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I focus on the intellectual founder of the modern nation state, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679,) who maintained that human beings in the natural state lived a brutish existence where “man is a wolf to man,” and offered a way out from this natural condition by means of a theory of sovereignty.

Today we assume a clear boundary differentiates human and animal. In the age of Hobbes though, the existence of liminal figures oscillating between humanity and animality was a topic that even sophisticated minds would take seriously. The possibility of a human becoming an animal if overwhelmed by feral passions or by melancholy was addressed not only by writers interested in witchcraft and possessions such as Reginald Scot, but also by 17th physiologists like Robert Burton, monarchs like King James, and portrayed by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*'s Caliban. Contrary to conventional wisdom, I suggest that Hobbes should also be added to this list of authors interested in the unstable nature of human nature.

But why is this instability of interest to political theory? The unstable nature of the human in Hobbes's political theory links the government of the passions by the self (inner government) with the government of the subjects by the sovereign (outer government) in a way that has been ignored by the literature. Now the distinction between human and animal seems natural, but it is in fact naturalized, and one of the things that maintains it, daily, are our institutions and practices of sovereignty. In humanity's natural state, Hobbes finds passions such as competition, glory and vainglory that left to their own devices would generate a war of all against all. To curb these passions, Hobbes creates a sovereign state which several continental commentators (such as Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida) have described as being part human, part machine and part animal. Thus, rather than resolving the problem of the passions Hobbes defers it to the sovereign, which can itself become a voracious wolf of other men -and of non-human animals, as well as of nature.

Focusing on Hobbes's theory of sovereignty offers a pre-history of our own selves understood both as members of a political community and as rational human beings. But it also portrays our present, since the work of the passions' domestication is never final. Institutions and discourses of modern sovereignty attempt to keep animality at bay, both at the level of the self and at the level of the sovereign, and they do so by means of rationalization and control.

Sovereignty aims at producing a stable and rational self as the main agent in politics together with an institutional, de-personalized sovereign. However, this de-personalized sovereign becomes lycanthropic rather than institutional.

This angle of vision helps us to name what is going on when our own late modern sovereignties seem to devour subjects in order to keep them under control. In other words, when we want to explain or diagnose high rates of incarceration in western democracies, or understand the war on terror, we may need to reach beyond explanations having to do with rationality, efficiency or political self-interest. We may need to look to the slippage in the terms of distinction between human and animal it self.