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Phil 28: Leviathan

In the view of Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, the fundamental nature of humanity is so similar to one another even with the variance of birth, that without the mutually agreed upon authority of a state, humanity would be in constant conflict with one another.

While the claim today that all humans have skills and abilities fairly similar to one another would be greeted as a societally beneficial egalitarian claim, Hobbes believes that this fundamental similarity leads anyone to be able to take advantage of any other person given our natural greed and desire for power. In his words, "From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. (Hobbes, p.184)". In this way, and to make the transition from a low-trust, zero-sum anarchy to a high-trust, positive-sum society, we need a state to enforce laws and punish those who break them. He believes that without a state at all, we are in a "war of all against all" because without the societal structure to allow the development of the belief that unjust actions, as defined by mutually agreed upon laws and enforced by a consented-to-state, would be punished no one has any incentive or ability to create anything. The only natural action in such a state of nature where everyone has relatively equal ability is to take what they can when they can from others.

A big part of explaining why we need a state, according to Hobbes, is that of private property rights. The accumulation of wealth is a natural human urge, and a positive one, but without the partial redirection of that urge through the state from stealing from others to a system of voluntary exchange where both parties benefit, we are left in

endless anarchy. A rules-based society is fundamentally a way to make the accumulation of wealth a positive-sum game that benefits everyone involved, thus private property rights are fundamental to the maintenance of a high-trust, rules-based society. This does not mean that as soon as a society loses trust for a social reason that private property rights collapse, but rather that if private property rights are not maintained, we will revert to a zero-sum war of all against all. The covenants between individuals and their States are fundamentally analogous to the kinds of covenants between individuals, as Hobbes envisions, the citizens voluntarily transfer some portion of their total liberty in exchange for the security and protection that the state provides, while the State gains a right to exercise upon that portion of citizen's liberty in order to make that protection realized, including the levying of taxes.

In conclusion, in order to escape the "war of all against all" a state is generally agreed upon by its citizenry as the best way to redirect the basic human urges of competition, distrust, and glory into a positive-sum system where these urges in the individual simultaneously benefit others as well as a function of their voluntary exchange. Without a state, according to Hobbes, we are left in a state of nature where there is no functional application of justice, and simply do what we can day by day to survive and protect ourselves.