

Hobbes: Against Democracy

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From the State-of-Nature to the Sovereign

PRISONERS DILEMMA

	Cooperate	Defect
Cooperate	2 \ 2	0 \ 5
Defect	5 \ 0	1 \ 1

In Game Theory, we say that the strategy set $(\mathbf{Defect}, \mathbf{Defect})$ is a *Nash Equilibrium*: no one can gain from unilaterally defecting from this strategy.

If each player is rational (and self-interested), they will prefer **Defect** to **Cooperate**. That being said, both players prefer the outcome that would come about were they to *both* choose **Cooperate**.

- **Hobbesian Hypothesis:** In the State-of-Nature, we will all confront many, many situations of this form.

Individual Rationality compels us to **Defect**, but, collectively, we will do better if we all **Cooperate**. The role of the sovereign is to resolve this tension: organize society so that what is collectively best will also be what is Individually Rational.

SOVEREIGN'S INTERVENTION

	Cooperate	Defect
Cooperate	2 \ 2	0 \ 5 - ϵ
Defect	5 - ϵ \ 0	1 - ϵ \ 1 - ϵ

Suppose that the sovereign institutes a policy of issuing a *penalty* ϵ to anyone who choose **Defect**. The Prisoners Dilemma evaporates (so long as ϵ is large enough) only if the penalty can be issued *effectively* and *credibly*.

What Must the Sovereign Be Like?

1. It must have *unrestricted* power.

2. It must have *undivided* power.
3. It *represents* "The People" (understood as a unified collective), which is a virtual entity created by the deference to the sovereign's absolute power.

Why Not Democracy?

Defensive Move: Democracy doesn't provide us with more freedom.

One reason to favor a democratic political system is this:

A free, democratic state is necessary for individual freedom.

Hobbes disagrees. He argues that a democracy *does not* provide its citizens with greater individual freedom. The argument turns on Hobbes' notion of individual freedom:

Freedom as Non-Obstruction. "A FREE-MAN is he that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to do."

On this account, your freedom to do *X* is compromised when (i) you have the ability to do *X*, (ii) you're disposed (or have the inclination, or want) to do *X*, (iii) the thing that prevents you from doing *X* is something "external" to you.

Offensive Move: Democracy is unstable. Democracy reproduce within themselves the same problematic features that are found in Hobbes' State-of-Nature.

1. The nature of power in a democracy will allow the "power hungry" to manipulate the masses, steering the state away from the common good.
2. The power in a democracy is *divided*. And that allows for inefficiency. It might lead to rebellion.
3. The power in a democracy is revocable. But that recapitulates the State-of-Nature problem once again.

Democracy and Bullshit

What is *bullshit*?

FRANKFURT: Indifference to the truth.

COHEN: Discourse that is obscure, and cannot be made less obscure.

What problem does *bullshit* give rise to in a democracy?

In other words, you are free — you have political liberty — only if you live in a democracy. Otherwise, you are not free. But being free is really important. So, we should favor a democratic state.