.

How do we deal with glory? The sovereign: our artificial Leviathan.

1. It rids potential gloryseekers of the *unjustified belief* that they are more powerful than others, by making them feel small. Therefore, first, they will see the risks of going on the attack, and, second, they will be less vulnerable to being dishonored.
2. It counteracts their desire to enjoy the pleasures of conquest, by making it so certain that, if they disobey, they will die, that it becomes a bad bargain to risk death for the chance of such pleasures. But what if the desire for such pleasures is stronger than the desire for self-preservation?

Review Questions:

1. Can you think of another real-life situation with the structure of the state of nature game in interpretation 1 above? This would be a case in which each person is better off if she does something (no matter what the others do), even though this leads to a situation that is worse for each person than a situation in which none of them did the thing in question. How might the problem be solved?
2. Vainglory, as we have seen, makes people more likely to go on the attack. Why? Is it because vainglory involves the unjustified belief that one is more powerful than other people? Or is it because vainglory involves enjoying vivid confirmations of that thought? Or is it because of both? Explain.
3. What does Hobbes mean by: “From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends”? Why does he think that this “equality of hope” is a bad thing?
4. He “maketh men by nature, some more worthy to command (meaning the wiser sort, such as he thought himself to be for his philosophy), others to serve (meaning those that had strong bodies, but were not philosophers as he), as if master and servant were not introduced by consent of men, but by difference of wit” (XV, 21). Who is “he”; whose view is Hobbes discussing? Does Hobbes agree with the view?
5. “Hitherto I have set forth the nature of man, whose pride and other passions have compelled him to submit himself to government, together with the great power of his governor, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of *Job*, where God, having set forth the great power of

Leviathan, calleth him King of the Proud” (XXVIII, 27). Why does Hobbes liken government to a monster sent by God to tame the *pride* of men? How is the answer related to the following quotation: “As in the presence of the master, the servants are equal, and without any honour at all, so are the subjects in the presence of the sovereign. And those they shine, some more, some less, when they are out of his sight, yet in his presence they shine no more than the stars in [the] presence of the sun” (XVIII, 19).