

## Chapter 1

---

# HOW DOES HISTORY END?

## A Coming Anarchy?

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama predicted the “end of history,” with all countries converging to the political and economic institutions of the United States, what he called “an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.” Just five years later Robert Kaplan painted a radically different picture of the future in his article “The Coming Anarchy.” To illustrate the nature of this chaotic lawlessness and violence, he felt compelled to begin in West Africa:

West Africa is becoming the symbol of [anarchy] . . . Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms, and international drug cartels are now most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism. West Africa provides an appropriate introduction to the issues, often extremely unpleasant to discuss, that will soon confront our civilization. To remap the political earth the way it will be a few decades hence . . . I find I must begin with West Africa.

In a 2018 article, “Why Technology Favors Tyranny,” Yuval Noah Harari made yet another prediction about the future, arguing that

advances in artificial intelligence are heralding the rise of “digital dictatorships,” where governments will be able to monitor, control, and even dictate the way we interact, communicate, and think.

So history might still end, but in a very different way than Fukuyama had imagined. But how? The triumph of Fukuyama’s vision of democracy, anarchy, or digital dictatorship? The Chinese state’s increasing control over the Internet, the media, and the lives of ordinary Chinese might suggest that we are heading toward digital dictatorship, while the recent history of the Middle East and Africa reminds us that a future of anarchy is not so far-fetched.

But we need a systematic way to think about all of this. As Kaplan suggested, let’s begin in Africa.

## **The Article 15 State**

If you keep going east along the West African coast, the Gulf of Guinea eventually turns south and heads to Central Africa. Sailing past Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Pointe-Noire in Congo-Brazzaville, you arrive at the mouth of the river Congo, the entry point to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a country that is often thought to be the epitome of anarchy. The Congolese have a joke: there have been six constitutions since the country gained its independence from Belgium in 1960, but they all have the same Article 15. The nineteenth-century French prime minister Charles-Maurice Talleyrand said that constitutions should be “short and obscure.” Article 15 fulfills his dictum. It is short and obscure; it says simply *Débrouillez-vous* (Fend for yourself).

It’s usual to think of a constitution as a document that lays out the responsibilities, duties, and rights of citizens and states. States are supposed to resolve conflicts among their citizens, protect them, and provide key public services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure that individuals are not able to adequately provide on their own. A constitution isn’t supposed to say *Débrouillez-vous*.

The reference to “Article 15” is a joke. There isn’t such a clause in the Congolese Constitution. But it’s apt. The Congolese have been fending for themselves at least since independence in 1960 (and things were even worse before). Their state has repeatedly failed to do any of the things it is supposed to do and is absent from vast swaths of the country. Courts, roads, health clinics, and schools are moribund in most of the country. Murder, theft, extortion, and intimidation are commonplace. During the Great War of Africa that raged in the Congo between 1998 and 2003, the lives of most Congolese, already wretched, turned into a veritable hell. Possibly five million people perished; they were murdered, died of disease, or starved to death.

Even during times of peace the Congolese state has failed to uphold the actual clauses of the constitution. Article 16 states:

All persons have the right to life, physical integrity and to the free development of their personality, while respecting the law, public order, the rights of others and public morality.

But much of the Kivu region, in the east of the country, is still controlled by rebel groups and warlords who plunder, harass, and murder civilians while looting the country’s mineral wealth.

What about the real Article 15 in the Congolese Constitution? It begins, “The public authorities are responsible for the elimination of sexual violence . . .” Yet in 2010 an official of the United Nations described the country as the “rape capital of the world.”

The Congolese are on their own. *Débrouillez-vous*.

## **A Journey Through Dominance**

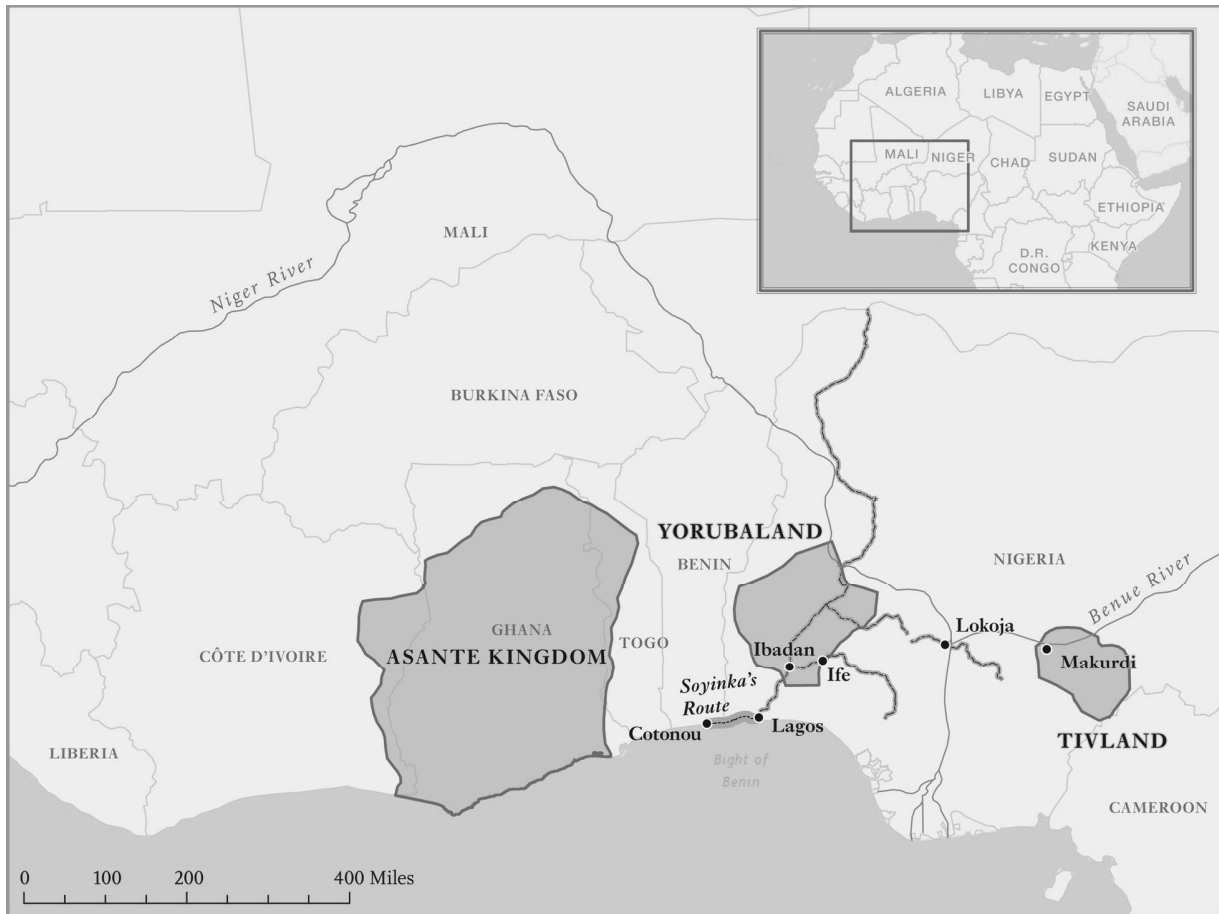
This adage is not apposite just for the Congolese. If you retrace the Gulf of Guinea, you arrive at the place that seemed to best sum up Kaplan’s bleak vision of the future, Lagos, the business capital of Nigeria. Kaplan described it as a city “whose crime, pollution, and

overcrowding make it the cliché par excellence of Third World urban dysfunction.”

In 1994, as Kaplan wrote, Nigeria was under the control of the military with General Sani Abacha as president. Abacha did not think that his job was to impartially resolve conflicts or protect Nigerians. He focused on killing his opponents and expropriating the country’s natural wealth. Estimates of how much he stole start at around \$3.5 billion and go higher.

The previous year the Nobel Prize–winning writer Wole Soyinka returned to Lagos, crossing the land border from Cotonou, the capital of neighboring Benin (which is shown on [Map 1](#)). He recalled, “The approach to the Nigeria-Cotonou border told the story at first glance. For miles we cruised past a long line of vehicles parked along the road right up to the border, unable or unwilling to cross.” People who ventured across “returned within an hour of their venture either with damaged vehicles or with depleted pockets, having been forced to pay a toll for getting even as far as the first roadblock.”





**Map 1.** West Africa: The Historic Asante Kingdom, Yorubaland and Tivland, and Wole Soyinka's Route from Cotonou to Lagos

Undeterred, Soyinka crossed into Nigeria to find somebody to take him to the capital, only to be told, "*Oga Wole, eko o da o*" (Master Wole, Lagos is not good). A taxi driver came forward pointing to his bandaged head with his bandaged hand. He proceeded to narrate the reception he had received; a bloodthirsty gang had pursued him even as he drove his car in reverse at full speed.

*Oga . . . Dose rioters break my windshield even as I dey already reversing back. Na God save me self . . . Eko ti daru* [Lagos is in chaos].

Finally, Soyinka found a taxi to take him to Lagos, though the reluctant driver opined, “The road is ba-a-ad. Very bad.” As Soyinka put it, “And thus began the most nightmarish journey of my existence.” He continued:

The roadblocks were made up of empty petroleum barrels, discarded tires and wheel hubs, vending kiosks, blocks of wood and tree trunks, huge stones . . . The freelance hoodlums had taken over . . . At some roadblocks there was a going fee; you paid it and were allowed to pass—but that safe conduct lasted only until the next barrier. Sometimes the fee was a gallon or more of fuel siphoned from your car, and then you were permitted to proceed—until the next barrier . . . Some vehicles had clearly run a gauntlet of missiles, cudgels, and even fists; others could have arrived directly from the film set of *Jurassic Park*—one could have sworn there were abnormal teeth marks in the bodywork.

As he approached Lagos, the situation grew worse.

Normally the journey into the heart of Lagos would take two hours. Now it was already five hours later, and we had covered only some fifty kilometers. I became increasingly anxious. The tension in the air became palpable as we moved nearer to Lagos. The roadblocks became more frequent; so did the sight of damaged vehicles and, worst of all, corpses.

Corpses are not an unusual sight in Lagos. When a senior policeman went missing, the police searched the waters under a bridge for his body. They stopped looking after six hours and twenty-three corpses, none of them the one they were seeking.

While the Nigerian military looted the country, Lagosians had to do a lot of fending for themselves. The city was crime ridden and the

international airport was so dysfunctional that foreign countries banned their airlines from flying there. Gangs called “area boys” preyed on businessmen, shaking them down for money and even murdering them. The area boys weren’t the only hazard people had to avoid. In addition to the odd corpse, the streets were covered in trash and rats. A BBC reporter commented in 1999 that “the city is . . . disappearing under a mountain of rubbish.” There was no publicly provided electricity or running water. To get light you had to buy your own generator. Or candles.

The nightmarish existence of Lagosians wasn’t just that they lived in rat-infested, trash-strewn streets and saw corpses on the sidewalk. They lived in continual fear. Living in downtown Lagos with the area boys wasn’t fun. Even if they decided to spare you today, they might come after you tomorrow—especially if you had the audacity to complain about what they were doing to your city or didn’t show them the subservience they demanded. This fear, insecurity, and uncertainty may be as debilitating as actual violence because, to use a term introduced by political philosopher Philip Pettit, it puts you under the “dominance” of another group of human beings.

In his book *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Pettit argues that the fundamental tenet of a fulfilling, decent life is non-dominance—freedom from dominance, fear, and extreme insecurity. It is unacceptable, according to Pettit, when one has to

live at the mercy of another, having to live in a manner that leaves you vulnerable to some ill that the other is in a position arbitrarily to impose.

Such dominance is experienced when

the wife . . . finds herself in a position where her husband can beat her at will, and without any possibility of redress; by the employee who dare not raise a complaint against an

employer, and who is vulnerable to any of a range of abuses . . . that the employer may choose to perpetrate; by the debtor who has to depend on the grace of the moneylender, or the bank official, for avoiding utter destitution and ruin.

Pettit recognizes that the threat of violence or abuses can be as bad as actual violence and abuses. To be sure, you can avoid the violence by following some other person's wishes or orders. But the price is doing something you don't want to do and being subject to that threat day in and day out. (As economists would put it, the violence might be "off the equilibrium path," but that doesn't mean that it doesn't affect your behavior or have consequences that are almost as bad as suffering actual violence.) As Pettit sees it, such people

live in the shadow of the other's presence, even if no arm is raised against them. They live in uncertainty about the other's reactions and in need of keeping a weather eye open for the other's moods. They find themselves . . . unable to look the other in the eye, and where they may even be forced to fawn or toady or flatter in the attempt to ingratiate themselves.

But dominance doesn't just originate from brute force or threats of violence. Any relation of unequal power, whether enforced by threats or by other social means, such as customs, will create a form of dominance, because it amounts to being

subject to arbitrary sway: being subject to the potentially capricious will or the potentially idiosyncratic judgement of another.

We refine Locke's notion and define liberty as the absence of dominance, because one who is dominated cannot make free choices.

Liberty, or in Pettit's words, non-dominance, means

emancipation from any such subordination, liberation from any such dependency. It requires the capacity to stand eye to eye with your fellow citizens, in a shared awareness that none of you has a power of arbitrary interference over another.

Critically, liberty requires not just the abstract notion that you are free to choose your actions, but also the ability to exercise that freedom. This ability is absent when a person, group, or organization has the power to coerce you, threaten you, or use the weight of social relations to subjugate you. It cannot be present when conflicts are resolved by actual force or its threat. But equally, it doesn't exist when conflicts are resolved by unequal power relations imposed by entrenched customs. To flourish, liberty needs the end of dominance, whatever its source.

In Lagos liberty was nowhere to be seen. Conflict was resolved in favor of the stronger, the better-armed party. There was violence, theft, and murder. Infrastructure was crumbling at every turn. Dominance was all around. This was not a coming anarchy. It was already there.

## **Warre and the Leviathan**

Lagos in the 1990s may seem an aberration to most of us living in security and comfort. But it isn't. For most of human existence, insecurity and dominance have been facts of life. For most of history, even after the emergence of agriculture and settled life about ten thousand years ago, humans lived in "stateless" societies. Some of these societies resemble a few surviving hunter-gatherer groups in the remote regions of the Amazon and Africa (sometimes also called "small-scale societies"). But others, such as the Pashtuns, an ethnic group of about 50 million people who occupy much of southern and

eastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan, are far larger and engaged in farming and herding. Archaeological and anthropological evidence shows that many of these societies were locked in an even more traumatic existence than the inhabitants of Lagos suffered daily in the 1990s.

The most telling historical evidence comes from deaths in warfare and murder, which archaeologists have estimated from disfigured or damaged skeletal remains; some anthropologists have observed this firsthand in surviving stateless societies. In 1978, the anthropologist Carol Ember systematically documented that there were very high rates of warfare in hunter-gatherer societies—a shock to her profession’s image of “peaceful savages.” She found frequent warfare, with a war at least every other year in two-thirds of the societies she studied. Only 10 percent of them had no warfare. Steven Pinker, building on research by Lawrence Keeley, compiled evidence from twenty-seven stateless societies studied by anthropologists over the past two hundred years, and estimated a rate of death caused by violence of over 500 per 100,000 people—over 100 times the current homicide rate in the United States, 5 per 100,000, or over 1,000 times that in Norway, about 0.5 per 100,000. Archaeological evidence from premodern societies is consistent with this level of violence.

We should pause to take in the significance of these numbers. With a death rate of over 500 per 100,000, or 0.5 percent, a typical inhabitant of this society has about a 25 percent likelihood of being killed within a period of fifty years—so a quarter of the people you know will be violently killed during their lifetimes. It is hard for us to imagine the unpredictability and fear that such brazen social violence would imply.

Though a lot of this death and carnage was due to warring between rival tribes or groups, it wasn’t just warfare and intergroup conflict that brought incessant violence. The Gebusi of New Guinea, for example, have even higher murder rates—almost 700 per 100,000 in the precontact period of the 1940s and 1950s—mostly taking place during peaceful, regular times (if times during which almost 1 in 100 of the population gets murdered each year can be called peaceful!). The reason appears to be related to the belief that every death is

caused by witchcraft, which triggers a hunt for the parties responsible for even nonviolent deaths.

It's not just murder that makes the lives of stateless societies precarious. Life expectancy at birth in stateless societies was very low, varying between twenty-one and thirty-seven years. Similarly short lifespans and violent deaths were not unusual for our progenitors before the past two hundred years. Thus many of our ancestors, just like the inhabitants of Lagos, lived in what the famous political philosopher Thomas Hobbes described in his book *Leviathan* as

continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

This was what Hobbes, writing during another nightmarish period, the English Civil War of the 1640s, described as a condition of “Warre,” or what Kaplan would have called “anarchy”—a situation of war of all against all, “of every man, against every man.”

Hobbes's brilliant depiction of Warre made it clear why life under this condition would be worse than bleak. Hobbes started with some basic assumptions about human nature and argued that conflicts would be endemic in any human interaction. “If any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and . . . endeavor to destroy, or subdue one another.” A world without a way to resolve these conflicts was not going to be a happy one because

from hence it comes to passe, that where an Invader hath no more to fear, than an other mans single power; if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossess and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty.

Remarkably, Hobbes anticipated Pettit's argument on dominance, noting that just the threat of violence can be pernicious, even if you can avoid actual violence by staying home after dark, by restricting your movements and your interactions. Warre, according to Hobbes, "consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary." So the prospect of Warre also had huge consequences for people's lives. For example, "when taking a journey, he arms himself, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doores; when even in his house he locks his chests." All of this was familiar to Wole Soyinka, who never moved anywhere in Lagos without a Glock pistol strapped to his side for protection.

Hobbes also recognized that humans desire some basic amenities and economic opportunities. He wrote, "The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them." But these things would not come naturally in the state of Warre. Indeed, economic incentives would be destroyed.

In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth.

Naturally, people would look for a way out of anarchy, a way to impose "restraint upon themselves" and get "themselves out from the miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the natural Passions of men." Hobbes had already anticipated how this could happen when he introduced the notion of Warre, since he observed that Warre emerges when "men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe." Hobbes dubbed this common Power the "great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH or STATE," three words he used interchangeably. The solution to Warre was thus



to create the sort of centralized authority that the Congolese, the Nigerians, or the members of anarchic, stateless societies did not have. Hobbes used the image of the Leviathan, the great sea monster described in the Bible's Book of Job, to stress that this state needed to be powerful. The frontispiece of his book, shown in the photography section, featured an etching of the Leviathan with a quotation from Job:

There is no power on earth to be compared to him. (Job 41:24)

Point taken.

Hobbes understood that the all-powerful Leviathan would be feared. But better to fear one powerful Leviathan than to fear everybody. The Leviathan would stop the war of all against all, ensure people do not “endeavor to destroy, or subdue one another,” clean up the trash and the area boys, and get the electricity going.

Sounds great, but how exactly do you get a Leviathan? Hobbes proposed two routes. The first he called a “Common-wealth by Institution . . . when a Multitude of men do Agree, and Covenant, every one, with every one” to create such a state and delegate power and authority to it, or as he put it, “to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgments, to his Judgment.” So a sort of grand social contract (“Covenant”) would accede to the creation of a Leviathan. The second he called a “Common-wealth by Acquisition,” which “is acquired by force,” since Hobbes recognized that in a state of Warre somebody might emerge who would “subdueth his enemies to his will.” The important thing was that “the Rights, and Consequences of Sovereignty, are the same in both.” However society got a Leviathan, Hobbes believed, the consequences would be the same—the end of Warre.

This conclusion might sound surprising, but Hobbes's logic is revealed by his discussion of the three alternative ways to govern a state: through monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. Though these appear to be very different decision-making institutions, Hobbes

argued that “the difference between these three kindes of Commonwealth consisteth not in the difference of Power; but in the difference of Convenience.” On balance, a monarchy was more likely to be convenient and had practical advantages, but the main point is that a Leviathan, however governed, would do what a Leviathan does. It would stop Warre, abolish “continuall feare, and danger of violent death,” and guarantee that the life of men (and hopefully women too) was no longer “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” In essence, Hobbes maintained that any state would have the objective of the “conservation of Peace and Justice,” and that this was “the end for which all Common-wealths are Instituted.” So might, or at any rate sufficiently overwhelming might, makes right, however it came about.

The influence of Hobbes’s masterpiece on modern social science can hardly be exaggerated. In theorizing about states and constitutions, we follow Hobbes and start with what problems they solve, how they constrain behavior, and how they reallocate power in society. We look for clues about how society works not in God-given laws, but in basic human motivations and how we can shape them. But even more profound is his influence on how we perceive states today. We respect them and their representatives, regardless of whether they are monarchies, aristocracies, or democracies. Even after a military coup or civil war, representatives of the new government, flying in their official jets, take their seats in the United Nations, and the international community looks to them to enforce laws, resolve conflicts, and protect their citizens. It confers on them official respect. Just as Hobbes envisaged, whatever their origins and path to power, rulers epitomize the Leviathan, and they have legitimacy.

Hobbes was right that avoiding Warre is a critical priority for humans. He was also correct in anticipating that once states formed and began monopolizing the means of violence and enforcing their laws, killings declined. The Leviathan controlled the Warre of “every man, against every man.” Under Western and Northern European states, murder rates today are only 1 per 100,000 or less; public services are effective, efficient, and plentiful; and people have come as close to liberty as at any time in human history.

But there was also much that Hobbes didn’t get right. For one, it

turns out that stateless societies are quite capable of controlling violence and putting a lid on conflict, though as we'll see this doesn't bring much liberty. For another, he was too optimistic about the liberty that states would bring. Indeed, Hobbes was wrong on one defining issue (and so is the international community, we might add): might does not make right, and it certainly does not make for liberty. Life under the yoke of the state can be nasty, brutish, and short too.

Let us start with this latter point.

## **Shock and Awe**

It wasn't simply that the Nigerian state didn't want to prevent the anarchy in Lagos or that the state in the Democratic Republic of Congo decided it would be best not to enforce laws and let rebels kill people. They lacked the capacity to do these things. The capacity of a state is its ability to achieve its objectives. These objectives often include enforcing laws, resolving conflicts, regulating and taxing economic activity, and providing infrastructure or other public services. They may also include waging wars. The capacity of the state depends partly on how its institutions are organized, but even more critically, it depends on its bureaucracy. You need bureaucrats and state employees to be present so that they can implement the state's plans, and you need these bureaucrats to have the means and motivation to carry out their mission. The first person to spell this vision out was the German sociologist Max Weber, who was inspired by the Prussian bureaucracy, which formed the backbone of the German state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



In 1938, the German bureaucracy had a problem. The governing National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) Party had decided to expel all Jews from Austria, which had recently been annexed by Germany. But a bureaucratic bottleneck quickly emerged. Things had to be done properly, so each Jew had to assemble a number of papers and

documents to be able to leave. This took an inordinate amount of time. The man who occupied desk IV-B-4 in the SS (Schutzstaffel, a Nazi paramilitary organization), Adolf Eichmann, was put in charge. Eichmann came up with the idea for what the World Bank would nowadays call a “one-stop shop.” He developed an assembly line system that integrated all the offices concerned—the Ministry of Finance, the income tax people, the police, and the Jewish leaders. He also sent Jewish functionaries abroad to solicit funds from Jewish organizations so that the Jews could buy the visas needed for emigration. As Hannah Arendt put it in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*:

At one end you put in a Jew who still has some property, a factory, or a shop, or a bank account, and he goes through the building from counter to counter, from office to office, and comes out at the other end without any money, without any rights, with only a passport on which it says: “You must leave the country within a fortnight. Otherwise you will go to a concentration camp.”

As a result of the one-stop shop, 45,000 Jews left Austria in eight months. Eichmann was promoted to the rank of *Obersturmbannführer* (lieutenant colonel), and moved on to become the transport coordinator for the Final Solution, which involved solving many similar bureaucratic bottlenecks to facilitate mass murder.

Here was a powerful, capable state at work, a bureaucratic Leviathan. But it was using this capacity not for solving conflicts or stopping Warre, but for harassing and dispossessing and then murdering Jews. The German Third Reich, building on the tradition of Prussian bureaucracy and its professional military, certainly counts as a Leviathan by Hobbes’s definition. Just as Hobbes wanted, Germans, at least a good portion of them, did “submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgments, to his Judgment.” Indeed, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger told students, “The Führer alone is the

present and future German reality and its law.” The German state also generated awe in the population, not just among Hitler’s supporters. Not many wanted to cross it or break its laws.

Awe turned into fear, with the SA (Sturmabteilung, brown-shirted paramilitaries), SS, and Gestapo roaming the streets. Germans spent their nights in cold sweats, waiting for the hard knocks on their doors and the jackboots in their living rooms that would take them to some basement for interrogation or draft them to go to the Eastern front to face almost certain death. The German Leviathan was feared much more than the anarchy in Nigeria or the Congo. And for good reason. It imprisoned, tortured, and killed huge numbers of Germans—social democrats, Communists, political opponents, homosexuals, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. It murdered 6 million Jews, many of whom were German citizens, and 200,000 Roma; according to some estimates, the number of Slavs it murdered in Poland and Russia exceeded 10 million.

What Germans and citizens of the territories Germany occupied suffered under Hitler’s reign wasn’t Hobbes’s Warre. It was the war of the state against its citizens. It was dominance and murder. Not the sort of thing Hobbes was hoping for from his Leviathan.

## **Reeducation Through Labor**

Fear of the all-powerful state is not confined to abhorrent exceptions such as the Nazi state. It is much more common than that. In the 1950s, China was still the darling of many Europeans on the left, Maoist thought was de rigueur in French cafés, and Chairman Mao’s *Little Red Book* was a choice item in trendy booksellers. After all, here was the Chinese Communist Party that had thrown off the yoke of Japanese colonialism and Western imperialism and was busy building a capable state and socialist society out of the ashes.

On November 11, 1959, the secretary of the Communist Party in Guangshan County, Zhang Fuhong, was attacked. A man called Ma Longshan took the lead and started to kick him. Others set on him

with fists and feet. He was beaten bloody and his hair ripped out in patches, his uniform was torn to threads, and he was left barely able to walk. By November 15, after repeated further attacks, he could only lie on the floor while he was kicked and punched and the rest of his hair torn out. By the time he was dragged home he had lost control of his bodily functions and could no longer eat or drink. The next day he was attacked again, and when he asked for water, it was refused. On November 19, he died.

This harrowing depiction is painted by Yang Jisheng in his book *Tombstone*. He recalls how earlier that year he was urgently called home from boarding school because his father was starving. Upon reaching home in Wanli, he noticed that

the elm tree in front of our house had been reduced to a barkless trunk, and even its roots had been dug up and stripped, leaving only a ragged hole in the earth. The pond was dry; neighbors said it had been drained to dredge for rank-tasting mollusks that had never been eaten in the past. There was no sound of dogs barking, no chickens running about . . . Wanli was like a ghost town. Upon entering our home, I found utter destitution; there was not a grain of rice, nothing edible whatsoever, and not even water in the vat . . . My father was half-reclined on his bed, his eyes sunken and lifeless, his face gaunt, the skin creased and flaccid . . . I boiled congee from the rice I'd brought . . . but he was no longer able to swallow. Three days later he departed this world.

Yang Jisheng's father died in the great famine that struck China in the later 1950s, when possibly 45 million people starved to death. Yang shows how

starvation was a prolonged agony. The grain was gone, the wild herbs had all been eaten, even the bark had been

stripped from the trees, and bird droppings, rats, and cotton batting were all used to fill stomachs. In the kaolin clay fields, starving people chewed on the clay as they dug it. The corpses of the dead, famine victims seeking refuge from other villages, even one's own family members, became food for the desperate.

Cannibalism was widespread.

The Chinese lived through a nightmare in this period. But, just as in the Third Reich, it was not brought on the people by the absence of a Leviathan. It was planned and executed by the state. Zhang Fuhong was beaten to death by his comrades in the Communist Party, and Ma Longshan was the county party secretary. Zhang's alleged crime was "right deviationism" and being a "degenerate element." That meant he attempted to instigate some solutions to the mounting famine. Even mentioning the famine in China could cause you to be labeled "a negator of the Great Harvest" and to be subjected to "struggle," a euphemism for being beaten to death.

In Huaidian People's Commune, another part of the same county, 12,134 people, a third of the population, died between September 1959 and June 1960. Most starved to death, but not all; 3,528 people were beaten by cadres of the Communist Party, 636 of those died, 141 were left permanently disabled, and 14 committed suicide.

The reason so many people perished in Huaidian is simple. In the autumn of 1959, the grain harvest brought in 5.955 million kilos, which was not unusually low. But the Communist Party had decided to procure 6 million kilos from the farmers. So all the grain from Huaidian went to the cities and the party. The farmers ate bark and mollusks, and starved.

These experiences were part of the "Great Leap Forward," the "modernization" program launched by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1958 with the aim of using the Chinese state's capacity to dramatically transform the country from a rural, agrarian society into a modern urban and industrial one. This program required heavy taxes on peasants in order to subsidize industry and invest in machinery. The

result was not just a human disaster, but also an economic tragedy of major proportions, all planned and implemented by the Leviathan. Yang's disturbing book brilliantly illustrates how the Leviathan, which had "the power to deprive an individual of everything," implemented the measures, such as requisitioning the entire grain production from Huaidian commune, and how they were enforced by "struggle" and violence. One technique was to centralize cooking and eating into a "communal kitchen" run by the state so that "anyone who proved disobedient could be deprived of food." Consequently, "villagers lost control of their own survival." Anyone who opposed the system was "crushed," and the consequence was to turn everyone into either "despot or slave." To stay alive, people had to allow others to "trample upon the things they most cherished and flatter things they had always most despised" and demonstrate their loyalty to the system by engaging in "virtuoso pandering and deceit"—dominance pure and simple.

Hobbes argued that life was "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" when "men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe." Yet Yang's description shows that even though all "stood in awe and terror before Mao," this led to the creation rather than the abatement of a nasty, brutish, and short life for most.

Another tool of governance the Communist Party created was the "Reeducation Through Labor" system. The first document to use this phrase was the "Directives for a Complete Purge of Hidden Counter-revolutionaries," published in 1955. By the next year the reeducation system had been born and camps set up throughout the country. These camps perfected various types of "struggle." Luo Hongshan, for example, was sentenced to three years of reeducation through labor. He recalled:

We woke up at 4 or 5 every morning and went to work at 6:30 am . . . laboring straight until 7 or 8 in the evening. When it was too dark to see, we would stop. We really had no notion of time. Beatings were common, and some detainees were beaten to death. I know of 7 or 8 detainees



on the number 1 middle work unit who were beaten to death. And this doesn't count those who hung themselves or committed suicide because they couldn't bear the abuse . . . They used iron clubs, wooden bats, pick handles, leather belts . . . They broke six of my ribs, and today I am covered with scars from head to foot . . . All kinds of torture—"taking a plane," "riding a motorcycle" . . . "standing on tiptoe at midnight" (these were all names for types of punishment)—were common. They would make us eat shit and drink urine and call it eating fried dough sticks and drinking wine. They were really inhuman.

Luo was not arrested during the Great Leap Forward, but in March 2001, when China was already a respected member of the international community and an economic powerhouse. Indeed, the Reeducation Through Labor system was expanded after 1979 by Deng Xiaoping, the engineer of China's legendary economic growth over the last four decades, who saw it as a useful complement to his "economic reform" program. In 2012 there were around 350 reeducation camps with 160,000 detainees. A person can be committed to such a camp for up to four years without any legal process. The reeducation camps are just one part of an extensive gulag of detention centers and various illegal "black jails" dotting the Chinese countryside and are complemented by an expanded "community corrections system," which has grown rapidly in recent years. In May 2014 the system was "correcting" 709,000 people.

The struggle continues. In October 2013 Premier Xi Jinping decided to praise the "Fengqiao experience," and urged Communist Party cadres to follow its example. The phrase refers to a district in Zhejiang Province that implemented Mao Zedong's "Four Clean-ups" political campaign in 1963 without actually arresting anyone, but rather by inducing people to publicly monitor, report on, and help to "reeducate" their neighbors. It was a prelude to China's Cultural Revolution, in which hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of

innocent Chinese would be murdered (the exact numbers are unknown and undisclosed).

The Chinese Leviathan, just like the Leviathan in the Third Reich, has the capacity to resolve conflicts and get things done. But it uses its capacity not to promote liberty but for naked repression and dominance. It ends Warre, but only to replace it with a different nightmare.

## **The Janus-Faced Leviathan**

The first crack in Hobbes's thesis is the idea that the Leviathan has a single face. But in reality, the state is Janus-faced. One face resembles what Hobbes imagined: it prevents Warre, it protects its subjects, it resolves conflicts fairly, it provides public services, amenities, and economic opportunities; it lays the foundations for economic prosperity. The other is despotic and fearsome: it silences its citizens, it is impervious to their wishes. It dominates them, it imprisons them, maims them, and murders them. It steals the fruits of their labor or helps others do so.

Some societies, like the Germans under the Third Reich or the Chinese under the Communist Party, see the fearsome face of the Leviathan. They suffer dominance, but this time at the hand of the state and those controlling the state's power. We say that such societies live with a Despotic Leviathan. The defining characteristic of the Despotic Leviathan isn't that it represses and murders its citizens, but that it provides no means for society and the regular people to have a say in how its power and capacity are used. It isn't that China's state is despotic because it sends its citizens to reeducation camps. It sends people to camps because it can, and it can because it is despotic, unrestrained by—and unaccountable to—society.

Hence we are back to the Gilgamesh problem from the Preface. The Despotic Leviathan creates a powerful state but then uses it to dominate society, sometimes with naked repression. What's the alternative? Before answering this question, let's return to the other

problem with Hobbes's account—his presumption that statelessness means violence.

## The Cage of Norms

Though the human past is replete with instances of Warre, there are plenty of stateless societies (living under the “Absent Leviathan”) that managed to control violence. These range from the Mbuti Pygmies of the Congo rain forest to several large agricultural societies in West Africa, such as the Akan people of modern Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. In Ghana the British administrator Brodie Cruickshank reported in the 1850s that

the paths and thoroughfares of the country became as safe for the transmission of merchandize, and as free from interruption of any description, as the best frequented roads of the most highly civilized countries in Europe.

As Hobbes would have expected, the absence of Warre led to flourishing commerce. Cruickshank observed, “There was not a nook or corner of the land to which the enterprize of some sanguine trader had not led him. Every village had its festoons of Manchester cottons and China silks, hung upon the walls of the houses, or round the trees in the market-place, to attract the attention and excite the cupidity of the villagers.”

You couldn't have such bustling enterprise in a society that was incapable of resolving conflicts and ensuring some type of justice. Indeed, as the French trader Joseph-Marie Bonnat observed later in the nineteenth century:

It is to the exercise of justice, in the small villages, that the first hours of the day are devoted.

How did the Akan people exercise justice? They used (social) norms—customs, traditions, rituals, and patterns of acceptable and expected behavior—that had evolved over generations.

Bonnat described how people gathered around for consultation. The elders are “accompanied by those in the village who are not working,” and they “go and sit under the most shady tree, the slaves following their master and carrying the chair on which he is to sit. The company, which always includes a large part of the inhabitants, goes to listen to the debate and takes the part of one of the litigants. On most occasions the matter is arranged amicably, the guilty person paying the costs; this consists usually of palm wine which is distributed to those present. If the matter is serious, the penalty consists of a sheep and also of a specified quantity of gold dust.”

The community listened and used its norms to decide who was guilty. The same norms then ensured that the guilty desisted, paid up, or undertook another form of restitution. Though Hobbes saw the all-powerful Leviathan as the fountainhead of justice, most societies aren't that different from the Akan. Norms determine what is right and wrong in the eyes of others, what types of behaviors are shunned and discouraged, and when individuals and families will be ostracized and cut off from the support of others. Norms also play a vital role in bonding people and coordinating their actions so that they can exercise force against other communities and those committing serious crimes in their own community.

Although norms play an important role even under the auspices of a Despotic Leviathan (could the Third Reich have survived if all Germans thought that it lacked all legitimacy, stopped cooperating with it, and organized against it?), they are critical when the Leviathan is absent because they provide the only way for society to avoid Warre.

The problem for liberty, however, is multifaceted. The same norms that have evolved to coordinate action, resolve conflicts, and generate a shared understanding of justice also create a cage, imposing a different but no less disempowering sort of dominance on people. This too is true in every society, but in societies without centralized authority and relying exclusively on norms, the cage becomes tighter, more stifling.

We can understand how the cage of norms emerges and how it restricts liberty by staying in the Akan country and studying the account of another British official, Captain Robert Rattray. In 1924 Rattray became the first head of the Anthropological Department of Asante, one of the largest Akan groups, and part of the British colony of the Gold Coast, now Ghana. His job was to undertake a study of Asante society, politics, and religion. He transcribed an Asante proverb thus:

When a chicken separates itself from the rest, a hawk will get it.

For Rattray this proverb captured a critical aspect of the organization of Asante society—that it was molded by immense insecurity and potential violence. Though the Asante eventually developed one of the most powerful states in precolonial Africa, this state was founded on basic social structures dating from an era before centralized political authority emerged. Without effective state institutions, how could you avoid “a hawk”? Norms had evolved to reduce vulnerability to violence and exposure to those who could carry it out, providing some protection against hawks. But at the same time, they imposed their cage; you would have to surrender your freedom and stand with the other chickens.

Even in stateless societies some people were more influential than others, had more wealth, better connections, more authority. In Africa these people were often the chiefs, or sometimes the most senior people in a kinship group, the elders. If you wanted to avoid the hawks, you needed their protection and you needed numbers to defend yourself, so you attached yourself to a kin group or lineage. In return, you accepted their dominance over you, and this is what became the status quo, enshrined in Akan norms. As Rattray put it, you accepted “voluntary servitude.”

A condition of voluntary servitude was, in a very literal sense, the heritage of every Ashanti; it formed indeed the essential basis of his social system. In West Africa it was the masterless man and woman who ran the immanent danger of having what we should term “their freedom” turned into involuntary bondage of a much more drastic nature.

By involuntary bondage of a “much more drastic nature,” Rattray meant slavery. So if you tried to free yourself from the chains of voluntary servitude, most likely you would be captured by hawks, in this instance slavers, and sold into slavery.

Indeed, a lot of the Warre in Africa was rooted in different groups trying to capture and sell others into slavery. Many vivid accounts describe the experience of Africans who were caught up in this trade. One, the story of Goi, was translated into English by a missionary, Dugald Campbell. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Goi lived in the south of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the lands of a Chief Chikwiva from the Luba people. His father died when he was young and he grew up with his mother, sister, and brother. One day

a war party appeared, and came yelling along the path shouting their war cries. They attacked the village and killed several women. They caught young women, chased and captured us boys, and tied us all together. We were driven to the capital and sold to the slave traders, who nailed wooden shackles on our feet.

From there Goi was taken to the coast, “Dragged thus from my house and from my mother, whom I never saw again, we were driven along the ‘red road’ to the sea.” The road was “red” because of all the blood spilled along it. By this time Goi was so weak and emaciated from starvation and constant violence that he was almost worthless.

Reduced to a skeleton, a mere shadow, and unable to travel, I was carried round the villages and offered for sale. No one was willing to give a goat or a hen for me . . . Finally one of the missionaries named “Monare” paid a coloured handkerchief for me, worth about fivepence, and I was free. So at any rate they told me, but I did not believe it, for I could not understand what freedom meant, and I thought I was now a slave of the white men. I did not want to be free, for I would only be caught and sold again.

The threat from slavers and the cage of norms conspired to create a spectrum of unfreedom. At one end of the spectrum was the extreme of slavery experienced by Goi. At the other end were obligations and duties you had to accept in order to avoid the hawks. This meant that belonging to a kinship group or society protected you, but didn't make you free from dominance. If you were a woman, you could be traded for bridewealth and exchanged in a marriage, not to mention the more general subjugation and abuse that was the lot of women in a patriarchal society dominated by chiefs, elders, and men generally.

Within this spectrum of unfreedom were many different types of relationships. One of those, fraught with dominance, can be seen from the story of Bwanikwa, also written down by Campbell. Bwanikwa too was a Luba and her father had a dozen wives. The head wife was a daughter of an important local chief, Katumba. Bwanikwa recalled how

the head wife had just died. According to Luba custom he [her father] was mulcted for death dues. He was ordered to pay three slaves, as compensation for his wife's death . . . my father could raise only two.

One of his four daughters had to be handed over to make a third, and I was chosen . . . When he handed me over to my master, he said to him as we parted: “Be kind to my little daughter; do not sell her to anyone else, and I will come and

redeem her.” As my father was unable to redeem me, I was left in slavery.

Bwanikwa’s status was that of a pawn or a pledge, another relationship of subjugation common in Africa. Pawning someone meant giving them to another person for a specific purpose. Often this was payment for some sort of loan, debt, or obligation. But in Bwanikwa’s case it was because her father couldn’t find an extra slave. If he’d found the slave, he could have redeemed Bwanikwa. A pawn was different from a slave; there was no automatic sale, and the expectation was that the situation was temporary. But as Bwanikwa realized, it could merge into slavery. F. B. Spilsbury, a visitor to Sierra Leone in 1805 and 1806, explained:

If a king or any other person goes to a factory, or a slave ship, and procures articles which he is not at that time able to pay for, he sends his wife, sister, or child as a pawn, putting a tally round their necks; the child then runs among the slaves until exchanged.

A related condition was that of a ward. People would send their children as wards to a more powerful family to be brought up in their household. It was a way of keeping them safe, even if they knew this would often involve permanent separation and even if it meant plunging them into a relationship of subservience to their caretakers.

These stories show that people were routinely treated as objects to be pawned and pledged. They often ended up in relationships of dominance. You had to obey the chief, the elders, your caretakers, and, if you were a woman, your husband. You had to follow the customs of your society closely. If you recall Pettit’s definition of being dominated—as living “in the shadow of the other’s presence . . . in need of keeping a weather eye open for the other’s moods . . . forced to fawn or toady or flatter in the attempt to ingratiate themselves”—you’ll see this fits it very well.



How did these subservient social statuses emerge? How were they justified? The answer is, again, norms; these relationships evolved as customs accepted by society and supported by beliefs of what was proper and right. People could be pawned and wards had to relinquish their freedom; wives had to obey their husbands; people had to tightly follow their prescribed social roles. Why? Because everybody else expected them to. But at a deeper level, these norms were not completely arbitrary. Though norms are not chosen by anybody and evolve over time from practices and collective beliefs, they are more likely to become widely accepted if they also play a useful role in society, or at least for some people in society. Akan society consented to norms restricting freedoms and the unequal power relations they implied because they reduced people's vulnerability to Warre. If you were a ward or pawn of an important person, the hawks were less likely to mess with you, and maybe less likely to capture you and enslave you. Another Asante proverb Rattray wrote down summarized their situation even more succinctly: "If you have not a master, a beast will catch you."

To be free was to be a chicken among the hawks, a prey for the beast. Better to settle for voluntary servitude and give away your liberty.



The cage of norms isn't just about preventing Warre. Once traditions and customs become so deeply ingrained, they start regulating many aspects of people's lives. It's then inevitable that they will start favoring those with a little more say in society at the expense of others. Even when norms have evolved over centuries, they get interpreted and enforced by these more powerful individuals. Why shouldn't they tilt the board in their favor and cement their power in the community or the household a little more?

With the exception of a few matriarchal groups, the norms of many stateless societies in Africa have created a hierarchy with men on top and women at the bottom. This is even more visible in the surviving customs in the Middle East and some parts of Asia, for

example, among the Pashtuns, whom we mentioned earlier. Pashtun lives are tightly regulated by their ancestral customs, called the Pashtunwali. The Pashtunwali system of law and governance puts a lot of emphasis on generosity and hospitality. But it also creates a stifling cage of norms. One aspect of this is the sanctioning of revenge for a whole host of acts. One of the most common compilations of the Pashtunwali starts by noting that

a Pashtun believes and acts in accordance with the principles of . . . an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and blood for blood. He wipes out insult with insult regardless of cost or consequence and vindicates his honor by wiping out disgrace with suitable action.

Warre is always around the corner, even if there is a lot of generosity and hospitality aimed at preventing it. This has predictable consequences for everybody's liberty. But the weight falls more heavily on women. Pashtun norms not only make women subservient to their fathers, brothers, and husbands; they also restrict their every action. Adult women do not work and mostly stay inside. If they go outside, they go covered from head to toe with a burka and must be in the company of a male relative. Punishments for extramarital relations are draconian. The subjugation of women is another facet of the illiberty created by the cage of norms.

## **Beyond Hobbes**

All in all, we are seeing a rather different picture from the one Hobbes painted. The problem in societies where the Leviathan is absent isn't just uncontrolled violence of "every man, against every man." Equally critical is the cage of norms, which creates a rigid set of expectations and a panoply of unequal social relations producing a different but no lighter form of dominance.

Perhaps centralized, powerful states can help us achieve liberty? But we have seen that such states are likely to act despotically, repress their citizens, and stamp out liberty rather than promote it.

Are we then doomed to choose between one type of dominance over another? Trapped in either Warre or the cage of norms or under the yoke of a despotic state? Though there is nothing automatic about the emergence of liberty, and it hasn't been easy to achieve in human history, there is room for liberty in human affairs and this critically depends on the emergence of states and state institutions. Yet these must be very different from what Hobbes imagined—not the all-powerful, unrestrained sea monster, but a shackled state. We need a state that has the capacity to enforce laws, control violence, resolve conflicts, and provide public services but is still tamed and controlled by an assertive, well-organized society.

## **Shackling the Texans**

The U.S. state of Wyoming was created by the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, which called for the construction of a railroad to connect the eastern and western United States. The Union Pacific was built west from the Missouri River to link up with the Central Pacific heading east from Sacramento, California. In 1867 it reached what was to become the state of Wyoming, at that time merely a county of the Dakota Territory. By July 1867, settlers were already arriving and General Grenville M. Dodge, chief engineer of the Union Pacific, began the survey for a city at Cheyenne, which would become the capital of the state. It was to be four miles square with well-organized blocks, alleys, and streets. The Union Pacific, the beneficiary of a huge land grant from the government as an incentive to get the railroad constructed, started selling off the lots three days after Dodge surveyed them. The first went for \$150. By August 7, though Cheyenne was mostly a city of tents, a mass meeting in a local store chose a committee to write a city charter. On September 19 the first newspaper of the town, a triweekly tabloid called the *Cheyenne Leader*, was

launched. By December the newspaper was advising its readers to carry guns at night for self-protection because of “frequent occurrences of garroting.” On October 13 of the next year, the editor asserted:

Pistols are almost as numerous as men. It is no longer thought to be an affair of any importance to take the life of a fellow being.

At this point Cheyenne resorted to vigilante justice to solve the problems endemic to the American frontier. In January 1868 three men were arrested for theft but released on bail. The next morning they were found tied together with a sign that read “\$900 stole . . . \$500 Recovered . . . Next case goes up a tree. Beware of Vigilance Committee.” The next day vigilantes caught and hanged three “ruffians.”

In the rural cattle areas, things were much worse. As Edward W. Smith of Evanston told the United States Public Land Commission in 1879, “Away from settlements the shotgun is the only law.” As the cattle spread, conflicts between ranchers and homesteaders grew, and the reaction of the cattlemen led to the Johnson County Range War. On Tuesday, April 5, 1892, a special six-car train sped north from Cheyenne, carrying twenty-five Texas gunmen along with another twenty-four locals who had joined them. The men had a “Dead List of seventy men” they intended to kill.

We don’t have information about the homicide rate in Cheyenne in the 1890s, though data for the mining town of Benton, California, suggests that there it may have reached an incredible high of 24,000 per 100,000! More likely it was closer to 83 per 100,000, the rate during the California gold rush, or 100 per 100,000, the rate in Dodge City, Kansas, in the days of Wyatt Earp.

This sounds as bad as Lagos when Soyinka was trying to make it there with his Glock pistol at the ready. But things turned out quite differently in Wyoming (actually, they turned out rather differently from what Kaplan expected in Lagos too, as we’ll explain in Chapter

14). The anarchy, fear, and violence were contained. Indeed, the Texans were soon holed up at the TA Ranch surrounded by lawmen from the town of Buffalo who were warned of their arrival. After three days of siege, the cavalry came, ordered in by President William Henry Harrison, and shackled all of the Texans and their collaborators. Today Wyoming largely enjoys freedom from fear, violence, and dominance. It has one of the lowest homicide rates in the United States, about 1.9 per 100,000.

Wyoming has a pretty good record when it comes to helping people break free from the cage of norms too. Take the subjugation of women. Even during the worst of times, women in Wyoming did not face the same restrictions as those in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan or many parts of Africa. But as everywhere else in the world, women in the first half of the nineteenth century had very limited power and no say in public affairs, and had to put up with myriad constraints on their behavior, both because of their unequal status in marriage and because of the norms and customs of their societies. That started to change as women got the right to vote. The first place in the world to grant female suffrage was Wyoming in 1869, earning it the nickname the Equality State. This wasn't because Wyoming's customs and norms favored women compared to other parts of the world. Rather, the state's legislature granted them voting rights, partly to make it more attractive for women to move to this new state, partly to ensure that there would be enough voters to meet the population requirement for statehood, and partly because once African Americans began gaining full citizenship and voting rights, it seemed less acceptable to leave women out of this process. We'll see in the next chapter that there are many reasons why the cage of norms often starts breaking down once a state capable of shackling the hoodlums and enforcing laws is in place.

## **The Shackled Leviathan**

The Leviathan that got the Warre under control and started to break the cage of norms in Wyoming is a different kind of beast from the ones we have discussed so far. It wasn't absent except in the very early days. It had the capacity to shackle the Texans. Since then it has massively expanded this capacity and can now resolve myriad conflicts fairly, enforce a complex set of laws, and provide public services that its citizens demand and enjoy. It has a large, effective bureaucracy (even if it is at times bloated and inefficient) and a huge amount of information about what its citizens are up to. It has the strongest military in the world. But it doesn't use this military power and its information to repress and exploit its citizens (for the most part). It responds to its citizens' wishes and needs, and it can also intervene to loosen the cage of norms for everybody, particularly for its most disadvantaged citizens. It is a state that creates liberty.

It is accountable to society not just because it is bound by the U.S. Constitution and by the Bill of Rights, which emphatically exalts the rights of the citizens, but more important because it is shackled by people who will complain, demonstrate, and even rise up if it oversteps its bounds. Its presidents and legislators are elected, and they are often kicked out of office when the society they are ruling over doesn't like what they are doing. Its bureaucrats are subject to review and oversight. It is powerful, but coexists with and listens to a society that is vigilant and willing to get involved in politics and contest power. It is what we'll call a Shackled Leviathan. In the same way that the Leviathan can shackle the Texan gunmen, so that they cannot do harm to ordinary citizens, it can itself be shackled by common people, by norms, and by institutions—in short by society.

It is not that the Shackled Leviathan isn't Janus-faced. It is, and repression and dominance are as much in its DNA as they are in the DNA of the Despot Leviathan. But the shackles prevent it from rearing its fearsome face. How those shackles emerge, and why only some societies have managed to develop them, is the major theme of our book.

## **Diversity, Not the End of History**

Liberty has been rare in human history. Many societies have not developed any centralized authority capable of enforcing laws, resolving conflicts peacefully, and protecting the weak against the strong. Instead they have often imposed a cage of norms on people, with similarly dire consequences for liberty. Wherever the Leviathan has shown up, the lot of liberty has hardly improved. Even though it has enforced laws and kept the peace in some domains, the Leviathan has often been despotic, thus unresponsive to society, and has done little to further the liberty of its citizens. Only shackled states have used their power to protect liberty. The Shackled Leviathan has been distinctive in another sense too—in creating broad-based economic opportunities and incentives and promoting a sustained rise in economic prosperity. But this Shackled Leviathan has arrived on the scene only late in history, and its rise has been contested and contentious.

We are now seeing the beginnings of an answer to the question we started with. It isn't that we are heading toward the end of history with the inexorable rise of liberty. It isn't that anarchy will spread around the world uncontrollably. It isn't even that all countries around the world will succumb to dictatorships, whether digital or just of the good old-fashioned sort. These are all possibilities, and this diversity, rather than convergence to one of these outcomes, is the norm. Nevertheless, there is also a glimmer of hope, because humans are capable of constructing a Shackled Leviathan, which can resolve conflicts, refrain from despotism, and promote liberty by loosening the cage of norms. Indeed, a lot of human progress depends on societies' ability to build such a state. But building and defending—and controlling—a Shackled Leviathan takes effort, and is always a work in progress, often fraught with danger and instability.

## **Brief Outline of the Rest of the Book**

In this chapter, we introduced the tripartite distinction between the Absent, Despotic, and Shackled Leviathans. In the next chapter, we present the heart of our theory, which concerns the evolution of state-society relations over time. We explain why the emergence of powerful states is often resisted (because people are afraid of despotism) and how societies use their norms, not just to mitigate the possibility of Warre, as we saw in Asante, but also to counter and control state power. We focus on how the Shackled Leviathan emerges in a narrow corridor where society's involvement in politics creates a balance of power with the state, and illustrate this possibility with the early history of the Greek city-state Athens and the founding of the U.S. Republic. We also draw out some of the implications of our theory, emphasizing how different historical configurations lead to the Absent, Despotic, and Shackled Leviathans. We further show that in our theory it is the Shackled Leviathan, not the despotic sort, that develops the most and the deepest state capacity.

In Chapter 3 we explain why Absent Leviathans may be unstable and yield to political hierarchy in the face of the “will to power”—the desires of some actors to reshape society and accumulate greater political and economic power. We'll see how these transitions away from stateless societies are a mixed bag for liberty. On the one hand, they bring order and may relax the cage of norms (especially when it is in their way). On the other hand, they introduce unrestrained despotism. Chapter 4 examines the consequences of the Absent and Despotic Leviathans for the economic and social lives of citizens. It explains why economic prosperity is more likely to emerge under the Despotic Leviathan than under either the anarchic conditions of Hobbesian Warre or in the cramped space created by the cage of norms. But we'll also see that prosperity created by the Despotic Leviathan is both limited and rife with inequities.

Chapter 5 contrasts the workings of the economy under the Absent and Despotic Leviathans to life in the corridor. We'll see that the Shackled Leviathan creates very different types of economic incentives and opportunities and permits a much greater degree of experimentation and social mobility. We focus on the Italian communes and the ancient Zapotec civilization in the Americas to



communicate these ideas and also to highlight that there is nothing uniquely European about Shackled Leviathans. This last point notwithstanding, it is of course the case that most examples of the Shackled Leviathan we have come from Europe. Why is this so?

Chapter 6 explains why several European countries have managed to build broadly participatory societies with capable but still shackled states. Our answer focuses on the factors that led much of Europe toward the corridor during the early Middle Ages as Germanic tribes, especially the Franks, came to invade the lands dominated by the Western Roman Empire after its collapse. We argue that the marriage of the bottom-up, participatory institutions and norms of Germanic tribes and the centralizing bureaucratic and legal traditions of the Roman Empire forged a unique balance of power between state and society, enabling the rise of the Shackled Leviathan. Underscoring the importance of this marriage, very different types of states emerged in parts of Europe where either the Roman tradition or the bottom-up politics of Germanic tribes were absent (such as Iceland or Byzantium). We then trace the path of liberty and the Shackled Leviathan, which had considerable ups and downs and veered out of the corridor on several occasions.

Chapter 7 contrasts the European experience with Chinese history. Despite historic similarities, the early development of a powerful state in China completely removed societal mobilization and political participation. Without these countervailing forces, the Chinese development path closely follows that of the Despotic Leviathan. We trace the economic consequences of this type of state-society relationship both in Chinese history and today, and discuss whether the Shackled Leviathan can emerge in China anytime soon.

Chapter 8 moves to India. Unlike China, India does have a long history of popular participation and accountability. But liberty has been no more successful in taking root in India. We argue this is because of the powerful cage of norms in India, as epitomized by its caste system. Caste relations have not only inhibited liberty but also made it impossible for society to effectively contest power and monitor the state. The caste system has produced a society fragmented against itself and a state that lacks capacity, which is nonetheless

unaccountable as the fragmented society remains immobilized and powerless.

Chapter 9 returns to the European experience, but this time to study why some parts of Europe and not others found their way into and stayed in the corridor. In the process of answering this question, we develop another one of the central ideas of the book: the conditional nature of how structural factors influence state-society relationships. We emphasize that the impact of various structural factors, such as economic conditions, demographic shocks, and war, on the development of the state and the economy depend on the prevailing balance between state and society. There are thus no unambiguous conclusions to be drawn about structural factors. We illustrate these ideas by discussing why, starting with similar conditions and facing similar international problems, Switzerland developed a Shackled Leviathan, while Prussia fell under the dominance of the Despotic Leviathan. We contrast these cases with Montenegro, where the state did not play much of a role in either conflict resolution or in organizing economic activity. We apply the same ideas to explain why Costa Rica and Guatemala diverged sharply in the face of nineteenth-century economic globalization, and why the Soviet Union's collapse led to a diverse set of political paths.

Chapter 10 returns to the development of the American Leviathan. We emphasize that, although the U.S. managed to build a Shackled Leviathan, this was based on a Faustian bargain—the Federalists accepted a Constitution that kept the federal state weak both to appease a society that was concerned about the threat of despotism and to reassure Southern slaveholders who were worried about losing their slaves and assets. This compromise worked, and the U.S. is still in the corridor. But it also led to an unbalanced development of the American Leviathan which, even as it has become a veritable international sea monster, still has only limited capacity in several important domains. This is most visible in the inability or unwillingness of the American Leviathan to protect its citizens from violence. This unbalanced development also led to the American Leviathan's patchy record in structuring economic policy to ensure equitable gains from economic growth. We'll see how uneven state

development has caused a distorted evolution of the power and capabilities of society, and paradoxically how it created room for the state's power to evolve in unmonitored and unaccountable ways in some domains (such as national security).

Chapter 11 shows that states in many developing countries may act as despots but lack the capacity of the Despotic Leviathan. We explain how these "Paper" Leviathans have come about and why they make so little attempt to build capacity. Our answer is that this is mostly because they are afraid of mobilizing society and thereby destabilizing their control over it. One origin of these Paper Leviathans lies in the indirect rule of colonial powers, which set up modern-looking administrative structures but at the same time empowered local elites to rule with few constraints and little participation from society.

Chapter 12 turns to the Middle East. Though state builders will often loosen the cage of norms as it limits their ability to mold society, there are circumstances under which despotic states may find it beneficial to strengthen or even to refashion the cage. We explain how this tendency has characterized Middle Eastern politics, the historical and social circumstances that have made it an attractive strategy for would-be despots, and the implications of this development path for liberty, violence, and instability.

Chapter 13 discusses how the Shackled Leviathan may get out of control when the race between state and society turns "zero-sum," with each side trying to undercut and destroy the other for survival. We emphasize how this outcome is more likely when institutions are not up to the task of impartially resolving conflicts and lose the trust of some segments of the public. We look at the collapse of the Weimar Republic in Germany, Chilean democracy in the 1970s, and the Italian communes to illustrate these dynamics and identify the structural factors making this type of zero-sum competition more likely. Finally we link these forces to the rise of modern-day populist movements.

Chapter 14 discusses how societies move into the corridor and whether anything can be done to facilitate such a move. We emphasize several important structural factors, focusing on what makes the corridor wider and thus easier to move into. We explain the role of

broad coalitions in such transitions and discuss a number of cases of successful transitions as well as some failed ones.

In Chapter 15 we turn to the challenges facing nations in the corridor. Our main argument is that as the world changes, the state must expand and take on new responsibilities, but this in turn requires society to become more capable and vigilant, lest it find itself spinning out of the corridor. New coalitions are critical for the state to gain greater capacity while keeping its shackles—a possibility illustrated by Sweden’s response to the economic and social exigencies created by the Great Depression and how this led to the emergence of social democracy. It is no different today when we are facing many new challenges, ranging from inequality, joblessness, and slow economic growth to complex security threats. We need the state to develop additional capabilities and shoulder fresh responsibilities, but only if we can find new ways of keeping it shackled, mobilizing society and protecting our liberties.