

Phil 114, January 25, 2007
Hobbes: The State of Nature as a State of War

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.

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 self-preservation suffice for war

Why does it promote each person's self-preservation 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?
- 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?
- 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 get rid of it. We need something like *Leviathan*: a monster sent by God to tame the pride of men. The sovereign is our Leviathan.