

Hobbes and the State of Nature

Hobbes' fundamental view: Nothing could possibly be *worse* than life without the protection of the state. We need strong government to *prevent* the state of nature.

What exactly is so bad about the Hobbesian state of nature?

-Human nature, without the threat of punishment from a sovereign, will inevitably lead us into a war of all against all.

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How does it work?

- We all constantly aim at “felicity”, or success in achieving the objects of our own desires. This pursuit inevitably steers us toward conflict with one another.

Why think this?

Two problems: We can never reach a state of complete satisfaction in this pursuit, and moreover a person “cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more”.

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It gets worse!

- We are all equal in our ability to kill one another.
 - “The weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others.”
- In the state of nature no one can make himself invulnerable to attack.
- In the state of nature there is a scarcity of goods.
- We stand to gain more power by building a *reputation* for power.
 - This means that we might sometimes have a motivation to attack others for no reason other than reputation.

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What about morality? Won't that prevent us from attacking each other in the state of nature?

The "Natural Right of Liberty":

- No justice, injustice, right or wrong applies in the state of nature
- Why not?

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What about morality? Won't that prevent us from attacking each other in the state of nature?

-Hobbes *does* propose *something* like a moral code. He offers several "Laws of Nature" that reduce to the following maxim:

-"Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe."

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Hobbesian schizophrenia?

According to the Natural Right of Liberty, rationality seems to require us to attack others.

According to the Laws of Nature, however, rationality seems to require us to seek peace.

How can rationality require us to be both at peace and at war?

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Collective Rationality vs.
Individual Rationality:
The Prisoner's Dilemma

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Collective Rationality vs. Individual Rationality

Collective rationality requires that we pursue peace, but individual rationality requires that we attack one another. In this way, individual rationality *threatens* the collectively rational position.