

444 Lecture 14

Stag Hunts

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Short Version

- There are a lot of situations in life that feel like prisoners dilemmas.
- The concept of a prisoners dilemma is so widely known, that a lot of people in those situations will conceptualise these situations as a prisoners dilemma.
- Often, they will be wrong; they are actually in a Stag Hunt.

Day Plan

Stag Hunt

More than 2 Players

Real Life Stag Hunts

Stag Hunt

	gather	hunt
Gather	x, x	y, z
Hunt	z, y	w, w

With the following constraints:

- $x > z$
- $w > y$
- $w > x$
- $x + y > z + w$

Concrete Example of Stag Hunt

	gather	hunt
Gather	2, 2	4, 0
Hunt	0, 4	5, 5

Differences with Prisoners' Dilemma

- Again, there is a cooperative move (in this case Hunt), which is socially better than the individualistic move (Gather).
- But in this case, cooperation is an equilibrium; it isn't dominated.
- The problem is that there are nevertheless reasons to do the individualistic thing.

Social Challenge

- How do we get people to be cooperative, i.e., Hunt?
- Note that we don't have to imagine changing the payouts, i.e., punishing, or taking away options.
- It suffices to get everyone to (truly) believe that others will Hunt.
- This isn't trivial, but it's a very different kind of challenge than in PD.

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Modeling Challenge

- Which cases are really Stag Hunt not PD?
- I'm going to talk about this a bit more, but it's really worth thinking through real life cases.
- Is there a genuine equilibrium where merely by everyone believing that everyone else will Hunt, it becomes in their own interest to Hunt?

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Modeling Challenge

- Note that it is really great if this if situations that look like PD are actually Stag Hunts.
- The view from Hobbes on was that getting out of PD required heavy handed intervention.
- But getting to the cooperative equilibrium in Stag Hunt might just require nudging.

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Mixing the Issues

- The modeling challenge and the social challenge can run together.
- If we want to change behavior, it helps to know what kind of game people are, or take themselves, to be playing.
- So the theoretical question of how to conceptualise a practice might be related to the social question of how to repair it.

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Day Plan

More than 2 Players

- The world doesn't have many 2 player 2 option games.
- If we're thinking of modelling real world situations, either as PD or Stag Hunt, we need something more general.

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Generalising

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- $n > 2$ players each choose a number x in $[0, 1]$.
- The mean of the choices is m .
- Payoff to each player is $m - \frac{x}{r}$, for r between 2 and n .

- If everyone picks the same number, better for everyone that that number is higher.
- Holding fixed other players moves, it is always better to pick a lower number.

- It's really hard to do Axelrod-type stuff in these kinds of games.
- Just having the chance to interact again is not enough to push people to cooperate.
- There isn't enough freedom of movement; do you defect if 1 player out of 100 defects?

- Changing the payouts is a more effective move.
- So what we see in these kinds of situations is what is called 'altruistic punishment'.
- One person makes themselves temporarily worse off, and the perpetrator much worse off, to send a signal that defection will not be tolerated.
- Of course there is a free riding issue with who carries out the punishment, so ...

- $n > 2$ players each choose a number x in $[0, 1]$.
- The mean of the choices is m .
- If a player chooses $x \leq m$, their payout is x .
- If they choose $x > m$, they receive $m - r(x - m)$, where $r > 1$ is some measure of how much one is penalised for leaving the equilibrium.

- For any x , everyone choosing x is a (strict) equilibrium.
- The higher x is, the better this equilibrium is for everyone.
- Choosing 0 minimises regret, and maximises expected return given some natural distributions of probability to the other player's moves.

Real World

- For something to be a real world stag hunt, those are the features you (approximately) need.
- The best thing to do is to do what everyone else does.
- If everyone does the same thing, better that everyone does the more cooperative thing.
- Given radical uncertainty about what others will do, best to do the uncooperative thing.

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Day Plan

Real Life Stag Hunts

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PD or Stag Hunt

So here's a depressingly common kind of situation.

- There is a social interaction where we'd all be better off if we all cooperated.
- But for whatever reason, cooperation hasn't arisen.

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PD or Stag Hunt

So here's a depressingly common kind of situation.

- One question to ask, assuming people are rational, well-informed, etc, is whether this is more like PD or Stag Hunt.
- In particular, if people did cooperate in this kind of situation, would cooperation be naturally sustainable, or would it require constant effort to sustain the cooperative equilibrium?

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Vague Question

- There are, as always, borderline cases.
- As Skyrms points out, there is a natural sense in which Iterated PD is, in the sense we're interested in, a Stag Hunt not a PD.
- That's because mutual cooperation is, at least in the iterated game, an equilibrium.
- But when there isn't a lot of iteration, and in particular when there isn't iteration between the same people over and over again, we're back in PD.

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Why This Matters

1. We're theorists here and we like getting this kind of thing right!
2. The social reforms needed to develop, and sustain, a cooperative equilibrium in the two cases might be very different.

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How Do We Tell

- If we were in the cooperative state, would everyone have an incentive to stay in it, or would they still have a (small) incentive to defect.
- In PD, everyone wants to defect even in the happy world where everyone else cooperates.
- In Stag Hunt, once there is cooperation, cooperation is actually beneficial to the participants.

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Example One - Walking

- So think about what it's like to walk through a crowded shared space: the corridors of a university, the common spaces of a shopping mall, a crowded sidewalk in a busy city.
- There are more or less cooperative ways to walk. Roughly speaking, the straighter the line you walk in, and the closer your speed is to the median speed, the more cooperative you are.

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Example One - Walking

- Some places are pretty cooperative. UM hallways are surprisingly so on the whole, and any major business city I've been in has been pretty cooperative during the morning and evening commute.
- But a lot of places are not - everyone is going in all directions, and it's a constant struggle to not get collided into many times. The touristy parts of big cities are like this all the time.

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PD or Stag Hunt

So question - if you're in one of the situations where things are going well, is there an incentive to defect and try to cut through the crowds even more quickly?

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My (very anecdotal) View

- This kind of feels like a Stag Hunt to me.
- If you're somewhere where the pedestrian traffic is moving smoothly and quickly enough, there isn't much to gain by darting between people looking for a small edge. You just go with the traffic.

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My (very anecdotal) View

- But if everyone is going at all angles and all speeds, then trying to be as cooperative as possible, sticking to a steady speed and a straight line, will be a disaster.
- The best way to get where you're going (in a reasonable time with minimal risk) is to do what everyone else does.

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Example Two - Climate Change

- Let's focus on climate change as an issue that affects the relationship between countries. (How individuals relate to each other vis a vis climate change is a trickier question.)
- At this level it is often thought to be a PD (or what's sometimes called a free rider problem).
- Everyone would prefer that everyone had lower emissions.
- But everyone would prefer to not lower their own emissions.

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Is This Right?

Three reasons for scepticism.

1. Synergies
2. Health
3. Altruistic Sentiment

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Synergy

- There is an incredible amount of learning by doing in clean energy.
- As more people install it, the prices just keep falling.
- So possibly if everyone cuts emissions, it is in everyone's interests to be part of the cheap energy revolution that is unleashed.

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Health

Carbon based forms of energy have two downsides.

1. They affect the climate, with negative consequences for the planet.
2. They are polluting, with negative health consequences for the people living near where the energy is generated.

The second puts some independent pressure on countries to get cleaner. You saw this in the US in the late 20th century (especially in Los Angeles), and in big cities in China and India now.

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Altruism

Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change

Michaël Aklin and Matto Mildenberger

Posted Online October 23, 2020
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfpol/obz007>

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A recent paper arguing against the PD model

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Altruism

- The voting public, at least in rich industrial countries, does not favor unilateral defection from climate agreements.
- This could be because of the first two factors I mentioned.
- But I suspect a non-trivial factor is that people are altruistic - they care about others.
- That is, at least given the subjectivist approach to utility we're using, enough to make the game not a PD.

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Stag Hunt
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More than 2 Players
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Real Life Stag Hunts
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The Big Distinction

- Is the situation you're looking at one where rational agents:
1. Will not cooperate without some added incentive, or
 2. Will not be the first to cooperate without some added incentive?

Stag Hunt
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More than 2 Players
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Real Life Stag Hunts
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The Big Distinction

- If it's the first, you're in a PD; if it's the second, you may be in a Stag Hunt.
- And then you might be better off doing some 'one-time' interventions to get people to a new sustainable equilibrium.

Stag Hunt
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More than 2 Players
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Real Life Stag Hunts
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After Break

We'll move onto O'Connor's book on the origins of inequality