Ought Hobbes’s Natural Condition of Mankind Be Represented As A Prisoner’s Dilemma?

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"... 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, and 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" (Lev. Ch. XIII, par. 12).

Isn’t this paper’s title wrong? Shouldn’t reference be made to Hobbes’s State of Nature rather than his Natural Condition of Mankind (NCM from now on) (cf. Hungerland, 1989; Alexandra, 1992; Archie, 1995)? After all, doesn’t De Cive — where the phrase State of Nature is invoked — represent Hobbes’s true philosophical position whereas Leviathan — where the phrase NCM occurs — renders something much more public? Moreover, the spirit of the quotation, accompanying this paper’s title, can be found in De Cive too¹. Such objections need to be overcome before a number of weaker arguments against representing Hobbes NCM as a Prisoner’s Dilemma (PD from now on) can be examined, before facing three much stronger objections. Finally, the insights into Hobbes’s philosophy, which can be gleaned from adopting this stance, can be considered. First, then, why a concern for Hobbes’s NCM rather than with his State of Nature?

¹ “Kingdoms guard their Coasts and Frontiers with Forts, and Castles; Cities are compassed with walls, and all for fear of neighbouring Kingdoms and Towns; even the strongest Armies, and most accomplished for Fight, yet sometimes Parley for peace, as fearing each others power, and lest they might be overcome”(De Cive Ch. I par II). Alexandra, for example, equates the NCM with the State of Nature (Alexandra, 1992, p. 2) as does Jackson (M. Jackson “Mushrooms, like Men?” Hobbes Studies Vol. XIII, 2000, pp. 46-57 p. 48) (Cf. Martinich: “Although the phrase “state of nature” does not appear in Leviathan, the concept is there in a more sophisticated form than in the two works just discussed” – The Elements of Law and De Cive. (A. P. Martinich A Hobbes Dictionary Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell 1995 p. 293)
1.0 *De Cive* or *Leviathan*

Three arguments might confirm we ought not to do so. Firstly, *De Cive* is a serious work written in Latin for the philosophically initiated, a work not to be exposed to "public interest" (*De Cive* Pref. par. 22) whereas *Leviathan* could be "profitably printed, and more profitably taught in the universities" (*Lev.* Part IV, ch. XLVII, par. 16). Secondly, *De Cive* focuses on the issue of truth-telling based on solid reasoning, whereas *Leviathan* is concerned to win the hearts and minds of those individuals prepared to examine themselves so as to "read and know what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon the like occasions". Yet, a quotation from the *Leviathan* itself establishes the priority of the method of ratiocination: "The skill of making and maintaining commonwealths, consisting in certain rules, as doth arithmetic and geometry; not as tennis play, on practice only: --" (*Lev.* Introd. & ch.20, last par.). Thirdly, *De Cive* manifests this method of ratiocination, a demonstrative method which starts with certain physical principles governing the motion and behaviour of bodies from which certain psychological principles can be derived governing human behaviour, dispositions and special faculties to which the civil realm and the duties of subjects are then related. In the *Leviathan*, however, the method of introspection comes to the fore, where the lessons of the mechanistic science of the day are side-stepped in favour of a Socratic kind of technique by which the reader can be manipulated into seeing the truth extricated from that science, when his or her eyes are fully opened, as a result of a reading of the self.

On the other hand, a remark in *De Cive* takes us in the opposite direction. In *This Author's Preface to the Reader* Hobbes points out that his Civil Philosophy was planned to have originated from his treatment of man and his faculties, which, in its turn, would have derived from the physics of his day. Yet he published what was to be this third part first because he saw that the section of civil government and the duties of subjects could be "grounded on its own principles sufficiently known by experience" so that "it would not stand in need of the former sections" (*De Cive* Pref. paras. 18, 19-20). At least two reasons make this an interesting confession. Firstly, after completing *De Cive*, Hobbes seems to have realized that his civil philosophy could be regarded as standing independently of his physicalistic presentation of the State of Nature. Secondly, Hobbes tells his reader that the method of introspection — fully exemplified in the *Leviathan* — will yield results as satisfactory as the method of ratiocination.

A third reason can be given for undermining the priority rendered previously to *De Cive*. Hobbes's extreme nominalism would not allow him to forward ontological assumptions in the way a naturalistic explanation of his philosophy might