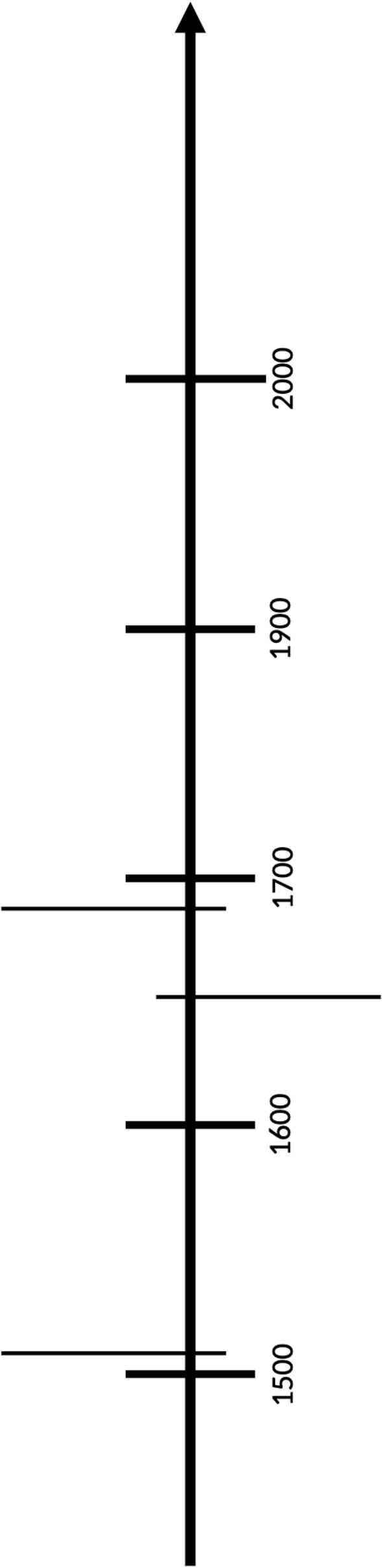


1274: St. Thomas Aquinas finishes
the *Summa Theologica*

1513: Machiavelli writes *The Prince*

1689: Locke publishes *Two Treatises of Government*

1651: Hobbes publishes *Leviathan*



- For Hobbes, the state of nature emerges when political power disappears.
We can also feel it when political power starts to slip away or when it's out of reach.
- What are some concrete examples of moments where we feel that the state of nature is gradually emerging? What are examples of moments where it fully exists?

- For Hobbes, the state of nature emerges when political power disappears. We can also feel it when political power starts to slip away or when it's out of reach.
- What are some concrete examples of moments where we feel that the state of nature is gradually emerging? What are examples of moments where it fully exists?
 - Hobbes and Locke were very influenced by the conflicts between natives and colonists in America
 - Civil wars, periods of intense factionalism
 - For Hobbes, the international affairs between countries is a giant state of nature
 - Natural disasters, breakdown of the social order
 - Even in everyday moments (being followed in a dark alley)
 - Hobbes' ideas can even be applied to talk about institutional management. For instance: moments when an institution (e.g. business, political institution) has to cut funds, which creates heightened conflicts between groups and individuals to secure scarce resources.

- It's weird to study Hobbes: he is more absolutist than even many of the absolutists that lived at that time. Isn't he a step backward from modern ideas?
- What are some of Hobbes' ideas that feel very modern?
 - Individuals are naturally equal. Inequality is not natural and emerges because of social factors (property, relations of power).
 - Individuals naturally have equal rights. Unequal rights (nobility, clergy) emerge once social and hierarchical relations are established.
 - Individuals do not act for the sake of virtue or Christian morality, but for the sake of their own self-interest
 - The point of government is to protect the individuals and their interests, not to make them moral
 - The government is consented by the individuals. It is not natural.

- Popular sovereignty: a major idea of modern politics is that political power is legitimate insofar as it comes from the people
- Does this mean that the people should take decisions about politics all the time, like in the Greek direct democracies?
 - No, it means that the government must rule in the name of the people, and that the people gets to change its representatives
 - Modern thinkers are often afraid of the problems that direct democracies could bring
- Of course, Hobbes is an absolutist and he wants individuals to decide about only one thing at one point in time: who is the sovereign?
 - Thinkers like Locke will qualify Hobbes' theory and introduce barriers to the power of the government (division between executive (government) and legislative (parliament) powers)
 - They will give more importance to representatives and methods to change them (elections)

- Let's look at these five ideas, it will structure our class nicely:
- Individuals are naturally equal
- Individuals naturally have equal rights
- Individuals exit the state of nature and enter politics out of self-interest: they want to avoid the problems of the state of nature, and they want to preserve themselves and their interests.
- Individuals consent to being governed. The state is not natural.
- The point of the government is to preserve peace and protect the individuals

(...) see how easy it is for even the weakest individual to kill someone stronger than himself. Whatever confidence you have in your own strength, you simply cannot believe that you have been made superior to others by nature. Those who have equal power against each other, are equal; and those who have the greatest power, the power to kill, in fact have equal power. Therefore all men are equal to each other by nature. Our actual inequality has been introduced by civil law. (p. 6)

- For Aristotle, some individuals are naturally apt to rule and to be masters
- Hobbes' state of nature says that "Those who have equal power against each other, are equal"
- In the state of nature, won't some people naturally rule because they are more intelligent?
 - In society, intelligence can be a mean to improve one's standing, credibility, etc. But periods of conflicts show that intelligence does not automatically create assent because of our endless disagreements.
 - In practice, intelligence does not make a difference in the state of nature (see n°5, p. 6)
- But aren't some individuals stronger than the others? Won't that make a difference?
 - In practice, it doesn't matter: several individuals can band together to defeat one strong individual
- In the state of nature, individuals are equal because their individual differences do not really make a difference in practice (= they can equally kill one another)

- There are three sources of fear between individuals in the state of nature:

(1) Competition for goods: Since goods are scarce, individuals compete for goods and fights break out over who gets what

(2) Permanent distrust: All individuals are aware that everyone else needs to secure resources, and that everyone can potentially break moral rules (equality of expectations)

(3) Human pride: There will always be a minority of individuals who will attack merely for the sake of being acknowledged as superior by others

- In theory, most individuals want to secure goods and leave others alone. But there is always a minority of ambitious individuals who naturally want an unequal status above all others (king, leader, dictator...)
- Most people are not ambitious but, in the state of nature, we don't know whether other individuals are merely robbers or something worse... which leads even normal individuals to strike preemptively.

- In the state of nature, there is no higher rule nor any superior individual to which everyone would naturally obey
- Aquinas was wrong: there are no self-evident natural laws one must obey
- However, Hobbes says that there are a few self-evident natural rights:
 - (1) natural right to defend ourselves and the natural right to (2) use any means necessary to achieve that end (even to steal and enslave others)
 - In the state of nature, individuals can take possession of anything and take any action they judge necessary to preserve their lives

- Hobbes doesn't give up on the idea of natural law, however. He develops it in *Leviathan*, chap. XV.
- There is not a self-evident duty not to kill or to steal, but there is one evident moral rule that all individuals should strive for: they should try to exit the state of nature, abolish permanent fear, and create the conditions for a stable life (e.g. have a family, enjoy their possessions)
 - For Hobbes, the achievement of peace is the great human law. Some further human laws are, for instance, the duty to obey the social contract to create the sovereign.
 - Humans cannot rationally agree on specific moral rules, but their passions tell them that they no longer want to be afraid
- For Hobbes, humans' major reason to live together is the advantage of security, not virtue, love, or God
 - This is the point of the initial parts of the readings: we don't naturally love other people. In fact, we naturally find innumerable faults in them and always try to get something from our dealings with them.
 - We don't naturally love others, but we naturally understand that it's better to live in peace and in a stable life

- Individuals will therefore create a contract where they will decide on a sovereign
- They will transfer all their natural rights to an absolute sovereign
 - The sovereign will concentrate all of the individuals' natural rights, and can therefore make any laws, establish any relation of property, declare wars, create social distinctions...
- Hobbes is known for being an absolute monarchist but, strictly speaking, the sovereign can take any form
 - The sovereign can be a king, an aristocracy, or an assembly with representatives
 - The only thing that matters for Hobbes is that the sovereign has absolute power
 - Hobbes prefers monarchies because it's quicker, more efficient, and monarchies don't have the risk of internal disagreements

The cover engraving of
Hobbes' *Leviathan*
Under the cover, a quote
of the Bible describing
the Leviathan: "*There is
no power on earth to be
compared to him*"
The sovereign is the
"Leviathan": an entity
with such powers that no
one is its equal



- For Hobbes, can an individual deliberately revolt/break the contract?
 - No. Why?
 - If a person or a group disagree with the sovereign, this act will reestablish the state of nature between that person and the sovereign. No amount of discussion can settle their dispute.
- Hobbes thinks that it's irrational to revolt against a sovereign: nothing is worse than the state of nature.
 - What if the sovereign is tyrannical?

- What if the sovereign is tyrannical?
- Hobbes developed several answers to these sorts of objections:
 - (1) there is no self-evident natural law, how can you accurately judge if a decision isn't actually rational? For all you know, the sovereign might be taking a difficult decision to save the realm.
 - (2) The state of nature is a permanent state of war: it's the worst thing individuals can wish for
 - Hobbes asks future revolutionaries: is a tyrant really that bad compared to a state of war? Even if the tyrant is horrible, look at History: how many revolutions have succeeded? Grab a sheet of paper and calculate your potential gains and losses. Is a revolution really the course of action that would best further your self-interest?
 - (3) since the individuals are part of the power of the sovereign, it is in the sovereign's self-interest to take care of the individuals (harming them needlessly would be like cutting one's leg)
- Nevertheless, an individual can legitimately flee if the sovereign wants to execute them
 - For Hobbes, that's why we bound prisoners before executing them. They are trying to exercise their natural rights by fleeing.

- What about limiting/dividing the power of the sovereign?
 - For instance, can we divide political power between parliament and king?
- Limiting the power of the sovereign means that the state of nature will continue between the institutions that share the political power
- While Hobbes believed that this solution was too precarious, the American Federalists fully accept it
 - We can contain the state of nature by making institutions endlessly “fight” one another