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FALL 2021 First-Year Seminar: Progress? (Professor Nishiten Shah)

*1-page paper 2*

***Prompt:* (2) Hobbes identifies three “principal causes of quarrel”: Competition, Diffidence, and Glory. Of the three, “Diffidence” is arguably the most serious cause. What does Hobbes mean by “Diffidence” and why does it lead to conflict?**

Dear Dev,

I hope that everything is fine. I am writing this letter to share a surprising perspective of Thomas Hobbes which I encountered during my reading. Diffidence, as Hobbes uses the word in chapter 13 of *Leviathan*, refers to the uneasiness or anxiety that all people have about their standing and security with respect to one another in the “state of nature”. What is the state of nature? It is a state in which there is no overarching power restraining human nature. According to Hobbes, diffidence arises from the situation the state of nature because we are equal.

What does Hobbes mean by equality? What he means is different from what you would expect. He does not mean that individuals have the same physical or mental strengths. Instead, Hobbes means that everyone has an equal opportunity to kill every other individual. For instance, a physically strong man can be killed while sleeping by a mentally strong man, and a mentally strong man can be killed by a physically strong one with karate techniques.

But, how does this kind of equality in the state of nature lead to diffidence? People in the state of nature will fear each other because they know that there are people out there who want to acquire more resources than they need, but they don’t know who those people are. Everyone will expect that their essential resources are at risk by everyone else. Furthermore, everyone would expect that if they do not kill other individuals, then they will get assassinated by them. This expectation, which Hobbes refers to as “diffidence”, leads people to kill each other to preempt being killed themselves.

Why does diffidence lead to conflict? If no man can calculate the other to be faithful, then all the mutual agreements will be fragile. If we don’t trust each other, then how will people get along? Thus, every man will be in a war against every other man in form of pre-emptive strikes.

Best Regards,

Dhyey Mavani