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Hobbes and the International Anarchy

BY HEDLEY BULL

HANS Morgenthau was one of the greatest academic exponents of international politics in our times, and if a great deal of intellectual effort over the last thirty years has been devoted to taking issue with him, this is itself a measure of his importance. One way of looking at Morgenthau's work is to see it as an attempt to restate the view of international politics contained in the works of Thomas Hobbes—to make it fully explicit, to systematize it, to expound it in the idiom and to relate it to the preoccupations of another generation. While it would be absurd to equate Morgenthau's position with that of Hobbes (Morgenthau takes issue with Hobbes on a number of points in *Politics Among Nations*, and we cannot in any case look for identity between thinkers separated by so wide a gulf of time and circumstance), Morgenthau was a leading representative of what may broadly be called the Hobbesian tradition in his approach to international relations. It therefore seems appropriate to offer in this collection of essays written in tribute to him, the following paper delivered as a lecture at the University of Oxford, where Hobbes was a student at Magdalen Hall (now Hertford College) on the occasion of the tercentenary of his death.

The State of Nature

In the vast mansion of Thomas Hobbes's philosophy, what he has to say about relations among states does not occupy

more than a small cupboard. Hobbes, indeed, constitutes no exception to a general truth that may be stated about all the greatest political thinkers of the past: none of them ever devoted himself primarily to the study of this subject—a sobering reflection for professors of International Relations. The historical drama in relation to which Hobbes's political ideas have chiefly to be seen was, after all, not an international but a civil conflict. The problem to which these ideas purport to offer a solution is how to provide internal or domestic peace and security. The particular solution that Hobbes recommends for the provision of domestic peace and security, moreover—the establishment of all-powerful Leviathans—is, I should argue, one that makes the attainment of international peace and security more difficult. The priority that Hobbes gave to pursuing the former even at the expense of the latter appears to reflect a belief he had that internal or domestic strife is more terrible than strife among states.

Yet the man who was born in the year of the Spanish Armada when, as Aubrey tell us, his mother “fell in labour with him upon fright of invasion of the Spaniards,” and who lived through the struggles against Hapsburg ascendancy, the last phase of the wars of religion and the early phase of the wars for naval and mercantile predominance, had reason enough to reflect about international or interstate conflict.¹ Nor can we say that a man who in his youth translated Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* into English and Bacon's essay on *The True Greatness of Kingdoms* into Latin, and who later read John Selden's *Mare Clausum*, did not apply himself to the study of this subject. In Hobbes's time as in ours civil conflicts and interstate conflicts were closely bound up with one another: civil wars provided opportunities for foreign intervention, and religious loyalties, like loyalties to the secular religions of today, linked parties across state frontiers.

¹ John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, edited by Oliver Lawson Dick (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957).

The English Civil War was no exception, and in his history of it, *Behemoth*, Hobbes numbers among the “seducers” that brought the conflict about the Papists who looked to Rome, the Presbyterians who looked to Scotland, and the City of London which looked to the Low Countries together with the universities which, instead of teaching obedience to the law, were centers of subversion. Hobbes himself, it seems, at least from this account which he wrote in old age during the Restoration, held that French intervention might have saved the King: “It is methinks no great polity in neighbouring princes to favour, as they often do, one another’s rebels, especially when they rebel against monarchy itself. They should first make a league against rebellion and afterwards (if there be no remedy) fight one against another.”² Hobbes’s account of conflicts within states is in fact linked integrally with an account of relations among them. The reason why men should institute Commonwealths is not only to save themselves from the injuries they would otherwise do to one another, but also to be able to resist external invasion. The two functions, moreover, cannot be separated: the sword of justice which the sovereign wields, as Hobbes puts it, is the same as the sword of defense.

However peripheral the subject may have seemed to him, in the discussion of modern international relations Hobbes is a figure of towering importance. Along with Machiavelli and Hegel, from both of whom he differs profoundly, he provides the principal impetus of what may loosely be called the Realist tradition, which presents world politics as essentially the struggle of states for power and—refurbished in the writings of E. H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau, Herbert Butterfield and many others—has had a deep influence on political thinking in the West in the last forty years. Hobbes’s contribution to the Realist tradition was to provide a rigorously systematic account of the logic of relations among inde-

² Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or The Long Parliament*, edited by Ferdinand Tönnies (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), p. 144.

pendent powers that find themselves in a situation of anarchy in the sense of absence of government, an account that not only tells us, with ruthless candor, how and why these powers do and must confront one another under the imperatives of international anarchy, but also what they should and sometimes can do to provide a modicum of security even while they remain in this condition. In this lecture I shall seek, first, to expound Hobbes's view of the international anarchy; second, to consider how it relates to other schools of interpretation of international relations, opposed to that of Hobbes; and third, to assess the bearing of what Hobbes has to say on world politics in our own times.

The starting point of Hobbes's account of relations among states is the proposition that they take place in a state of nature which is a state of war. Hobbes puts this proposition forward in the course of providing the evidence for his argument that individual men would find themselves in such a condition of war if they were not in awe of a common power. In *Leviathan* he mentions that savage peoples in America are in this condition, and also that men experience it in civil war. He then makes his celebrated appeal to the facts of international relations:

But though there had never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another; yet in all times, kings, and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators; having their weapons pointing, their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their forts, garrisons and guns upon the frontiers of their Kingdoms; and continual spies upon their neighbours; which is a posture of war.³

From this and comparable passages in *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive* we are entitled to infer that all of what Hobbes says

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* [hereinafter *EWH*], edited by Sir William Molesworth, 11 vols. (London: J. Bohn, 1836-45), 3: 115.

about the life of individual men in the state of nature may be read as a description of the condition of states in relation to one another.

States, then, are in a condition of war, not in the sense that they are always fighting, but in the sense that over a period of time they have a known disposition to fight. War in this sense is inherent in the condition of states that are not in awe of a common power; peace, in the sense of a time in which there is not a disposition to fight, is beyond their reach. This is a war of every state against every other state: at any one time there might be relations of alliance or indifference between particular states as well as relations of hostility, but over a long enough stretch of time every state will display its disposition to fight every other—there are no “security communities,” or groups of states that have overcome the disposition to fight one another, such as today the countries of the European Community, or yesterday the countries of the British Commonwealth, are alleged to have done.

The causes or motives that lead states to war are three: competition for material possessions, which leads to wars fought for gain; diffidence or mistrust, the source of wars fought for defense or security; and glory, the pursuit of which leads to wars to prevent others from undervaluing us, as they do when they ignore our opinions or faith. Hobbes’s doctrine of the three great motives of war—gain, fear, and glory—is an amplification of the account given by Thucydides, who puts similar words into the mouths of the Athenian ambassadors in Sparta when, on the eve of the Peloponnesian War and in the attempt to avert it, they explain to the Lacedaemonians how Athens had come to expand its dominion, “chiefly for fear, next for honour, and lastly for profit.”⁴

Hobbes also follows Thucydides in treating fear—not in the sense of an unreasoning emotion, but rather in the sense of the rational apprehension of future insecurity—as the prime

⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Hobbes’s translation in *EWB* 8: 81.

motive, a motive that affects not only some states some of the time but all states all of the time, the cause of preventive wars as well as of defensive ones, in the Peloponnesian War the main issue for the Lacedaemonians as well as for the Athenians. It is this concern to secure what we already have, rather than any ambition to acquire what we do not have, that inclines all mankind toward "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."⁵ It is the motive of fear, leading to the search for security through superior power, which, more than competition for material goods or clashes of ideology, brings states into conflict with one another, for two contending states seeking security in this way cannot both be superior. Here Hobbes might seem to come close to twentieth-century analyses of the logic of "the arms race," "the mutual reinforcement of threat perceptions," or, to use the phrase which Robert McNamara applied to Soviet-American competition in strategic armaments, "the action-reaction phenomenon." But this is not so: those today who warn us against the dangers of seeking security through superior power generally believe that the dangers can be averted or are the result of mistaken or self-confirming perceptions. Hobbes's argument points rather to the conclusion that the dangers cannot be averted, that the incompatibility of interests between two or more states each of which is seeking security through superior power does not rest on mistaken perceptions but is quite genuine.

It is a feature of the state of war that "The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place." There is no law, "no propriety, no dominion, no *mine* and *thine* distinct; but only that to be every man's, that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it."⁶ Whatever else he intends in this famous passage, Hobbes means that in the state of nature there is no positive law. He believes that rules of natural law,

⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in *EWB* 3: 85–86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

in his special sense of the term, apply to it, and that these rules are commanded by God. It may be that, as Warrender and others have argued, there is some sense in which for Hobbes there are moral rules in the state of nature.⁷ There is also some question whether this and similar passages refer, not to the state of nature in all its phases, but only to a supposed early phase in which men are not only subject to a sovereign but also in a literal sense solitary. But law is the command of the sovereign, and can come into being only as a consequence of the establishment of government. Princes and commonwealths, being subject to no common government, cannot be subject to law. What is called the law of nations, according to Hobbes, is not law—the view which, refined successively by John Austin, Hans Kelsen, and Herbert Hart, has been handed down to us as the view that international law, whether or not it is law properly so-called, is at all events not law in quite the same sense in which municipal law is law. The law of nations, Hobbes tells us, is the same as the law of nature, that is to say, the prudential rules of survival.

The foundation of Hobbes's approach to the question of right and wrong in the international anarchy is his doctrine not of natural law but of natural right. By the right of nature Hobbes means the liberty each man has to do whatever is necessary to preserve himself from death or injury, and in the state of nature for an individual man this liberty is entirely without limit. The individual man, in Hobbes's theory, enters society and surrenders this untrammelled liberty by submitting himself to the sovereign, but he still retains his natural right to preserve himself if the sovereign should fail to protect him from death or injury. "Every subject," Hobbes tells us, "has liberty in all those things the right whereof cannot be by covenant transferred," and so the subject need not obey an order to kill or maim himself, can defend himself against

⁷ See Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

execution, refuse in certain circumstances to fight in foreign wars, and may submit to a foreign conqueror "if his person or means of life be within the guards of the enemy."⁸

This natural right of liberty or self-preservation, Hobbes tells us, is enjoyed by commonwealths in just the same way as it is by individual persons in the state of nature: "every sovereign hath the same right, in procuring the safety of his people, that any particular man can have in procuring the safety of his own body."⁹ It is this conception of the right of states to ensure their own survival that links Hobbes to the tradition of reason of state or *raison d'état* that runs through European history from Machiavelli and Botero and Rohan to Frederick the Great, Hegel, and Treischke, and whose historian is Friedrich Meinecke.¹⁰ Hobbes does not use the term reason of state, and the meaning it came to have for Hegel and his successors—of justification by reference to a state with an individual soul apart from the persons of which it is made up, and with a moral duty to assert itself—is entirely foreign to Hobbes. But in asserting the ultimate freedom of states from moral fetters, at least where the objective of self-preservation is concerned, and in his willingness to allow whatever measures are rationally judged necessary to achieve this objective (and to exclude mere brute force or the pursuit of power for its own sake), Hobbes stands within the broad tradition of Machiavellianism. Hobbes's doctrine of natural right, as Strauss has commented, performs the function of hallowing self-interest.¹¹ At the hands of writers on international law from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, this doctrine of the natural right of states to self-

⁸ See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 30, in *EWB* 3: 342.

¹⁰ Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism* [1924], translated by Douglas Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

¹¹ See Leo Strauss in K. C. Brown, ed., *Hobbes Studies* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1965); see also Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

preservation—sometimes asserted to be part of international law, sometimes appealed to as a higher principle standing outside it—came to be used as a means of demolishing the claims of international society on its members states, or at least of showing that they had only a contingent or tentative validity. In our own times it still sometimes rears its head, as in Dean Acheson's dismissal of the relevance of international law to American decisions in the Cuban missile crisis, or Henry Kissinger's appeal to a right of the Western powers to take whatever action is necessary to prevent economic strangulation by an oil embargo.

The analogy between the condition of states in the international anarchy and the condition of individual persons living without government is not taken by Hobbes to what, on some views at least, is its logical conclusion. Individual men, in Hobbes's account, are driven to escape from the state of nature by submitting to a sovereign power that will hold them in awe, either by covenanting among themselves to institute a commonwealth or, in the case of paternal commonwealths ruled by heads of families or despotic commonwealths established by foreign conquerors, by covenanting directly with the sovereign to submit themselves to him in return for protection. In the case of states in the international state of nature, no such escape route is suggested. It has often been said that if Hobbes were faithful to the premises of his own argument he would be bound to recognize that princes and commonwealths are subject to the same pressures that would drive individual persons to seek a way out of the state of nature and must covenant to submit themselves to a world government. Yet Hobbes says nothing to give sustenance to the idea that this would, or even that it should, take place. The only universal kingdom of which he speaks is the Kingdom of God, which can have no earthly embodiment, as he makes clear in his savage demolition of the claims of the Papacy still to exercise some ghostly relic of *imperium mundi* and in his firm conclusion that a Christian commonwealth is one in which Christian men

and their religious beliefs are wholly subject to the state. The idea of a covenant among sovereigns does not seem to have occurred to Hobbes. Still less does it occur to him, as it does not to any of the contract theorists in the long line from Plato to John Rawls, to consider the possibility of a contract of world government among all individual persons in the world.

It is not clear that in failing to address himself to the idea of a contract of world government Hobbes was departing from his own premises. One of the main pressures driving individual persons to escape from the state of nature is the need to form groupings large enough, united enough, and enduring enough to be able to resist external attack. It is, of course, one of the classic obstacles to the political unity of mankind as a whole that no external enemy exists against which a common defense is needed.

Hobbes's theory, however, does seem to leave us without any good reason to resist the establishment of a world government by conquest as opposed to one established by contract. In his account, persons who fall into the hands of a foreign conqueror who is willing to protect them may submit to him, just as they are released from any obligation to obey their own sovereign, if it has failed to provide protection. In a situation in which some new Alexander were near to establishing universal monarchy, and other governments had ceased to be able to afford protection, a Hobbesian individual would seem bound to submit. The ideas with which countless writers and statesmen have justified resistance to a potentially dominant power—the need to maintain a balance of power, “the public law of Europe,” the legal rights of states or of nations to independence—have no place in Hobbes's intellectual inventory. Hobbes's theory, indeed, does not provide any reason why an individual person should prefer his own sovereign to a foreign one. In the *Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* the latter asks why, if the king has absolute powers over the people and can take from them what he pleases, they would be any worse off

under a foreign conqueror. This, given Hobbes's premises, is a very reasonable question. The Philosopher answers that the people should remember in how much worse a condition they were at the time of William the Conqueror, "when it was a shame to be an Englishman; who, if he grumbled at the base offices he was put to by his Norman masters, received no other answer but this, '*Thou art an Englishman.*'"¹² The Philosopher's answer is a good one, but it is not, I think, one that could be drawn from the argument of *Leviathan*.

Hobbes's equation of the international state of nature with the imagined state in which individuals would find themselves if they lived without government contains an important qualification. After the passage in *Leviathan* in which he says how persons in sovereign authority face one another in the posture of war, Hobbes goes on to say that "because they uphold, thereby, the industry of their subjects; there does not follow from it, that misery that accompanies the liberty of particular men."¹³ In other words, states may face one another in the posture of gladiators, but the lives of the men in them are not solitary, and not necessarily poor, nasty, brutish, or short. On the contrary, the sovereign powers which, facing outward, create the international anarchy are the same sovereign powers which, facing inward, provide the possibility of social life. The international anarchy may have its problems, but for Hobbes, perhaps, the price is worth paying. If one tries to think through the problem of radical disarmament one is forced to a conclusion rather like the one Hobbes reaches, if I have interpreted him correctly. Supposing that by some miracle states were able to agree on a program of what used to be called general and complete or "total" disarmament, they would wish to retain at the very least forces adequate to maintain internal peace and security, as is generally recog-

¹² Thomas Hobbes, *Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Law of England*, in *EWB* 6: 11.

¹³ *EWB* 3: 115.

nized in disarmament plans. If they did, it would necessarily follow that these internal-security forces would become a factor in relations among states also, and would preserve the classic dangers of a system of armed and sovereign states from which disarmament is intended to deliver us. Yet confronted with a choice between facing these dangers and living in societies that have no internal-security forces, few of us would opt for the latter.

Even while states are in the state of nature and are left by Hobbes with no shred of hope of escaping from it, there are still measures they can take to make the best of their situation. All men are driven by passions that incline them to peace: the fear of death, the desire of things necessary for commodious living and hope of attaining them. They are also equipped with natural reason, which prescribes for them the rules they must follow if they are to attain peace, the rules which Hobbes calls the laws of nature. Once commonwealths are established, the laws of nature are incorporated in the civil law, but they are available also in the state of nature, where princes or states in their relations with one another can be guided by them. In the state of nature these dictates or theorems of right reason cannot be enforced. Moreover, while they are eternal and we must always desire that they are observed, we are obliged in practice to follow them only if it is safe to do so, which in the state of nature it often will not be. But imperfect though they are, these laws of nature, "the articles of peace" as Hobbes calls them, are the lifeline to which sovereign states in the international anarchy must cling if they are to survive.

The articles of peace contain within them most of the basic rules of co-existence on which states have relied in the international anarchy from Hobbes's time and before it to our own. We are enjoined, first and above all, "to seek peace and follow it," while also preparing to defend ourselves if peace eludes us.¹⁴ We must be prepared to sacrifice some of our liberty by

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

entering into agreements in which others will accept comparable sacrifices of their liberty. We must perform our covenants, recognizing in particular that in the state of nature covenants extorted under duress are valid. In our dealings with other parties we must display gratitude, complaisance, and a willingness to pardon where this is due, and avoid vengefulness, pride, arrogance, or the display of hatred or contempt. We must respect the immunity of mediators and envoys, and be willing to arbitrate disputes.

All of this shows how deeply pacific Hobbes's approach to international relations was, at least in the values from which it sprang. There is no sense in Hobbes of the glorification of war, nor of relish for the game of power politics as an end in itself, nor of willingness to abdicate judgment in favor of the doctrine that anything in the international anarchy is permissible. But the rules of natural reason, on which states in the international anarchy must rely for want of anything else, have for Hobbes only a conditional validity. They are not embodied in any positive law of nations or common pool of diplomatic and military practice which imposes demands of its own on the allegiance of states. They are not expressions of the existence of an international society or community of which princes and commonwealths are members, or which confers rights and imposes duties upon them. At the heart of Hobbes's approach to international relations there lies the proposition with which I began, that states do not form together any kind of society or community but are in a state of war. And this is the proposition to which those who seek to challenge his position must address themselves.

The Community of Mankind

The challenge has come from two directions. First, the Hobbesian or Realist conception of international relations as simply the conflict of states in a condition of war is attacked by

those who seek to put in its place the idea of the community of mankind. On this view, the main reality in international politics is not the existence of independent states or rulers and of conflict among them but rather the moral and social bond that links human beings to one another across frontiers throughout the world as a whole, or at least throughout Christendom or Europe. The bond may be conceived as being of a religious nature (the community of all men in Christ) or as secular (the brotherhood of man, the solidarity of the working classes). There is no political structure of universal government that expresses this moral and social unity of mankind as a whole, but it exists potentially, and the duty is imposed on those of us who know this, to work to actualize it. On this view, the world of sovereign states, which Hobbes and his like describe, is only of transitory importance and is destined to be swept aside. The conception of the community of mankind sometimes appears in the backward-looking form of an appeal for return to the political structure of Western Christendom, as it does in the work of Cardinal Bellarmine, which Hobbes attacks in *Leviathan*. It also appears in the forward-looking form of a doctrine of progress, a belief that new and better forms of universal political organization should and will evolve, as it does most notably in Kant's *Perpetual Peace*. The conception of progress is, of course, entirely absent from Hobbes's account of the international state of nature, which presents the behavior of states in terms of static and unchanging principles. The idea of the community of mankind sometimes leads to avowal of the goal of world government, sometimes to the advocacy of a league or concert of like-minded and right-minded states that, acting as trustees for mankind as a whole, will provide a substitute for world government. Kant himself espoused first one, then the other.

Those who look forward to the establishment of a world government or quasi-government often see some merit in Hobbes's account of life in the international anarchy. They argue that Hobbes was indeed right in contending that sover-

eign states in the international anarchy are in a condition of war and cannot achieve peace in the absence of a common power to keep them in awe. But they contend that Hobbes's account of the international anarchy is incomplete: he is wrong not to take the further step of providing for the submission of states to a world authority so as to reproduce the conditions of domestic or municipal society on a universal scale. This is the logic of such popular works as G. Lowes Dickinson's *The International Anarchy*, which, before and during the First World War, sought to support the argument for a world authority by presenting a Hobbesian or near-Hobbesian description of what the existing system of interstate politics was like. At a more profound level it is the logic of Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, which accepts a Hobbesian account of the reality of relations among sovereign states, dismissing the "miserable comforters" Grotius, Pufendorf, and Vattel, as Hobbes himself would have done, and going on to argue that peace must be "established" by agreement among republican or constitutionalist states.¹⁵ Kant's belief in the possibility of progress in international relations enables him to avoid one of the classic difficulties of Hobbes's theory of the social contract. If in the state of nature men are incapable of effective cooperation and "covenants without the sword are but words," how is the social contract possible? Kant, who also believes that existing states are incapable of effective cooperation, is able to look forward to a time when they agree to join together in a league to establish peace because he thinks domestic changes within states—the rise of republican or constitutionalist forms of government—will enable states in future to concert their efforts in a way they have not been able to do in the past. There is, of course, in Hobbes no belief at all that the international behavior of any one kind of government in the international anarchy was different from that of any other, and the belief

¹⁵ See *Kant's Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

expressed in later generations that republican states, nation-states, democratic states, or socialist states are more able than others to achieve peace in their relations with one another is quite alien to his point of view.

The second challenge to the Hobbesian doctrine comes from those who would put in place of the idea of conflict among sovereign states not the conception of an immanent community of mankind leading to a central world authority but rather the idea that states and peoples already form a society. This is the position of Grotius, Pufendorf, Vattel and their predecessors and successors, the "miserable comforters" denounced by Kant and equally at loggerheads with Hobbes. Grotius and his company accept with Hobbes that rulers or states are the main actors on the stage of universal politics, and like him do not insist that they are destined to be swept aside and replaced by a world authority. But they reject Hobbes's argument that relations among states consist only or chiefly of conflict. War occurs, but it is subject to legal and moral regulation, both as to the cause for which it is undertaken and as to the way in which it is conducted. Alongside war they see intercourse, especially commercial intercourse, and rules and institutions facilitating it. States in the international anarchy, in the view of the Grotians, are constrained not merely, as Hobbes maintains, by rules of prudence, but on the one hand by rules of law and on the other hand by their sense of an interest or stake in preserving the system or society of states and its institutions. The Grotian tradition speaks not of "the war of all against all" but of *societas gentium*, "the family of nations," "the public law of Europe." It looks sometimes to principles of natural law, sometimes to the customary and treaty law of Christendom, of Europe, or of the global international community of today. It is expressed not only in the writings of exponents of the law of nations and what later came to be called international law but also in political and historical accounts of the modern states system, which describe the operation of such institutions as the balance of power, the

concert of great powers, diplomacy, and international organization.

Thinkers in the Grotian tradition recognize with Hobbes that states are in a state of nature or condition of anarchy in the sense that there is no world government over them. But the Grotians see the condition of states as more like that which Locke describes in his account of the state of nature than that which is described by Hobbes. They see international society, that is to say, as a society without government, an anarchical society in which rules are crudely interpreted and administered, power is decentralized, and justice is uncertain and imperfect, but a society nevertheless that embodies the traditions of civilization and not the law of the jungle.

From the Grotian tradition there derives the most radical critique of the whole analogy between the condition of states without a common government and the condition of individual persons living without government. As we have seen, Hobbes himself drew attention to a limitation of this analogy when he held that the misery accompanying the liberty of particular men did not follow from the liberty of states. There is, however, a deeper problem about the analogy, which is that states are very unlike individual persons. The foundation of Hobbes's account of the state is the proposition that "Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body and mind . . . that the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest."¹⁶ It is this vulnerability of every man to every other, and more particularly the equal vulnerability of men to one another, that renders the condition of anarchy intolerable.

There are two difficulties about the application of this line of argument to states. In the first place, states or commonwealths are not as vulnerable to attack as individual persons are. Spinoza, for example, points out that an individual person

¹⁶ *EWB* 3: 115.

is overcome by sleep every day, is often afflicted by disease of body or mind, and is finally prostrated by old age; a commonwealth, by contrast, can provide itself with a means of defense that exists independently of any one of its members.¹⁷ An individual person may suffer a single blow resulting in death, but for a state or commonwealth war has not, at least until recently, posed any comparable danger. Clausewitz, our greatest authority on war, points out that it never consists of a single, instantaneous blow, but always of a succession of separate blows, each providing opportunities for reconsideration of the issue.¹⁸ He also points out that "war is never absolute in its results"; even defeat may prove "a passing evil that can be remedied."¹⁹ Violent assaults on the individual person, if they result in death, have a certain finality; the individual person's fear of his own death, and desire by rational action to avert it, is the motive force of Hobbes's own system. But for the state, even if it has experienced catastrophe, there may still be another day.

In the second place, to the extent that states are in fact vulnerable to violent attack they are not equally so. Great powers are not as vulnerable as small powers; island powers, at least at some period of history, have been less vulnerable than continental land powers; states living in the isolation of a "fireproof house," to use an expression applied to Canada in the interwar period, have been less vulnerable than states situated in the front line, like Belgium or Holland. The inequality of states in respect of their vulnerability has been a cardinal and perennial feature of the modern international system, and a basic condition of the kind of order that has grown up in it.

¹⁷ Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus* III, ii in Spinoza, *The Political Works*, edited by A. G. Wernham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

¹⁸ Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated by O. J. Matthijs Jolles (New York: Modern Library, 1943).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Hobbes in Our Time

One has only to utter these words to raise the question in every mind: what about the effects of nuclear weapons? Cannot nuclear war today take precisely the form of the single, instantaneous blow that Clausewitz said it never could be? Cannot war now be "absolute in its results," resulting in the extinction of not merely the political entity of the state but the physical existence of a whole people, thus admitting of no possibility of being considered "a passing evil that can be remedied"? Moreover, is not the nuclear weapon system the great equalizer of states in the international anarchy, at least in respect of their vulnerability, and will not the inexorable spread of nuclear weapons throughout the international system have the effect that the conditions which Hobbes attributes to individual persons in the state of nature will be reproduced? If it was once true that the condition of anarchy or absence of government was more tolerable for states than for individuals, is it so any longer?

We are still at the beginning of the nuclear era. The system of states is not yet, and may never become, "a unit veto system" in which each state has the capacity for instant and catastrophic destruction of every other. Our experience of nuclear proliferation so far suggests that it does not eliminate inequalities in vulnerability. Whether or not the new factor of nuclear weapons should impel states toward a contract of world government, we have to note that it has not in fact had that effect. On the contrary, the increased vulnerability of states and peoples is widely taken to provide a new guarantee of peace, making the international anarchy not less but more tolerable than it was before. The Hobbesian fear of death that lies behind the system of mutual deterrence has operated to freeze the nuclear powers in their state and posture of gladiators rather than to impel them toward attempts to escape from the international anarchy.

Does Hobbes's account of the international anarchy throw

any light on world politics in our own times? It is foolish to imagine that Hobbes is speaking directly to us about the problems of the twentieth century, and even more so to seek to enlist his name in support of some cause of defense or deterrence remote from his own experience. But it is legitimate to ask how far world politics today resembles Hobbes's account of the state of war.

Great areas of the international political landscape today cannot be described in Hobbes's terms, just as, I should argue, they could not have been in Hobbes's own time. An adherent of Grotius's interpretation would be able to point to much evidence of the existence of an international society: a functioning system of international or world law, now geographically extended to embrace extra-European as well as European states, and functionally extended to include economic and social issues as well as political and strategic ones; a universal system of diplomacy and a multiplicity of international organizations, including the United Nations, the chief symbol of the existence of international society; a world economy embodying shared interests in intercourse and creating new networks of interdependence. An adherent of the conception of the community of mankind might point to the revolutionary turmoil that characterizes world politics at the present time, the ideological bonds that link revolutionists and counter-revolutionists across the frontiers, the common language of "human rights" spoken in all societies throughout the world, even while different meanings are given to it, the importance of "transnational" as opposed to interstate or intergovernmental links in many spheres of world political activity, the evidence of a factor of progress, or at all events of change, which Hobbes's theory does not countenance.

Yet the continued validity of Hobbes's account, at least as a partial description of world politics, is still inescapable. The international system is still anarchic, in the sense that it is marked by the absence of a central authority. Sovereign states

are still the principal actors in the system and retain a near monopoly of armed force. International law and international organizations still command only a tentative and uncertain allegiance. The logic of relations among sovereign powers, which Hobbes describes, still underlies the system, even though it is only from time to time, when a crisis occurs, that the curtain is drawn and this becomes fully apparent. States are still driven to seek gain, glory, and security, and as a consequence are drawn into conflict with one another. This is not the whole of world politics, but it conditions the whole, and in this sense it is difficult to see that progress has taken place or that the underlying principles of international politics are different from those which Hobbes sets forth.

Nuclear weapons are a new factor in world politics, but the behavior of states in relation to them has provided new illustrations of Hobbes's thesis. Since the rise of the strategic nuclear stalemate in the 1950s, the fear of death, the first of the passions inclining men to peace, has galvanized the contending superpowers to practice discipline and restraint and to recognize common interests, even while remaining in competition with one another. Natural reason, suggesting to them how rules of co-existence can be drawn up enabling them to protect these common interests, has enabled them to improvise "articles of peace" in areas such as arms control, the avoidance and control of crises, the demarcation of spheres of influence, where existing positive law and precedent offer little guidance. While the superpowers in this sense follow Hobbes's injunction to seek peace, they at the same time prepare to defend themselves and to deter one another. The relationship of mutual nuclear deterrence, on which our hopes for nuclear peace precariously rest, institutionalizes the Hobbesian fear.

Hobbes's message, that we should seek peace, is one that is especially apposite to world politics in our own era, at all events if we remember that he accompanied this with a warn-

ing that we should not count on finding it. Keith Thomas, in his lecture which opened this series, warned us that Hobbes's ideas, if they are to be understood, must be seen in relation to his own time and circumstances. It is also true that Hobbes offers them to us as an account of the condition of man, the citizen, and the state at all times and in all places. Hobbes is one of that select company of thinkers whose topicality is experienced afresh by every new generation. As, after three hundred years, we salute Thomas Hobbes of Magdalen Hall, I ask you to remember that, among his many other distinctions, he was a true philosopher of peace.