

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE STATE OF NATURE & THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZED SOCIETY

HUMAN NATURE?

We know how to create arguments and test them. And we've found that some issues are far more complicated than they seemed to be before we looked at them. It's important to ask whether God exists, and what sort of being God might be if God exists. Now what sort of things are we? What is our nature, our essence? When you look at a human being *as such* (human *qua* human), what is it?

This is a multi-part question. The first part we'll treat in this chapter (and the others in the rest of this text). This question asks about our nature as *moral* or *virtuous*. Are we good? Are we evil? If you could theoretically remove us from society, and just look at us as individuals—like pinned insects on a card or samples in a Petri dish—what would we be like?

This question has been treated by a number of thinkers, and you can bet they come down on both sides. Some say we're nasty and only act or become good because organized society changes us (so, person 0, society 1). Others say we're just great, but society corrupts us (so, person 1, society 0). Which arguments seem more compelling?

Finally, if we are purely evil or purely good, then how in the world can we act *contrary* to our nature? How is it possible that something essentially good can go sour or something essentially bad can rise to moral greatness? How could we change our very essential nature?

Logically, it would seem we couldn't.



READING QUESTIONS

As you study this chapter, keep these questions in mind for critical thinking and analysis.

- Explain the "Ring of Gyges" thought experiment. What is its point?
- Explain the importance of thought experiments in testing philosophical arguments or theories.
- What is the difference between *negative* and *positive* philosophy? What is the role of each in the philosophical pursuit of truth?
- Explain the notion called the "State of Nature."
- Explain and analyze Hobbes' state of nature argument. What is his conclusion? How does his argument work?
- Explain Xunzi's argument that we are essentially, naturally evil. How does he explain our ability to do good? Analyze his argument. Is it valid? Sound? How can he explain how something can go against its nature? Does his explanation work?
- How do Hobbes and Master Hsün disagree regarding human nature and the role of organized society? Do either agree with Glaucon's suggestion in the Ring of Gyges thought experiment?

continued...

HUMAN NATURE IS THE ONLY SCIENCE OF MAN; AND
YET HAS BEEN HITHERTO THE MOST NEGLECTED.

(DAVID HUME)

FOUNDATIONS

We'll be maintaining our use of the logical principles we learned already:

The Principle of Non-

Contradiction (PNC): It is a logical law that for any claim p , it is false that both p and not- p .

PNC: $\sim(p \& \sim p)$

The Law of Excluded Middle

(LEM): It is a logical law that for claim p , either p is true or p is not true.

LEM: $p \vee \sim p$

Bivalence: Every claim or theory has exactly one truth value, either true or false. (That is, both PNC and LEM apply.)

Leibniz's Law (LL): It is a logical law that for anything x , anything y , and any property P , if x is **identical** with y , then x and y will both have P .

LL: $(x = y) \rightarrow (Px \& Py)$

We'll also learn the following :

X is a **thought experiment** iff x is a conceptual exploration of a possible SOFA that tests one particular concept or thesis.

X is the **essence** of something y iff x is the most basic, necessary, and unalterable part of y that defines y as y and not something else.

X is an **accidental property** (or accident) of y iff x is a part of y that may be understood as important but still could be removed or changed without making y into something other than y .

TASKS AND CQs

There **three critical questions** and **one task** in this chapter. There is also **one team project**.

READING QUESTIONS, *continued.*

- How does Xunzi differ from Mengzi regarding human nature? How do they account for the presence of evil?
- Explain Rousseau's state of nature arguments. How does he reach his final conclusion? What is his conclusion?
- Explain Locke's state of nature argument. What is his conclusion? How does it differ from Rousseau's?
- What is *natural law*, and how is it different than the law we find in organized society?
- What do all the European philosophers agree on? What things do all humans share in the State of Nature?
- What influence does Locke's account have on American political thought, both historically and currently?
- Compare and contrast all the state of nature arguments. Who would agree with whom, and over what? Which position (or positions) seem(s) to you best supported, both by evidence and by argument?
- Explain why one might think humans are naturally evil. What arguments can be supplied for this thesis? Why might one think we're naturally good? What problems come from taking one position over the other?
- What are some criticisms of the social contract theory of justice?



ON THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS

One way philosophers attempt to tease out specific problems or issues, as we've seen from the last chapter, is the **thought experiment**. Rowe's deer in the forest fire scenario is a thought experiment. But what is a thought experiment?

*X is a **thought experiment** iff x is a (probably implausible) hypothetical scenario that is designed to isolate and analyze intuitions concerning some philosophical issue.*

Notice that thought experiments are only *probably* implausible. Rowe's isn't. But the Matrix is. The Allegory of the Cave is. Most thought experiments are implausible because they are isolating specific intuitions—specific gut feelings or pre-reflective beliefs. In the Allegory of the Cave, for example, Plato wants to look at only the process of learning and the nature of reality.* It doesn't matter that somebody who's spent their whole life strapped to a chair would have atrophied muscles, so wouldn't be able to clamber out of a steep cave. It doesn't matter that somebody who's never seen color would fail to grasp the riot of hues behind him, let alone the dizzying array outside of the sunless cave. In a thought experiment, it does not matter how *probable* the scenario is. Saying, *this is absurd. It'd never happen!* is unhelpful, and totally missing the point. *Of course* this scenario would probably never happen. We've probably taken away from it all the complexities that would make it possible, in order to focus on the important intuitions (or those intuitions that are important to the current discussion).

Instead of worrying about how likely a certain scenario is, focus on what the key point of the experiment might be. Thought experiments are like laboratory experiments. In a lab, scientists create artificial conditions—that would never happen otherwise—in order to narrow down their study to one or two key variables. (A Petrie dish isn't exactly a natural environment!)

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* He's actually looking at both. The Allegory of the Cave shows up alongside two other allegories, which explain the nature of reality in his metaphysical system, and learning about reality is going to be directly related to the nature of reality itself. If reality were different, then the path to coming to understand it would be different.

CHAPTER
OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we are primarily concerned with another problem that deals with **metaphysics**, but it is more directly related to questions of **value theoretical** philosophy like **ethics** and **political philosophy**. For certain practices and values to make sense—to be to some extent *rational* values—reality needs to be certain ways. For example, if it turned out that human beings have no power to direct their own actions but were instead marionettes being directed by some cosmic puppeteer, it would seem very irrational to blame people for doing what they do, for calling those actions morally wrong. * Responsibility requires some ability to control one's own actions. More generally, then, how the world *is* (metaphysics) relates directly to how we *value* things in the world.

Specifically for this chapter, we're looking at what sort of thing a human being is. We'll ask "what is a human *qua* human?" The term **qua** (pronounced 'quay') is Latin for *as*, or *to the extent that* (among many other things). When we talk of 'x

* This is a pretty succinct description of the importance of the problem of free will, which we discuss in chapter 13.

ON THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS,

continued.

They set up circumstances with strict parameters in order to *limit* the variables to only those they wish to study. Thought experiments do the same thing, but with concepts. They are designed especially to see if the issue, claim, concept, or theory under investigation is consistent. They're designed to see if that issue, claim, concept, or theory has unexpected consequences, or if it requires unexpected or unwelcome things. They're designed to see if our intuitions are mistaken or if the theory is implausible in light of intuitions we cannot shake.

Philosophical theories we study tend to claim that they *must* be right, or that their explanation is the best one going. To test the theory, we posit a scenario that, if this theory truly *is* right, it should be able to solve in a way that our intuitions are comfortable accepting. Remember, if we say that *x must* be true, then we're saying that *in all possible worlds* *x* is true. So we use thought experiments to test others' claims. And we also use them to test the truth of our own claims, by positing situations that fit within the defined space. So we present a thought experiment to see whether our definitions are as carefully drawn as they need to be.

Take a thought experiment in ethics, for example. Do you believe that something must have *consciousness* in order to have moral rights? At first, you might not know what you think about the question. So we present a thought experiment to draw out your intuition. Consider the following:

*A woman is driving her car and crashes into a tree, is thrown from the car, and is rendered unconscious. She may one day regain consciousness, but at the moment she is not. Do we have ethical obligations to her?**

If you say 'yes,' then you believe that we have ethical obligations towards some unconscious things. So you believe the conditional

if x is not conscious, then we have no ethical obligations towards x

continued...

* Thanks to Jason Waller for this thought experiment.

qua x,' we mean we want to talk about *x* itself, stripped of everything but the core essence of *x*, without any extras. So in this chapter, we're going to look at the essence of being human.

We're also going to try to see how this human *qua* human is affected by organized society. Once we know what a human is essentially, how does the development of an organized and systematic structure affect the human? Does society corrupt us? Or do we start out corrupted?

Before we can determine such things, we need a couple terms.

*X is an **agent** iff x is some entity (person, animal, or any living being in general) that has the power to act in a world.**

You're an agent. I'm an agent. There are two sources of movement, if you think of it generally. External, and internal to the object being moved. If the object's source of movement is within—if it moves itself—then to that extent, it's an agent.

Some movements have moral weight to them. Some don't. Swimming across the ocean in a pod of whales is not a morally significant movement if you're a whale. It might be if you're human. We can thus say that

*X is a **moral agent** iff x is some entity (person, animal, or any living being in general) that has the power to make moral judgments, to act on these judgments, and to be reasonably held accountable for these actions.†*

* For a careful discussion regarding the nature and definition of a *world*, see chapter 10.

† We won't discuss what the standards of morality are until the last part of this text, beginning in chapter 16.

ON THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS,

continued.

is *false*. Now does it matter whether she has the *capacity* to be conscious? To test your intuitions on this question, consider a case where she will never recover and everybody knows it. Would having sex with her be rape? Would it be immoral? What if she had no family and no friends?

Intuitions

Notice that this experiment gave us an insight into our unreflective beliefs. We now have the starts of what is called a *considered judgment*—a conclusion that has come from careful introspection and reasoning. Thought experiments are tools we use to bring unconsidered—unreflective gut intuitions to the surface so that we can analyze and test them. And this brings us to a term we use a lot in philosophy:

X is an intuition iff x is a person's unreflective, unconscious, or unconsidered insight regarding something.

An intuition is your starting point. Intuitions are a great tool to test concepts, claims, theories, or issues. Intuitions, of course, are not infallible, and they are susceptible to prejudice and error. But they are still quite powerful tools in testing for truth or probability, if they are themselves analyzed critically in the process. It is by means of experimenting on them that we have the ability to see whether they are worth keeping or need discarding.

Why are our intuitions important? Are they always right? Probably not. So why consider them? A lot of this is answered earlier in this text, when we discussed our *background information*. Although our background information and its set of intuitions are not infallible, they are nonetheless our most reliable tools for analyzing and functioning in the world. Because they aren't infallible, we test them. Because they are invaluable, we trust them. It's a back-and-forth, give-and-take.

continued...

* In chapter 3.

Where do we start as human beings? That is, from what sort of point do we begin our self-movement, our agency? Are we starting from an essence of goodness? Of evil? Or what?

Moral agents are held accountable only in an organized society. That is, they are responsible only to the extent that their actions are social:

X is an organized society iff x is a systematically structured community of persons associated together for some agreed-upon purpose(s).

Organized societies cohere around different shared values, which can be political, religious, benevolent, scientific, patriotic, or cultural. Organized societies have some sort of hierarchical structure, which might be democratic, aristocratic, oligarchic, or many other possibilities. They might be temporary groups, built around a shared project—say a charity run—or more permanent structures like communities, cities, or nations. They might seem rather simple—like a marriage—or very complex, like the Catholic church. It is within the confines of organized society that values like *justice* and *correct behavior* and *meaning* make sense.*

In this chapter, we're going to try to figure out what sort of thing we are, and at how we are affected by organized society. We're going to try to figure out whether we're naturally good or naturally evil, remembering, of course, the

* This last one, though not argued for in this text, is the claim of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Private Language argument. He holds that language is impossible—that there is no language because no meaning—without organized society. This argument is spelled out in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

ON THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS,

continued.

It's the heart of intellectual honesty. We trust them to test claims and theories, but if we test them for accuracy (like tuning a piano or checking the oil in our car) from time to time. And if we find them in error, we move on. Thought experiments are our tools (alongside arguments) for doing just this.

The Value of A Good Thought Experiment

There are three important benefits of thought experiments, if they're made properly.

They help us find our intuitions, which are useful pieces of information to include in our considerations.

In short, we find our intuitions valuable, because they are a useful piece of information—especially if they are widely shared. That almost everyone in the world has the intuition that microwaving a cat is immoral is an interesting fact. If some ethical theory entailed that there was nothing wrong with cat microwaving, then we might plausibly conclude (unless there is good evidence to the contrary) that the ethical theory was less probable than the widespread intuition. That would make a reasonable case against that theory.

They simplify the question so that we do not get distracted by side issues.

Just like lab experiments are good at testing certain reactions or properties, thought experiments, if executed well, can simplify a problem at hand by distilling it to the key elements.

They are good at testing strong statements.

For example, suppose that somebody claims we have ethical obligations to *all* conscious (sentient) beings. Somebody might propose the following thought experiment:

Imagine that we one day discovered pencils to be actually alive and minimally conscious, but incapable of feeling pleasure or pain. Furthermore, there has been a huge conspiracy to hide this fact from us (people build fake pencil making factories, paid lots of people to lie, etc.). Do we then have ethical obligations towards pencils?

continued...

discussion about kinds of evil we had in the last chapter. And you can bet that this is going to be another bumpy ride!



"We don't get paid for thought experiments."

THE CRITERIA OF A GOOD THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Quite simply, a good thought experiment is one that does any (or all) of those three things well. It must simplify, clarify and test our intuitions and the theory or claim at issue. Thus, *most importantly*, a good thought experiment is one that involves no unnecessary material. This is crucial. Extra stuff distracts. It muddies and confuses. The more complicated the thought experiment, the easier it is to get off track.

A good thought experiment focuses *only* on the issue at hand. So, if you are using a particular movie (say, *The Matrix*) as a thought experiment on perception and reality, *do not include* such things as who the actors were or what else they acted in, how cool the scene with the vats is, how they digitally mastered the déjà vu scene, etc. Don't explain the whole movie.

ON THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS,

continued.

Of course the scenario is implausible. But what's being tested isn't whether the scenario can actually happen, but whether the claim "we have ethical obligations to all conscious beings" is true or not.

It is often the case that the stronger the claim being tested, the more odd the thought experiment will seem, since it is testing the outer limits of that claim. This, by the way, is inspired by the idea that a theory or definition has to be true at the *outer* limits, not just in the middle. It has to be true for the weird cases as well as the normal ones, if it is to be accurate.

LOVE THAT THOUGHT
EXPERIMENT STUFF!

Please write a critical question on either Hobbes or Master Hsün,* depending on what your instructor assigns. And it might be a good thing to go back and review the criteria of a CQ. Are you writing it as one paragraph? Or are you writing a question, and then answering it in a paragraph? The assignment is the former, and you should by now know how to write a question as a statement ("I wonder why..." or "My question is..." or "I am confused about...") and how to use it as a topic sentence. As one of the goals of doing philosophy is thinking clearly and with structure, this is a valuable assignment. And by now, it's likely your instructor is going to start grading your CQs a bit harder, focusing more on whether you're following the directions clearly. Best check on what they are again so you don't sabotage your grade by falling into bad habits.



These details are likely to be distracting and they may complicate the thought experiment in unhelpful ways.

Remember, *clarity is more important than profundity.*

With this all in mind, then, read on. We're going to stay in two basic thought experiments throughout the rest of this chapter: The Ring of Gyges, and the State of Nature. Make sure you spend some time thinking about what these experiments are trying to pull out, how they *work* as thought experiments, and what they're trying to test.

* By the way, this is important. The word (often suffixed to a name) *Zi* means *master*. It's a title, not a name. In fact, often it's appended to the name of the bearer like so: Xunze or Mengze or Kong Fuze. You read that as *Master Hsün* or *Master Meng* or *Master Kong*. *Zi* is sometimes rendered as "Tzu," but it is still certainly **not** a last name, and you should never ask a question of 'Tzu.' This is crazy wrong, because all you're doing is asking whether "teacher" or "learned one" or "philosophical specialist" thinks something. Well, *which one* of all the learned teachers we're studying do you mean? It's ambiguous. Reference thinkers by name not just by honorific.

The names Kong Futze (孔夫子 or Grand Master Kong) and Mengze (孟子 or Master Meng) were encountered along with the philosophical claims and theories they brought to the world by Latin-speaking scholars a *long* time ago. It was customary to *Latinize* names then (much like we Anglicize names now). Thus, the French name *Descartes* led to the term *Cartesian*, and these Chinese names were Latinized to *Confucius* (from Grand Master Kong, or Kong Fuze) and *Mencius* (Mengzi). So now you know.

We Are Naturally Evil

(and it is only organized society that keeps us in line)

SUBDUE YOUR APPETITES, MY DEARS, AND
YOU'VE CONQUERED HUMAN NATURE.

(CHARLES DICKENS)

Let's start out by considering (Plato's brother) Glaucon's thought experiment. Suppose you were to be completely removed from accountability for anything. What sort of person would you be? He presents his experiment in a conversation about justice, and Glaucon truly wants Socrates (his teacher) to prove that justice is good as an end (intrinsically valuable) and not just a means (a path to something else that is valuable). Consider this as you read the thought experiment.

THE RING OF GYGES

*Plato, from The Republic (Book II, 359a-360d)**

With these words I was thinking that I had made an end of the discussion; but the end, in truth, proved to be only a beginning. For Glaucon, who is always the most pugnacious of men, was dissatisfied at Thrasymachus' retirement; he wanted to have the battle out. So he said to me: Socrates, do you wish really to persuade us, or only to seem to have persuaded us, that to be just is always better than to be unjust?

Socrates. I should wish really to persuade you if I could.

Glaucon. Then you certainly have not succeeded. Let me ask you now: — How would you arrange goods—are there not some which we welcome for their own sakes, and independently of their consequences, as, for example, harmless pleasures and enjoyments, which delight us at the time, although nothing follows from them?

Socrates. I agree in thinking that there is such a class.

Glaucon. Is there not also a second class of goods, such as knowledge, sight, health, which are desirable not only in themselves, but also for their results?

Socrates. Certainly.

Glaucon. And would you not recognize a third class, such as gymnastic, and the care of the sick, and the physician's art; also the various ways of money-making —these do us good but we regard them as disagreeable; and no one would choose them for their own sakes, but only for the sake of some reward or result which flows from them?

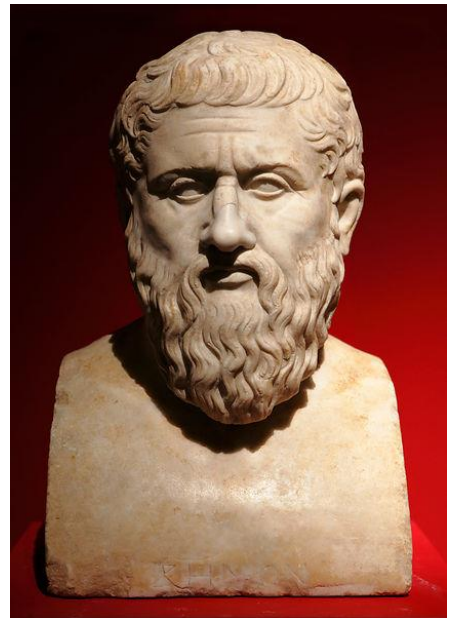
Socrates. There is this third class also. But why do you ask?

Because I want to know in which of the three classes you would place justice?

Socrates. In the highest class—among those goods which he who would be happy desires both for their own sake and for the sake of their results.

Glaucon. Then the many are of another mind; they think that justice is to be reckoned in the troublesome class, among goods which are to be pursued for the sake of rewards and of reputation, but in themselves are disagreeable and rather to be avoided.

Socrates. I know that this is their manner of thinking, and that this was the thesis which Thrasymachus was maintaining just now, when he censured justice and praised injustice. But I am too stupid to be convinced by him.



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* Translation in the public domain, available at gutenberg.org.

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Glaucou. I wish that you would hear me as well as him, and then I shall see whether you and I agree. For Thrasymachus seems to me, like a snake, to have been charmed by your voice sooner than he ought to have been; but to my mind the nature of justice and injustice have not yet been made clear. Setting aside their rewards and results, I want to know what they are in themselves, and how they inwardly work in the soul. If you, please, then, I will revive the argument of Thrasymachus.

And first I will speak of the nature and origin of justice according to the common view of them. Secondly, I will show that all men who practise justice do so against their will, of necessity, but not as a good. And thirdly, I will argue that there is reason in this view, for the life of the unjust is after all better far than the life of the just —if what they say is true, Socrates, since I myself am not of their opinion.

But still I acknowledge that I am perplexed when I hear the voices of Thrasymachus and myriads of others dinning in my ears; and, on the other hand, I have never yet heard the superiority of justice to injustice maintained by any one in a satisfactory way. I want to hear justice praised in respect of itself; then I shall be satisfied, and you are the person from whom I think that I am most likely to hear this; and therefore I will praise the unjust life to the utmost of my power, and my manner of speaking will indicate the manner in which I desire to hear you too praising justice and censuring injustice. Will you say whether you approve of my proposal?

Socrates. Indeed I do; nor can I imagine any theme about which a man of sense would oftener wish to converse.

Glaucou. I am delighted to hear you say so, and shall begin by speaking, as I proposed, of the nature and origin of justice.

They say that to do injustice is, by nature, good; to suffer injustice, evil; but that the evil is greater than the good. And so when men have both done and suffered injustice and have had experience of both, not being able to avoid the one and obtain the other, they think that they had better agree among themselves to have neither; hence there arise laws and mutual covenants; and that which is ordained by law is termed by them lawful and just. This they affirm to be the origin and nature of justice; —it is a mean or compromise, between the best of all, which is to do injustice and not be punished, and the worst of all, which is to suffer injustice without the power of retaliation; and justice, being at a middle point between the two, is tolerated not as a good, but as the lesser evil, and honoured by reason of the inability of men to do injustice.

For no man who is worthy to be called a man would ever submit to such an agreement if he were able to resist; he would be mad if he did. Such is the received account, Socrates, of the nature and origin of justice.

Now that those who practise justice do so involuntarily and because they have not the power to be unjust will best appear if we imagine something of this kind: having given both to the just and the unjust power to do what they will, let us watch and see whither desire will lead them; then we shall discover in the very act the just and unjust man to be proceeding along the same road, following their interest, which all natures deem to be their good, and are only diverted into the path of justice by the force of law.

The liberty which we are supposing may be most completely given to them in the form of such a power as is said to have been possessed by Gyges the ancestor of Croesus the Lydian.

According to the tradition, Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia; there was a great storm, and an earthquake made an opening in the earth at the place where he was feeding his flock. Amazed at the sight, he descended into the opening, where, among other marvels, he beheld a hollow brazen horse, having doors, at which he stooping and looking in saw a dead body of stature, as appeared to him, more than human, and having nothing on but a gold ring; this he took from the finger of the dead and re-ascended. Now the shepherds met together, according to custom, that they might send their monthly report about the flocks to the king; into their assembly he came having the ring on his finger, and as he was sitting among them he chanced to turn the collet of the ring inside his hand, when instantly he became invisible to the rest of the company and they began to speak of him as if he were no longer present.

He was astonished at this, and again touching the ring he turned the collet outwards and reappeared; he made several trials of the ring, and always with the same result—when he turned the collet inwards he became invisible, when outwards he reappeared.

Whereupon he contrived to be chosen one of the messengers who were sent to the court; where as soon as he arrived he seduced the queen, and with her help conspired against the king and slew him, and took the kingdom.

Suppose now that there were two such magic rings, and the just put on one of them and the unjust the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice. No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a God among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point.

And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever anyone thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice, and he who argues as I have been supposing, will say that they are right. If you could imagine any one obtaining this power of becoming invisible, and never doing any wrong or touching what was another's, he would be thought by the lookers-on to be a most wretched idiot, although they would praise him to one another's faces, and keep up appearances with one another from a fear that they too might suffer injustice. Enough of this.

Now, if we are to form a real judgment of the life of the just and unjust, we must isolate them; there is no other way; and how is the isolation to be effected?

I answer this: Let the unjust man be entirely unjust, and the just man entirely just; nothing is to be taken away from either of them, and both are to be perfectly furnished for the work of their respective lives.

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First, let the unjust be like other distinguished masters of craft; like the skilful pilot or physician, who knows intuitively his own powers and keeps within their limits, and who, if he fails at any point, is able to recover himself. So let the unjust make his unjust attempts in the right way, and lie hidden if he means to be great in his injustice (he who is found out is nobody): for the highest reach of injustice is: to be deemed just when you are not. Therefore I say that in the perfectly unjust man we must assume the most perfect injustice; there is to be no deduction, but we must allow him, while doing the most unjust acts, to have acquired the greatest reputation for justice. If he have taken a false step he must be able to recover himself; he must be one who can speak with effect, if any of his deeds come to light, and who can force his way where force is required his courage and strength, and command of money and friends.

And at his side let us place the just man in his nobleness and simplicity, wishing, as Aeschylus says, to be and not to seem good. There must be no seeming, for if he seem to be just he will be honoured and rewarded, and then we shall not know whether he is just for the sake of justice or for the sake of honours and rewards; therefore, let him be clothed in justice only, and have no other covering; and he must be imagined in a state of life the opposite of the former. Let him be the best of men, and let him be thought the worst; then he will have been put to the proof; and we shall see whether he will be affected by the fear of infamy and its consequences. And let him continue thus to the hour of death; being just and seeming to be unjust.

When both have reached the uttermost extreme, the one of justice and the other of injustice, let judgment be given which of them is the happier of the two.



ALL HIS LIFE HE TRIED TO BE A GOOD PERSON.
MANY TIMES, HOWEVER, HE FAILED. FOR AFTER
ALL, HE WAS ONLY HUMAN. HE WASN'T A DOG.

(CHARLES M. SCHULZ)

MAN IS LEAST HIMSELF WHEN HE TALKS IN HIS OWN PERSON. GIVE HIM A MASK AND HE WILL TELL YOU THE TRUTH.

(OSCAR WILDE)

ABOUT GYGES

Our first thought experiment is Glaucon's story about Gyges' ring—which, by the way—was the source of Tolkien's idea regarding The One Ring.* As you know, he presents a situation that can be summarized thus:

A nobody shepherd finds a ring in a hole that he learns can make him invisible to everyone. Being invisible, he realizes, makes him wholly free from accountability for his actions. So he uses this newfound power to seduce the queen, kill the king, and take over the kingdom as the new ruler. He uses it to gain power, influence, and wealth.

Now the question this story elicits is psychological—designed to get us to think about what sort of character we have as humans. If it were possible for there to be another ring like this one, and if you happened upon it, would you not use it the same way?

Most of us would probably stumble over each other to be the first to say *no way!* But let me up the ante. Let's bring it to modern thinking. To be *invisible* in Greek mythology was to be *completely* invisible. Even to the gods. So let me posit the experiment in BJ-speak:

*Suppose you had some ring that allowed you to become entirely invisible, to people, to animals, even to God. Whatever you did or said while wearing that ring was presumed to be done by some natural or supernatural force—words you uttered were believed to be the thoughts of those who heard them. Suppose further that it would be impossible for anyone—including God—to trace the consequences of your ring-enshrined words or deeds back to you. **NOT EVEN GOD** would know what you were doing or saying when wearing the ring. Whatever gains you made by means of the ring were somehow otherwise explained, even by God to God's own self.*

GYGES AND THE TROLL

Lest you jump to the defense of human nature before considering the plausibility of Glaucon's assessment of human nature, consider exhibit A, the Internet Troll.

In 2015, Claire Hardaker wrote of “the Gyges effect”—the way in which the Internet can “encourage a disinhibition people simply would not experience face to face.” That is, the anonymity of online relations—the invisibility ring of the 21st Century—brings out the monster that accountability usually keeps safely behind bars of civility. “Given the chance to hide behind a computer screen,” she notes, “it's amazing what some of these keyboard warriors will say.”

That same year, Stephen Marche discussed the “epidemic of facelessness”: how the inevitable reaction of online communication—where “all speech and image are muted and at arm's reach”—is to create a desire an insatiable craving to have an impact “at any cost.” At any cost. Kill the king, seduce the queen, rule the world.

The anonymity of the internet shuts down human-to-human awareness—removing all sense of obligation or ownership for one's actions. Thomas Apperley notes,

It is here, in the depositories of namelessness, that the internet troll is conceived. Their previous sense of empathy shuts down and they enter a world without filters or contrition. This makes it very easy to pretend that there isn't an actual human being at the other end of their assaults. To them it's simply words on a screen.

* And the inspiration for the Green Lantern ring, which grants great power. How would *you* use such a ring?

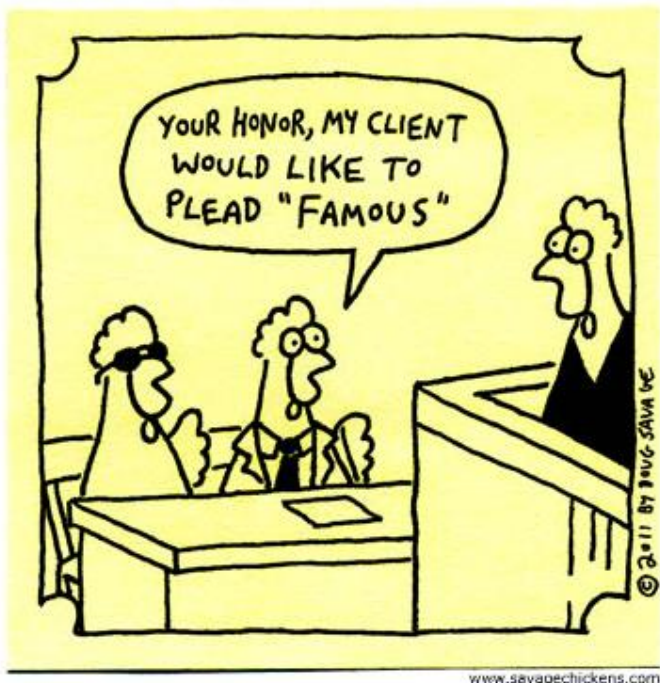
Would you use the ring? Would you ever do anything to make things better for yourself via ring-enabled shortcut? Fix grades you don't like? Clean up a police record? Take back that stuff your ex stole from you? Teach that jerk a lesson? Get that car you need so badly but can't afford? Supplement your income?

The heart of the Gyges thought experiment is to dig up our intuitions on human nature. Are we inherently selfish? Inherently generous? Why do we do the things we do? Are we good to others *only* because there's accountability? If so, then what happens if we remove all accountability? Glaucon suggests the very plausible position that we are inherently—essentially—at the core of what we are *as humans*—selfish. It's only external constraints that keep us in line.

This goes along with what had been discussed earlier. The Gyges thought experiment comes from a larger work, Plato's *Republic*. In Book I of the *Republic*, a well-known and irascible Sophist named Thrasymachus argued (with much sweat and great volume, according to Plato) that *might makes right*: justice is whatever is to the advantage of the stronger. Everyone—including Glaucon—recoils at Thrasymachus's suggestion. They want to believe that people are intrinsically good. That people would embrace doing the *right* thing—not so clearly defined, but certainly consistent with our

Savage Chickens

by Doug Savage



www.savagechickens.com

The internet troll: the monster that thrives on sowing hatred, bigotry, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and other violent seeds with deliberately acidic and offensive comments, designed to gash open wounds or create new ones, aimed towards causing grief and fear in both individuals and groups the troll considers himself (herself) superior than. The Gyges Effect.

Comments that people would never say face to face are now brazenly scattered over the bones of the massacred online—and the troll sits back in satisfied self-congratulatory glee.

Unsurprisingly, the rise of the troll has been shown to correspond directly with the increase in suicide. 14-year-old Hannah Smith was brutally attacked by relentless trolls on Facebook and other social media. When she committed suicide, they persisted—attacking her family for their inability to protect Hannah from suicide, blaming the parents instead of taking responsibility. People's lives are destroyed—the trolls think it's hilarious to kick them while they are gasping in grief. The Gyges Effect.

Hannah Smith is only one of the named victims. Ciara Pugsley, Erin Gallagher, Joshua Unsworth, Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons, Phoebe Prince, Jamie Huble, Jamey Rodemeyer, Audrie Pott, Kenneth Weishuhn, Jadin Bell, Emilie Olsen—all younger than 16, all killed themselves to escape the torture of online trolls, who rip into those they dehumanize twenty-four hours a day.

The troll does whatever s/he pleases, without meaningful reprisal—the worst that might happen is a forum ban, but this is quickly remedied by the creation of a new username.

The Gyges Effect arises from the many heads of the internet hydra—justified to the troll with words like, "You don't know me," "You can't see me," "See you later," "It's all in my head," "It's just a game," and "Your rules don't apply here."

Invisibility forms a (false) sense of invulnerability, especially in the fake eloquence of time-lapsed communication.

intuitions of justice as including compassion, honor, and impartiality—simply because it is the right thing, not because they get something for doing the right thing.

They want to believe that justice is choiceworthy all on its own power. To test this intuition, Glaucon sets up a situation where, on the one hand, all accountability is removed. No punishments for selfish, intuitively unjust behavior. Gyges becomes the stronger, and he takes advantage of it. Would we?

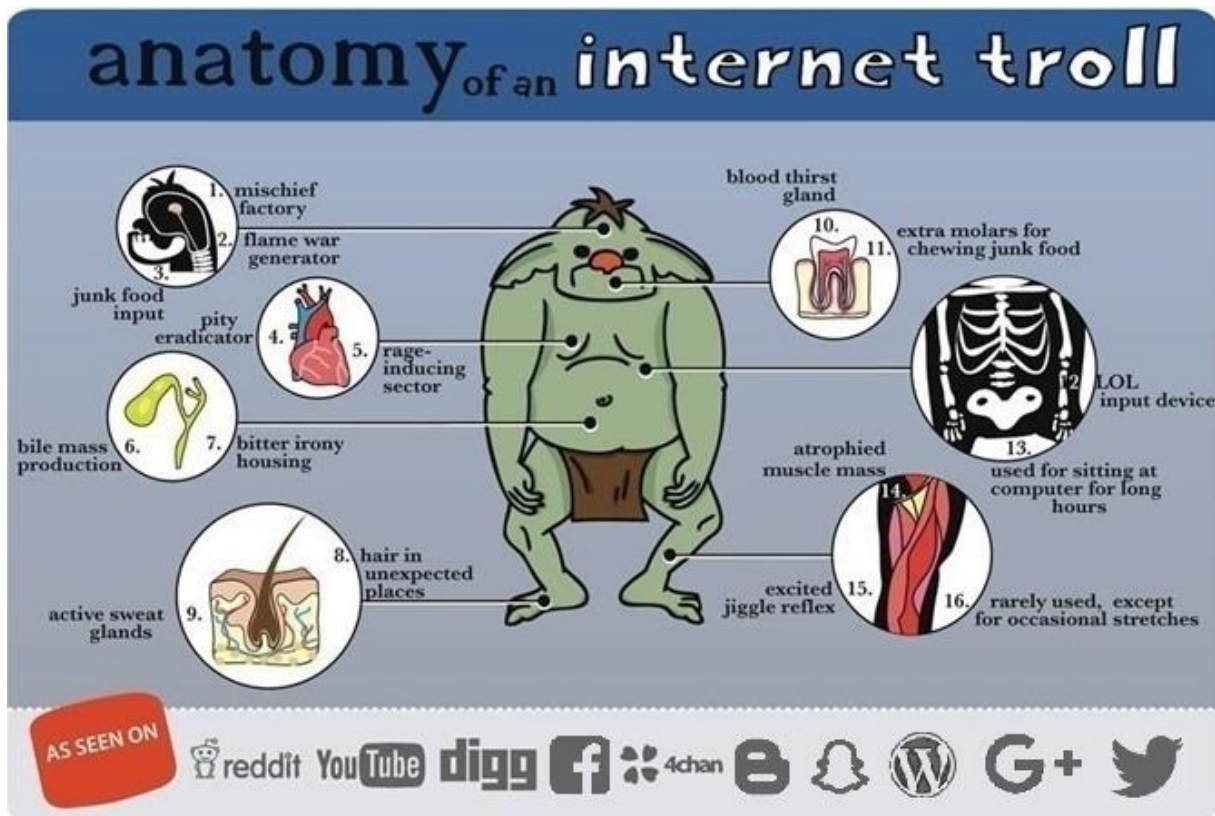
On the other hand, Glaucon ups the ante by juxtaposing two men: one who is completely unjust and vicious, the other who is completely just and virtuous. But the former is well-loved and respected as a just man, and the latter is widely hated as a vicious man. Thus does Glaucon remove from them any social standing gains one might earn from acting justly. If justice is choiceworthy on its own—and not for what it gets us—then it would seem that the truly just man would be happier, even though he were wrongly perceived as vicious. But is this the case? Would we use the ring, and thereby maintain our reputation as just and fair, even while, when invisible to all who might hold us accountable, rig the game to our own advantage?

Susan Greenfield, a pharmacologist at Oxford, argues that humans developed “handbrakes” in the shape of body language, to halt potentially monstrous actions. The screen that we now easily hide behind disconnects the brakes. What biology had done to protect us, the anonymity of the internet has removed.

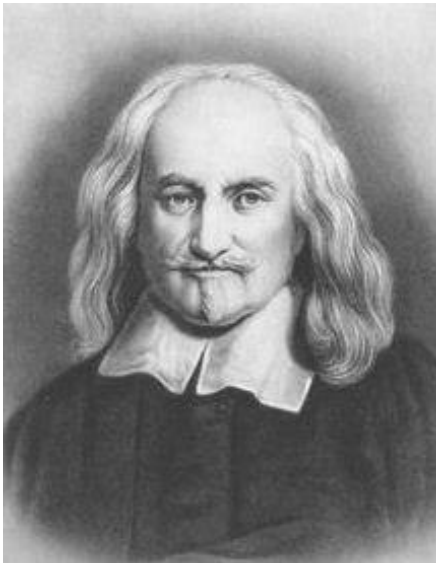
Lindy West was brutally trolled, and shared her experience in a podcast called “If You Don’t Have Anything Nice to Say, SAY IT IN ALL CAPS.” For an extra credit worth two Tasks, listen to the whole podcast. You can find it at

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/545/if-you-dont-have-anything-nice-to-say-say-it-in-all-caps>

Then write a 2-page reflection on the Gyges Effect and the stories in the podcast. What insights did you get? Have you put on the troll ring? Have you or has somebody you know and love been trolled? What do you think is the role of accountability in keeping people civil? Do you think people are all potential trolls?



Read the following selection from Thomas Hobbes and prepare a Critical Question.



LEVIATHAN, BOOK I, CHAPTERS XIII-XIV

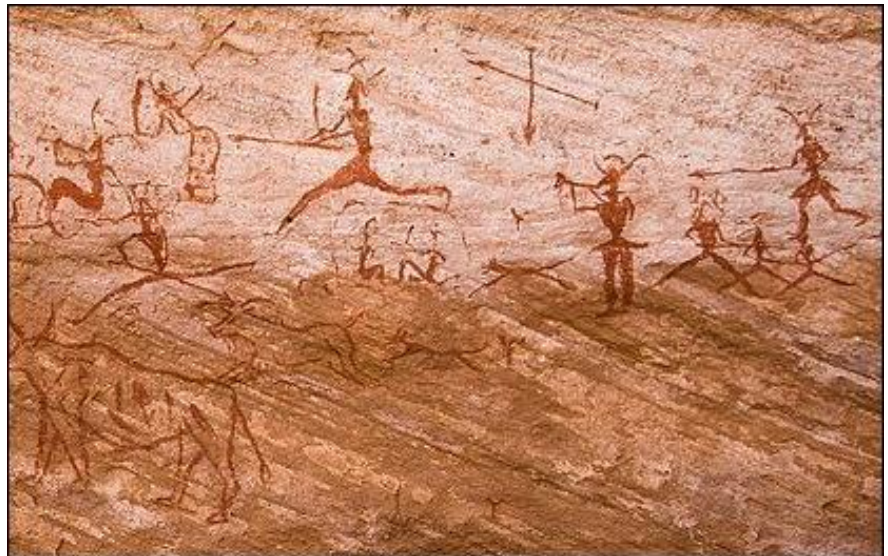
*Thomas Hobbes**

Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery

NATURE hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself.

And as to the faculties of the mind, setting aside the arts grounded upon words, and especially that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules, called science, which very few have and but in few things, as being not a native faculty born with us, nor attained, as prudence, while we look after somewhat else, I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength. For prudence is but experience, which equal time equally bestows on all men in those things they equally apply themselves unto. That which may perhaps make such equality incredible is but a vain conceit of one's own wisdom, which almost all men think they have in a greater degree than the vulgar; that is, than all men but themselves, and a few others, whom by fame, or for concurring with themselves, they approve. For such is the nature of men that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent or more

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* Public domain; available at gutenberg.org; spelling has been updated to modern preferences.

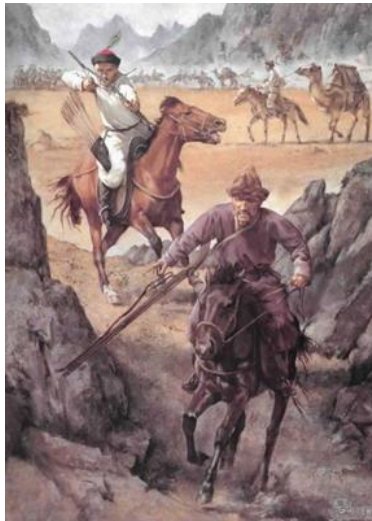
learned, yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves; for they see their own wit at hand, and other men's at a distance. But this proveth rather that men are in that point equal, than unequal. For there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of anything than that every man is contented with his share.



From this Equality Proceeds Diffidence, and From Diffidence War

From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass that where an invader hath no more to fear than another man's single power, if one plant, sow, build, or possess 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. And the invader again is in the like danger of another.

And from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself so reasonable as anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can so long till he see no other power great enough to endanger him: and this is no more than his own conservation requireth, and is generally allowed. Also, because there be some that, taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security requires, if others, that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds, should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by



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standing only on their defence, to subsist. And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion over men being necessary to a man's conservation, it ought to be allowed him.

Again, men have no pleasure (but on the contrary a great deal of grief) in keeping company where there is no power able to overawe them all. For every man looketh that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself, and upon all signs of contempt or undervaluing naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power to keep them in quiet is far enough to make them destroy each other), to extort a greater value from his contemnners, by damage; and from others, by the example.

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.

The first maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the

nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is Peace.

The Incommodities of Such a War

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. 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; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.



It may seem strange to some man that has not well weighed these things that Nature should thus dissociate and render men apt to invade and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this inference, made from the passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him therefore consider with himself: when taking a journey, he arms himself and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse man's nature in it. The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions that proceed from those passions till they know a law that forbids them; which till laws be made they cannot know, nor can any law be made till they have agreed upon the person that shall make it.

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It may peradventure be thought there was never such a time nor condition of war as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places where they live so now.

For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small families, the concord whereof dependeth on natural lust, have no government at all, and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before. Howsoever, it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, where there were no common power to fear, by the manner of life which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government use to degenerate into a civil war.

But though there had never been any time wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another, yet 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. But because they uphold thereby the industry of their subjects, there does not follow from it that misery which accompanies the liberty of particular men.



In Such a War Nothing is Unjust

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place.

Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues. Justice and injustice are none of the faculties neither of the body nor mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world, as well as his senses and passions. They are qualities that relate to men in society, not in solitude. It is consequent also to the same condition that there be no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct; but only that to be every man's that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it. And thus much for the ill condition which man by mere nature is actually placed in; though with a possibility to come out of it, consisting partly in the passions, partly in his reason.

The passions that incline men to peace are: fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace upon

which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles are they which otherwise are called the laws of nature, whereof I shall speak more particularly in the two following chapters.

Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contracts

The right of Nature which writers commonly call *Jus Naturale*, is the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgment, and Reason, he shall conceive to be aptest means thereunto.

By Liberty, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgement, and reason shall dictate to him.

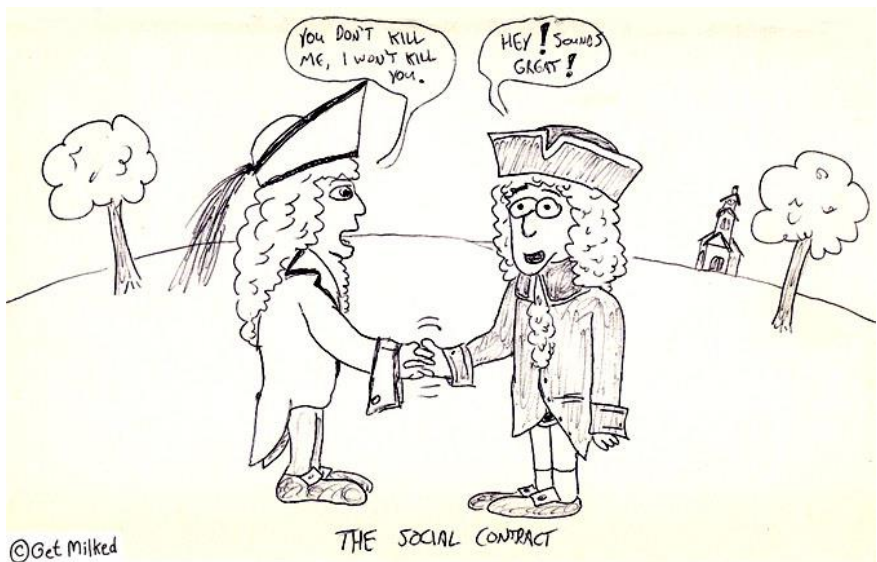
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A Law of Nature (*Lex Naturalis*) is a Precept, or general rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. For though they that speak of this subject, use to confound *Jus* and *Lex*, Right and Law; yet they ought to be distinguished; because Right, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; whereas Law determineth and bindeth to one of them: so that Law and Right differ as much as Obligation and Liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent.

And because the condition of Man, (as hath been declared in the precedent Chapter) is a condition of War of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemy's; It followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a Right to everything; even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural Right of every man to everything endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be,) of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live.



The Fundamental Law of Nature

And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of Reason, "That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of War." The first branch, of which Rule, containeth the first, and Fundamental Law of Nature; which is, "To seek Peace, and follow it." The Second, the sum of the Right of Nature; which is, "By all means we can, to defend ourselves."

The Second Law of Nature

From this Fundamental Law of Nature, by which men are commanded to endeavour Peace, is derived this second Law; "That a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himself he shall

think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself." For as long as every man holdeth this Right, of doing anything he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of War. But if other men will not lay down their Right, as well as he; then there is no Reason for any one, to divest himself of his: For that were to expose himself to Prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose himself to Peace. This is that Law of the Gospel; "Whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them." And that Law of all men, "*Quod tibi feiri non vis, alteri ne feceris.*"

To lay down a man's Right to anything, is to divest himself of the Liberty, of hindering another of the benefit of his own Right to the same. For he that renounceth, or passeth away his Right, giveth not to any other man a Right which he had not before; because there is nothing to which every man had not Right by Nature: but only standeth out of his way, that he may enjoy his own original Right, without hindrance from him; not without hindrance from another. So that the effect which redoundeth to one man, by another man's defect of Right, is but so much diminution of impediments to the use of his own Right original.

Right is laid aside, either by simply renouncing it, or by transferring it to another. By simply renouncing, when he cares not to whom the benefit thereof redoundeth. By transferring, when he intendeth the benefit thereof to some certain person or persons. And when a man hath in either manner abandoned or granted away his right, then is he said to be obliged, or bound, not to hinder those to whom such right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it: and that he ought, and it is duty, not to make void that voluntary act of his own: and that such hindrance is injustice, and injury, as being sine jure; the right being before renounced or transferred. So that injury or injustice, in the controversies of the world, is somewhat like to that which in the disputations of scholars is called absurdity. For as it is there called an absurdity to contradict what one maintained in the beginning; so in the world it is called injustice, and injury voluntarily to undo that which from the beginning he had voluntarily done. The way by which a man either simply renounceth or transferreth his right is a declaration, or signification, by some voluntary and sufficient sign, or signs, that he doth so renounce or transfer, or hath so renounced or transferred the same, to him that accepteth it. And these signs are either words only, or actions only; or, as it happeneth most often, both words and actions. And the same are the bonds, by which men are bound and obliged: bonds that have their strength, not from their own nature (for nothing is more easily broken than a man's word), but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.

The Mutual Transferring of Right is That Which Men Call a Contract

Whensoever a man transferreth his right, or renounceth it, it is either in consideration of some right reciprocally transferred to himself, or for some other good he hopeth for thereby. For it is a voluntary act: and of the

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voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself. And therefore there be some rights which no man can be understood by any words, or other signs, to have abandoned or transferred. As first a man cannot lay down the right of resisting them that assault him by force to take away his life, because he cannot be understood to aim thereby at any good to himself. The same may be said of wounds, and chains, and imprisonment, both because there is no benefit consequent to such patience, as there is to the patience of suffering another to be wounded or imprisoned, as also because a man cannot tell when he seeth men proceed against him by violence whether they intend his death or not. And lastly the motive and end for which this renouncing and transferring of right is introduced is nothing else but the security of a man's person, in his life, and in the means of so preserving life as not to be weary of it. And therefore if a man by words, or other signs, seem to despoil himself of the end for which those signs were intended, he is not to be understood as if he meant it, or that it was his will, but that he was ignorant of how such words and actions were to be interpreted.

The mutual transferring of right is that which men call contract.

There is difference between transferring of right to the thing, the thing, and transferring or tradition, that is, delivery of the thing itself. For the thing may be delivered together with the translation of the right, as in buying and selling with ready money, or exchange of goods or lands, and it may be delivered sometime after.

Again, one of the contractors may deliver the thing contracted for on his

part, and leave the other to perform his part at some determinate time after, and in the meantime be trusted; and then the contract on his part is called pact, or covenant: or both parts may contract now to perform hereafter, in which cases he that is to perform in time to come, being trusted, his performance is called keeping of promise, or faith, and the failing of performance, if it be voluntary, violation of faith.

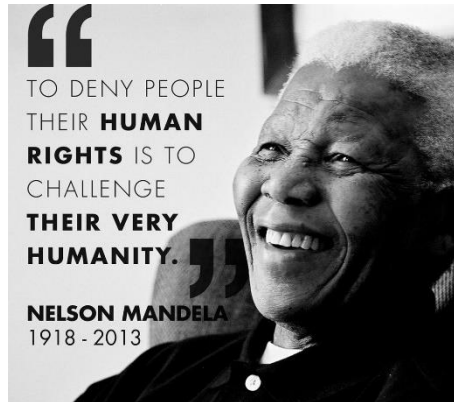
When the transferring of right is not mutual, but one of the parties transferreth in hope to gain thereby friendship or service from another, or from his friends; or in hope to gain the reputation of charity, or



“Of course, this social contract will have to remain hypothetical until someone invents writing.”

magnanimity; or to deliver his mind from the pain of compassion; or in hope of reward in heaven; this is not contract, but gift, free gift, grace: which words signify one and the same thing.

Signs of contract are either express or by inference. Express are words spoken with understanding of what they signify: and such words are either of the time present or past; as, I give, I grant, I have given, I have granted, I will that this be yours: or of the future; as, I will give, I will grant, which words of the future are called *promise*.



Signs by inference are sometimes the consequence of words; sometimes the consequence of silence; sometimes the consequence of actions; sometimes the consequence of forbearing an action: and generally a sign by inference, of any contract, is whatsoever sufficiently argues the will of the contractor.

Words alone, if they be of the time to come, and contain a bare promise, are an insufficient sign of a free gift and therefore not obligatory. For if they be of the time to come, as, tomorrow I will give, they are a sign I have not given yet, and consequently that my right is not transferred, but remaineth till I transfer it by some other act. But if the words be of the time present, or past, as, I have given, or do give to be delivered tomorrow, then is my tomorrow's right given away today; and that by the virtue of the words, though there were no other argument of my will. And there is a great difference in the signification of these words, *volo hoc tuum esse cras*, and *cras dabo*; that is, between I will that this be thine tomorrow, and, I will give it thee tomorrow: for the word I will, in the former manner of speech, signifies an act of the will present; but in the latter, it signifies a promise of an act of the will to come: and therefore the former words, being of the present, transfer a future right; the latter, that be of the future, transfer nothing. But if there be other signs of the will to transfer a right besides words; then, though the gift be free, yet may the right be understood to pass by words of the future: as if a man propound a prize to him that comes first to the end of a race, the gift is free; and though the words be of the future, yet the right passeth: for if he would not have his words so be understood, he should not have let them run.

In contracts the right passeth, not only where the words are of the time present or past, but also where they are of the future, because all contract is mutual translation, or change of right; and therefore he that promiseth only, because he hath already received the benefit for which he promiseth, is to be understood as if he intended the right should pass: for unless he had been content to have his words so understood, the other would not

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have performed his part first. And for that cause, in buying, and selling, and other acts of contract, a promise is equivalent to a covenant, and therefore obligatory.

He that performeth first in the case of a contract is said to merit that which he is to receive by the performance of the other, and he hath it as due. Also when a prize is propounded to many, which is to be given to him only that winneth, or money is thrown amongst many to be enjoyed by them that catch it; though this be a free gift, yet so to win, or so to catch, is to merit, and to have it as due. For the right is transferred in the propounding of the prize, and in throwing down the money, though it be not determined to whom, but by the event of the contention. But there is between these two sorts of merit this difference, that in contract I merit by virtue of my own power and the contractor's need, but in this case of free gift I am enabled to merit only by the benignity of the giver: in contract I merit at the contractor's hand that he should depart with his right; in this case of gift, I merit not that the giver should part with his right, but that when he has parted with it, it should be mine rather than another's. And this I think to be the meaning of that distinction of the Schools between *meritum congrui* and *meritum condigni*. For God Almighty, having promised paradise to those men, hoodwinked with carnal desires, that can walk through this world according to the

precepts and limits prescribed by him, they say he that shall so walk shall merit paradise *ex congruo*. But because no man can demand a right to it by his own righteousness, or any other power in himself, but by the free grace of God only, they say no man can merit paradise *ex condigno*. This, I say, I think is the meaning of that distinction; but because disputers do not agree upon the signification of their own terms of art longer than it

serves their turn, I will not affirm anything of their meaning: only this I say; when a gift is given indefinitely, as a prize to be contended for, he that winneth meriteth, and may claim the prize as due.

Invalid Covenants of Mutual Trust

If a covenant be made wherein neither of the parties perform presently, but trust one another, in the condition of mere nature (which is a condition of war of every man against every man) upon any reasonable suspicion, it is void: but if there be a common power set over them both, with right and force sufficient to compel performance, it is not void. For he that

WAIT A MINUTE! WHAT KIND OF SEVERANCE PACKAGE IS INCLUDED IN THIS SO-CALLED "SOCIAL CONTRACT" ?



performeth first has no assurance the other will perform after, because the bonds of words are too weak to bridle men's ambition, avarice, anger, and other passions, without the fear of some coercive power; which in the condition of mere nature, where all men are equal, and judges of the justness of their own fears, cannot possibly be supposed. And therefore he which performeth first does but betray himself to his enemy, contrary to the right he can never abandon of defending his life and means of living.

But in a civil estate, where there a power set up to constrain those that would otherwise violate their faith, that fear is no more reasonable; and for that cause, he which by the covenant is to perform first is obliged so to do.

The cause of fear, which maketh such a covenant invalid, must be always something arising after the covenant made, as some new fact or other sign of the will not to perform, else it cannot make the covenant void. For that which could not hinder a man from promising ought not to be admitted as a hindrance of performing.

NOTES



IF THERE IS TRUE EVIL IN THIS WORLD, IT LIES IN THE HEART OF MANKIND.

(EDWARD MORRISON)



THE MARKS HUMANS LEAVE
ARE TOO OFTEN SCARS.

(JOHN GREEN)

TOTAL WAR: ORIGINS

Considering our total equality in a state of nature completely devoid of organized society, we find that all human quarrels bubble up from three sources:

- competition,
- intimidation (diffidence), and
- reputation (glory).

Think about it even in our current non-SON world. What causes our wars or internecine dissent?

Why do we fight wars, commit crimes, or put sanctions on other nations? Why do we have arms races? Why is America so in love with the belief that every single person should have a gun?* It's because we want *more* than they have, or because we are *afraid* of them, or because we want to be *respected* or (better yet) *feared* by them. We call some nations or people a *threat* (intimidation), so we sanction or attack them. We justify that bar fight by saying 'he needed to be taken down a notch.' We invade other countries because we want their _____ (fill in the blank).

HUMAN EQUALITY IN THE STATE OF NATURE

The question is whether humans are essentially *good* or essentially *evil*. That is to say we want to determine what is *necessary* to the human being. What are we *qua* humans? Specifically, does whatever we are include *goodness* or *badness*?

Some nineteen centuries after Plato wrote the *Republic*, Thomas Hobbes penned his great work *Leviathan*. Hobbes had watched the English people overthrow and decapitate King Charles I and set up the short-lived Cromwell-led Commonwealth that was marked by uncertainty, brutality, ethnic divisions, massacres, and civil war. Hobbes had seen with his own eyes what happened when organized society was obliterated.

He posits a different thought experiment that echoes with the dark undertones of Gyges' ring. If we were to take away not just accountability, but *all* organized society, what would be left? What is a *human being* on his own? What is the *essential nature* of a person?

To take away organized society means to take away all the things it gives us. Without organized society, I'm *utterly alone*. What I'd have in such isolation would be limited to what I could do completely on my own. Consider. What would I wear? Where would I live? How would I care for myself? What would I eat? It's like *Survivor*, only without cameras and the behind-the-scenes network of medical and script-writing staff. No tribes. No alliances. Total. ISOLATION. All caps.

Four Equalities

Let's call this unaffiliated circumstance the **State of Nature** (or SON). What would it be like if we were in such a state, without some organizing social constraints? Hobbes notes that in such a state, every single person is **equal** to every other single person in a number of significant ways:

- *strength*,
- *smarts*,
- *hope*, and
- *pride*.

continued...

* I'm not exaggerating. A law before the Iowan House (as I write this in 2015) would make it legal for small children—no age restriction—to handle guns of any kind (under parental supervision).

Oil. Land. Access to the Ocean. Water rights. Power to control holy sites.

In the *total* state of nature, this is unyielding, unending. A total state of nature is a state of total war—everyone against everyone. A free-for-all of violence and death. Think of life without any organized society: no safe travel, no education, no large buildings, no machinery, no time, no art, no literature, no history, no gourmet food or drink, no reliable agriculture, no fashion, no nothing. Life without organized society is, in Hobbes' famous phrase, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."



Hobbes reminds us that he isn't saying that the state of nature (SON) *actually happened* at some time or in some place. It's a *thought experiment*. But it is plausible because there are many similar circumstances in specific places in the world. Hobbes might have been mistaken regarding the First Nations' living styles in the Americas,* but it was a common misconception in the 1640s-50s.

What we can do is get his point from our current world. So perhaps we can look at what life is like in places like war-torn Syria or Rwanda immediately after the genocide or Berlin at the end of WWII. What happens when there's no rule of law? No social organization? No private property. No security. No peace of mind.

EQUALITY IN THE SON,

continued.

Regarding pure brute **strength**, he writes "the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others," noting that whatever differences we have in physical prowess would, in the SON, be insignificant. It's not only the larger that can take down the smaller—a huge bully can be taken down easily by another who has brute force, but just as easily by a smaller person with good aim with a slingshot or yet another person with a well-laid trap.

Regarding **smarts**, we are even more evenly matched. Things like education or training not being relevant, we're left to *prudence*, or good judgment. Since this comes by experience, we all have the same potential for greatness; and we all succumb to the same folly of thinking ourselves wiser and wittier than everyone else who ever breathed. Since we all tend to think so highly of our own mental acuity, we must then be satisfied with our share of intellectual power.

Regarding **hope**, we are equally capable—because of our equality of mind and strength—of seeing it possible that we can get what we want. Hope springs eternal, and hope arises when we have reason to believe the hoped-for is within reach. Notice that Hobbes isn't talking about fantasy or pipe dreams, but real *hope*. From this equality of hope arises battles between competitors for those things that cannot go to but one. Since everyone has an equal shot—via strength or smarts—our battles are open-ended regarding who will get the prized object.

Finally, because the total equality makes battles open-ended, we fear each other: we are never quite sure we have stable footing, never quite sure we will be the victor, never quite sure we're safe with what we have. But despite this, we are equal in **pride**, taking great satisfaction in what we can had have accomplished—triumphing in those times when we look better than everyone else, when we've gotten more than everyone else, and when we've intimidated everyone else.

* Hobbes wrote in a time when England, Spain, Portugal, and France were newly colonizing the so-called "New World." The information about life over here trickled back to Europe mixed into greater narratives about wealth, religion, politics, and culture that were unreflective and therefore mistaken. From this came both the idea of the bestial and bloodthirsty savage and the idea of the toweringly noble savage. Neither accurately mirrors the full humanity of those people who inhabited the cultures so shallowly represented. But to judge Hobbes as wrong because he is limited to his era is to leap to a conclusion far beyond what evidence we have. We can say his *example* was wrong, but we can still use the *idea* (and test it for accuracy), and look around to see whether there are *better* examples to illustrate the idea.

AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS FEAR

The defining characteristic of the SON—that world without organized society—is fear. Terror, really.

Hobbes writes that our essential equality produces fear—guaranteed. And it is the *fear* that produces war.



This is an important point. Without organized society, we're fearful. In organized societies, we fear those we consider not members of our own society. But it is from *fear* that all organizing, all law, all morality emerges.

Savage Chickens

by Doug Savage



The Limits of a Thought Experiment: *what we still have in the SON*

What is important here to see is what Hobbes' thought experiment does *not* say (and why it doesn't say it).

Hobbes does not say that we have no language in the State of Nature. We can see why this is important when we see what his purpose is in putting forth this experiment in the first place. Hobbes tasted, smelled, heard, and felt the bruising horror of civil war. He wanted to find some rational principles upon which a governmental structure could be built that wouldn't be vulnerable to internal forces of destruction. To find this, he needed to analyze the government's purpose and the people's needs separately and side by side. So what does government give us?

Not language. We get that from something else. Certainly, language is social. But without language we are, arguably, not fully persons. Thus, to remove language from the essence of a person is to make us something utterly different and to make the experiment itself completely useless as a tool in discovering what principles make for the government Hobbes aimed for.

It is a part of human nature that we are social. But what if that interaction is not *organized*? We can have loose, unorganized societies. Something like whatever you'd call a random conversation on the street or in an elevator. These encounters don't have organization or hierarchical structure even though they involve language. You can talk to each other even though not in some shared system.

So Hobbes doesn't take language away from us in this experiment because it would be counterproductive, because it is irrelevant to the aim of removing those things we gain from organized societies, and finally, because he's not presenting anything that could actually happen in nature. Even his examples—and mine—are examples of places where society once existed but has since been destroyed or places where a simpler organization of society *still* exists. This is a *thought experiment*, not a claim about what did or even could happen historically. To focus on details that would render the experiment unhelpful would be like polluting a culture in a Petrie dish. It is to miss the very purpose of the test.

Morality and the Social Contract

What organized society does get us is law, enforcement of law, hierarchy, and stability. Without organized society there is no morality. This is the heart of the philosophical theory called **Social Contract Theory**. Hobbes is certainly not the first to present something like Social Contract theory,* but he's among the first to recast it as the foundation of law and civil society. What Hobbes infers is that it is *mutual agreement* that determines what is right or wrong, both morally and legally. We have social norms that are enforced by legal systems. In a state of nature, there are no organized human interactions, so there cannot be any sense to what is morally right or wrong. Isolated individuals cannot have social norms. In the State of Nature, we are utter individuals, and right and wrong in that case is really more a question of what I need at this precise moment.

Without organized society, there is no morality...it is mutual agreement that determines right and wrong.

Justice, injustice, right, wrong, good, bad, these move from the practical meaning of brute survival and personal advantage into the more abstract meaning of morality and social order.

Notice what this means for Hobbes: it would be inaccurate to call people in the state of nature *evil* or *good*. If these concepts are meaningless outside of organized society, then it is meaningless to assign them to individuals outside of organized society. What we have outside of the calming, ordering, stabilizing influence of organized society is a short and impoverished existence pockmarked by endless violence and competition. We are naturally violent.

War is the state of nature. Peace is the absence of war, which we desire only because death terrifies us and comfort entices us and we cannot go to the later or mitigate the former without somehow carving peace out of the natural state of war (there's that fear again). Thus we form alliances, based perhaps on bartering or small agreements, and these social contracts give use peace, morality, and law.

* It shows up in Plato's dialogue *Crito*, which I'll discuss more fully in chapter 19.

Meanwhile, in a land far, far away and long before...

A hundred years after Plato, and some eighteen hundred years before Hobbes, thousands of miles east of either, Confucian philosophers struggled with the same questions. Actually, Confucius himself—Kong Fuzi, the Grand Master Kong—was a contemporary of Socrates. While the latter was challenging the self-proclaimed wisdom of influential Athenians, the former was rising in fame as a great teacher in the Chinese state of Lu. Like Socrates and Hobbes, Confucius saw political chaos and war around him as people fought for power, wealth, and dynastic influence. In the midst of a three-way civil war, Confucius struggled to establish the peaceful order of civilization without weapons. What he had was the ear of the people. Slowly, he rose from teacher to minor city government posts to regional prominence.

Confucius sought to end the civil war between the three warring families by returning society to central rule. But through his life and influence, even though his teachings were well received, the three-way battles remained the scourge of the Lu state, as one family razed the walls of a city governed by another while the third burned the fields of the first. In frustration, Confucius abandoned his political position and exiled himself from Lu. During this time, he taught his philosophy of duty and order as a political and ethical cure to every kingdom he visited, but he never saw anything he taught carried out. He returned to Lu as an old man, and spent his final years teaching disciples his philosophy.

One such disciple we know as Mencius. Mengzi (Master Meng) wrote and taught Confucianism though so brilliantly that his teachings, over time, were given prominence as one of the so-called *Four Books* of canonical Confucianism. Some hundred years later, another great Confucian philosopher came to prominence, Xunzi or Hsün Tzu—Master Xun.

continued...

A FEMINIST REFLECTION ON HOBBSIAN THOUGHT

In the State of Nature, as Hobbes envisions it, every human person is equal with every other human person—adults with children, men with women. But of course, “equality” does not here mean anything like “equal rights” since there’s no such thing as “rights” without organized society. Rather, he means that women and children are equally capable to kill or be killed, to use their smarts, strength, hope, and pride.

Interestingly, the contracts that one might make in the state of nature do not then have to look like the relationships we know from our lives in organized society. There wouldn’t be any patriarchy or matriarchy, since children would be just as likely to contract with fathers as with mothers—and possibly with neither.



In fact, with no family structure (no organized society), children wouldn’t necessarily even know who their fathers are! Carole Pateman, a British political philosopher, notes that in such conditions, it is highly unlikely women would agree to have children at all—they’ve got the same basic drive to survive as any other person, and pregnancy and childcare puts them at greater risk than the unencumbered man with whom they would compete for survival.

American philosopher Eva Feder Kittay underscores Pateman’s observation by demonstrating how, even in the organized state of affairs we actually live in, caretakers are far more vulnerable to attack and harm than those who do not care for dependents.



For Hobbes, the family and home are not significantly different than the state—they are a contractual agreement aimed at mutual protection



of each member. They are, notes New Zealand philosopher Susan Moller Okin, fear-based. Marriage, family, friendships—for Hobbes, these are devoid of love. The Hobbesian family bonds to protect the vulnerable wife and ensure some level of future existence for not-yet-equal (because not yet able to hope, use smarts, or bring strength to bear) children. Children bond with parents or other

Meanwhile...

continued.

The late 300s BCE were a horrible time in China, called the *Warring States* period, where the seven different kingdoms in China battled viciously for control and absolute rule. The same horrors observed by Hobbes some eighteen hundred years later and thousands of miles to the west were observed by Xunzi in his beloved China.

In his teachings, Mengzi had argued that humans were naturally good, that we were capable of much kindnesses and great virtue. His teacher Confucius had no notion of human *nature*—the idea not being introduced into conversation until the proto-Daoist Master Yang brought it up. More carefully, there was no notion of *individual* human nature until this time, and it didn’t become an important topic of philosophical discourse until Master Yang’s theory was roundly rebutted by Mengzi. It was this that made human nature and the role of organized society a central theme in Chinese philosophy.

Mengzi argued that people are essentially good. Human nature is *good*.*

All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others.

The ancient kings had this commiserating mind, and they, as a matter of course, had likewise a commiserating government. When with a commiserating mind was practised a commiserating government, to rule the kingdom was as easy a matter as to make anything go round in the palm.

When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others, my meaning may be illustrated thus:—even now-a-days, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favour of the child’s parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing.

continued...

* *Mencius*, chapter 6. (transl. James Legge, 1895).

adults only for their self-preservation. But what is in it for the father? Without affection, Okin notes, it is unlikely that parent-child relationships can create a mutual benefit—and thus it seems unlikely that one would ever want to encumber oneself with a dependent.

The worry is the basic assumption that **fear** (and self-preservation) is the foundation of all human relationship—the necessary condition for any social contract.

The response is *not* that fear plays no part in human relationships—including the family—but that it is not a necessary element in the creation or maintenance of any social contract. Nor, in fact, is it sufficient. Consider the contracts—family relationships—that persist even in conditions that *increase* the risk of harm (say, abusive marriages). In such cases, it is the *affection*—that is, something utterly distinct from self-preservation—that cements the relationship for women, and those who flee consistently justify the breaking of the contract not as **self**-preservation, but for the safety of their dependents—for the children.

Battered wives still care for their abusive partners (as do battered husbands). The very fact that such relationships persist—without any promise of mutual protection—gives the feminist philosopher reason to question the accuracy of the Hobbesian account of human nature.

The social contract that creates morality and human society, according to Hobbes, is completely based on this understanding of human nature. But it fails to explain an important part of human nature—the caretaker, whether woman or man. Feminist thinkers remind us that we care for each other not necessarily because justice and survival demands it, but because we care, because we have compassion, because we love.

The problem they find in Hobbes is not that he is completely wrong—he isn't. His notion of a solitary existence and the violence we face resonates. But, like Euthyphro's first definition of piety, Hobbes's account of human nature is *too narrow*. It leaves out too much by leaving out other factors that inform and even serve as the foundation of human relationships.

Meanwhile...

continued.

From this case we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man.

The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of propriety. The feeling of approving and disapproving is the principle of knowledge.

Men have these four principles just as they have their four limbs. When men, having these four principles, yet say of themselves that they cannot develop them, they play the thief with themselves, and he who says of his prince that he cannot develop them plays the thief with his prince.

Since all men have these four principles in themselves, let them know to give them all their development and completion, and the issue will be like that of fire which has begun to burn, or that of a spring which has begun to find vent. Let them have their complete development, and they will suffice to love and protect all within the four seas. Let them be denied that development, and they will not suffice for a man to serve his parents with.

We have these principles planted in our nature like seeds, waiting to sprout. And in fact, they will *naturally* sprout. But whether they grow and flourish will depend on how we tend our garden. Living the upright life is the way we fertilize and tend our nature, and so doing ensures strong growth in virtue. But if we live a life in chaos and non-disciplined indulgence we allow the weeds to choke out our sprouting virtue, rendering us stunted, debased humans.



Read the following selection from Xunzi and prepare a Critical Question.



“THE NATURE OF MAN IS EVIL”

Xunzi (or Hsün Tzu)*

The nature of man is evil; his goodness is the result of his activity. Now, man's inborn nature is to seek for gain. If this tendency is followed, strife and rapacity result and deference and compliance disappear. By inborn nature one is envious and hates others. If these tendencies are followed, injury and destruction result and loyalty and faithfulness disappear. By inborn nature one possesses the desires of ear and eye and likes sound and beauty. If these tendencies are followed, lewdness and licentiousness result, and the pattern and order of propriety and righteousness disappear. Therefore to follow man's nature and his feelings will inevitably result in strife and rapacity, combine with rebellion and disorder, and end in violence. Therefore there must be the civilizing influence of teachers and laws and the guidance of propriety and righteousness, and then it will result in deference and compliance, combine with pattern and order, and end in discipline. From this point of view, it is clear that the nature of man is evil and that his goodness is the result of activity.

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Crooked wood must be heated and bent before it becomes straight. Blunt metal must be ground and whetted before it becomes sharp. Now the nature of man is evil. It must depend on teachers and laws to become correct and achieve propriety and righteousness and then it becomes disciplined. Without teachers and laws, man is unbalanced, off the track, and incorrect. Without propriety and righteousness, there will be rebellion, disorder, and chaos. The sage-kings of antiquity, knowing that the nature of man is evil, and that it is unbalanced, off the track, incorrect, rebellious, disorderly, and undisciplined, created the rules of propriety

* From *The Basic Writings of Hsün Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson. Columbia University Press; Revised edition (April 15, 1996).

and righteousness and instituted laws and systems in order to correct man's feelings, transform them, and direct them so that they all may become disciplined and conform with the Way (Tao). Now people who are influenced by teachers and laws, accumulate literature and knowledge, and follow propriety and righteousness are superior men, whereas those who give rein to their feelings, enjoy indulgence, and violate propriety and righteousness are inferior men. From this point of view, it is clear that the nature of man is evil and that his goodness is the result of activity.

Mencius [Mengzi] said, "Man learns because his nature is good" (6A:1-8). This is not true. He did not know the nature of man and did not understand the distinction between man's nature and his effort. Man's nature is the product of Nature; it cannot be learned and cannot be worked for. Propriety and righteousness are produced by the sage. They can be learned by men and can be accomplished through work. What is in him and can be learned or accomplished through work is what can be achieved through activity. This is the difference between human nature and human activity. Now by nature man's eye can see and his ear can hear. But the clarity of vision is not outside his eye and the distinctness of hearing is not outside his ear. It is clear that clear vision and distinct hearing cannot be learned. Mencius said, "The nature of man is good; it [becomes evil] because man destroys his original nature." This is a mistake. By nature man departs from his primitive character and capacity as soon as he is born, and he is bound to destroy it. From this point of view, it is clear that man's nature is evil.

By the original goodness of human nature is meant that man does not depart from his primitive character but makes it beautiful, and does not depart from his original capacity but utilizes it, so that beauty being [inherent] in his primitive character and goodness being [inherent] in his will are like clear vision being inherent in the eye and distinct hearing being inherent in the ear. Hence we say that the eye is clear and the ear is sharp. Now by nature man desires repletion when hungry, desires warmth when cold, and desires rest when tired. This is man's natural feeling. But not when a man is hungry and sees some elders before him, he does not eat ahead of them but yields to them. When he is tired, he dares not seek rest because he wants to take over the work [of elders]. The son yielding to or taking over the work of his older brother— these two lines of action are contrary to original nature and violate natural feeling. Nevertheless, the way of filial piety is the pattern and order of propriety and righteousness. If one follows his natural feeling, he will have no deference or compliance. Deference and compliance are opposed to his natural feelings. From this point of view, it is clear that man's nature is evil and that his goodness is the result of activity.

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Someone may ask, "If man's nature is evil, whence come propriety and righteousness?" I answer that all propriety and righteousness are results of the activity of sages and not originally produced from man's nature. The potter pounds the clay and makes the vessel. This being the case, the vessel is the product of the artisan's activity and not the original product of man's nature. The artisan hews a piece of wood and makes a vessel. This being the case, the vessel is the product of the artisan's activity and not the original product of man's nature. The sages gathered together their ideas and thoughts and became familiar with activity, facts, and principles, and thus produced propriety and righteousness and instituted laws and systems. This being the case, propriety and righteousness, and laws and systems are the products of the activity of the sages and not the original products of man's nature.

As to the eye desiring color, the ear desiring sound, the mouth desiring flavor, the heart desiring gain, and the body desiring pleasure and ease—all these are products of man's original nature and feelings. They are natural reactions to stimuli and do not require any work to be produced. But if the reaction is not naturally produced by the stimulus but requires work before it can be produced, then it is the result of activity. Here lies the evidence of the difference between what is produced by man's nature and what is produced by his effort. Therefore the sages transformed man's nature and aroused him to activity. As activity was aroused, propriety and righteousness were produced, and as propriety and righteousness were produced, laws and systems were instituted. This being the case, propriety and righteousness, laws, and systems are all products of the sages. In his nature, the sage is common with and not different from ordinary people. It is in his effort that he is different from and superior to them.

It is the original nature and feelings of man to love profit and seek gain. Suppose some brothers are to divide their property. If they follow their natural feelings, they will love profit and seek gain, and thus will do violence to each other and grab the property. But if they are transformed by the civilizing influence of the pattern and order of propriety and righteousness, they will even yield to outsiders. Therefore, brothers will quarrel if they follow their original nature and feeling but, if they are transformed by righteousness and propriety, they will yield to outsiders.

People desire to be good because their nature is evil. If one has little, he wants abundance. If he is ugly, he wants good looks. If his circumstances are narrow, he wants them to be broad. If poor, he wants to be rich. And if he is in a low position, he wants a high position. If he does not have it himself, he will seek it outside. If he is rich, he does not desire more wealth, and if he is in a high position, he does not desire more power. If he has it

himself, he will not seek it outside. From this point of view, [it is clear that] people desire to be good because their nature is evil.

Now by nature a man does not originally possess propriety and righteousness; hence he makes strong effort to learn and seek to have them. By nature he does not know propriety and righteousness; hence he thinks and deliberates and seeks to know them. Therefore, by what is inborn alone, man will not have or know propriety and righteousness. There will be disorder if man is without propriety and righteousness. There will be violence if he does not know propriety and righteousness. Consequently by what is inborn alone, disorder and violence are within man himself. From this point of view, it is clear that the nature of man is evil and that his goodness is the result of his activity.

People desire to be good because their nature is evil.

Mencius said, "The nature of man is good." I say that this is not true. By goodness at any time in any place is meant true principles and peaceful order, and by evil is meant imbalance, violence, and disorder. This is the distinction between good and evil. Now do we honestly regard man's nature as characterized by true principles and peaceful order? If so, why are sages necessary and why are propriety and righteousness necessary? What possible improvement can sages make on true principles and peaceful order?

Now this is not the case. Man's nature is evil. Therefore the sages of antiquity, knowing that man's nature is evil, that it is unbalanced and incorrect, and that it is violent, disorderly, and undisciplined, established the authority of rulers to govern the people, set forth clearly propriety and righteousness to transform them, instituted laws and governmental measures to rule them, and made punishment severe to restrain them, so that all will result in good order and be in accord with goodness. Such is the government of sage-kings and the transforming influence of propriety and righteousness.



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But suppose we try to remove the authority of the ruler, do away with the transforming influence of propriety and righteousness, discard the rule of law and governmental measure, do away with the restraint of punishment, and stand and see how people of the world deal with one another. In this situation, the strong would injure the weak and rob them, and the many would do violence to the few and shout them down. The whole world would be in violence and disorder and all would perish in an instant. From this point of view, it is clear that man's nature is evil and that his goodness is the result of activity.



TEAM PROJECT: THE ARGUMENT OF MASTER HSÜN

Unearthing the Skeleton

Xunzi does not argue the way Western philosophers do. You might say that while Westerners argue “in a straight line”, Eastern thinkers reason in well-planned cycles. It’s like two different methods of lawn mowing: the back and forth method that leaves clear lines, and the go-around method that leaves clear circles. The Chinese thinkers mow in circles, edging nearer and nearer to the point, always coming back to it before going around again.

You are, as a team, to analyze Xunzi’s argument, looking for his premises. Clearly, his conclusion includes two claims: that human nature is evil, and that any goodness comes from deliberate, continuous action. Study the selection, and reconstruct his argument in standard form.

Your conclusion will be “human nature is evil, and any human goodness comes only from deliberate (or conscious) activity.”

You will need to find a *valid* argument that attempts to prove *both* that human nature is evil *and* that any goodness comes only from deliberate activity.

Your instructor will set the due date for this project. Write that date on the assignment, along with the names of all your participating team members. Turn in *one* paper for the whole team. Please write legibly.