

1

THE STATE OF NATURE

Introduction

‘I should have thought that a pack of British boys—you’re all British aren’t you?—would have been able to put up a better show than that—I mean—’

‘It was like that at first,’ said Ralph, ‘before things—’

He stopped.

‘We were together then—’

The officer nodded helpfully.

‘I know. Jolly good show. Like the Coral Island.’

(William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 192)

R. M. Ballantyne’s *Coral Island* is a story in which three English boys are marooned on a desert island. Through courage, intelligence, and cooperation they repel pirates and native savages to enjoy an idyllic life in the South Seas. William Golding’s characters also find themselves on a bountiful coral island, but soon fall first into dispute, and then into desperate tribal warfare. In telling their stories as they do, Ballantyne and Golding suggest opposing pictures in answer to our first question: what would life be like in a ‘natural’ state, a world without government?

Why ask this question? What is its relevance for political philosophy? We take for granted that we live in a world of political institutions: central government, local government, the police, the law courts. These institutions distribute and administer political power. They place people in offices of responsibility, and these people then claim to have the right to command us to act in various ways. And, if we disobey and are caught, we will be punished. The life of each one of us is structured and

controlled, in part, by the decisions of others. This level of interference in our lives can seem intolerable. But what is the alternative?

A natural starting-point for thinking about the state is to ask: what would things be like without it? To understand why we have something, it is often a good tactic to consider its absence. Of course, we could hardly abolish the state just to find out what life would be like without it, so the best we can do in practice is carry out this process as a thought-experiment. We imagine a ‘state of nature’; a situation where no state exists and no one possesses political power. Then we try to decide what it would be like to live under those conditions. This way we can come to a view about how things would be without the state, and this, we hope, will help us to see just why we have a state. Perhaps we will come to understand how the state is justified, if it is, and also what form it should take.

Was there ever a state of nature? Many philosophers seem reluctant to commit themselves on this topic. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), for example, thought that so much time would have been required to pass from a state of nature to ‘civil society’ (a society governed by a formal state) that it would be blasphemous to assume that modern societies had arisen in this way. He argued that the amount of time needed for the transition was longer than the age of the world, as recorded in the scriptures. Yet, on the other hand, Rousseau also believed that there were contemporary examples of peoples living in a state of nature, while John Locke (1632–1704) thought this was true of many groups living in seventeenth-century America.

But even if there never has been a true state of nature we can still consider the question of what life would be like if, hypothetically, we found ourselves without a state. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), deeply worried by the English Civil War, thought he saw his country falling into a state of nature. In *Leviathan* he drew a picture of how unpleasant this would be, hoping to persuade his readers of the advantages of government. Accordingly, for the purposes of this chapter we need not spend much time discussing the question of whether, as a matter of fact, human beings have ever lived in a state of nature. All we need to argue is that it is possible.

Is it possible? Sometimes it is claimed that not only have human beings always lived under a state, but that it is the only way they possibly

could live. On this view, the state *exists naturally* in the sense of being *natural to human beings*. Maybe we would not be human beings if we lived in a society without a state. Perhaps we would be a lower form of animal. If human beings exist, then so does the state. If this is true then speculation about the state of nature is redundant.

In response some theorists claim that we have plenty of evidence that human beings have been able to live without the state, and such claims have been vital to the case made by anarchist writers (we will return to these later in the chapter). But even if human beings have never actually lived for any length of time without a state, it is very hard to see how it could be established that it is absolutely impossible. And so, as a way of trying to work out why we have the state, we will assume that human beings could find themselves in a world without it. What would that world be like?

Hobbes

In [the state of nature] 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 of 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, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

(Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 186)

Hobbes's greatest work, *Leviathan* (published in 1651), pursues a theme that had obsessed him for more than twenty years: the evils of civil war and the anarchy by which it would be accompanied. Nothing could be worse than life without the protection of the state, Hobbes argued, and therefore strong government is essential to ensure that we do not lapse into the war of all against all.

But why did Hobbes believe that the state of nature would be so desperate, a state of war, a state of constant fear and danger of a violent death? The essence of Hobbes's view is that, in the absence of government, human nature will inevitably bring us into severe conflict.

For Hobbes, then, political philosophy begins with the study of human nature.

Hobbes suggests that there are two keys to the understanding of human nature. One is self-knowledge. Honest introspection tells us a great deal about what human beings are like: the nature of their thoughts, hopes, and fears. The other is knowledge of the general principles of physics. Just as to understand the citizen (the individual in political society) you have to understand human nature; Hobbes believed, as a materialist, that to understand human nature you must first understand 'body' or matter, of which, he urged, we are entirely composed.

For our purposes, the most important aspect of Hobbes's account of matter is his adoption of Galileo's principle of the conservation of motion. Prior to Galileo, philosophers and scientists had been puzzled by the question of what kept objects in motion. By what mechanism, for example, does a cannon-ball remain in flight once it has been fired? Galileo's revolutionary answer was to say that this was the wrong question. We should assume that objects will continue to travel at a constant motion and direction until acted on by another force. What needs to be explained is not why things keep going, but why they change direction and why they stop. In Hobbes's lifetime this view was still a novelty, and, he pointed out, defied the common-sense thought that, just as we tire and seek rest after moving, objects will naturally do this too. But the truth, he claims, is that 'when a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion, unless somewhat els stay it' (*Leviathan*, 87). This, he thought, was true for us too. Becoming tired and desiring rest is simply to have a different motion act upon us.

So the principle of the conservation of motion was used by Hobbes in developing a materialist, mechanist view of human beings. The broad outlines of this account are laid out in the introduction to *Leviathan*: 'What is the *Heart*, but a *Spring*; and the *Nerves* but so many *Strings*; and the *Joynts*, but so many *Wheeles*, giving motion to the whole Body . . . ?' (p. 81). Thus human beings are animated through motion. Sensation, for example, is a 'pressing' on an organ. Imagination is a 'decaying relic' of sensation. A desire is an 'internal motion towards an object'. All of this is meant quite literally.

The importance of the theory of the conservation of motion is that with it Hobbes paints a picture of human beings as always searching for

something, never at rest. 'There is no such thing as perpetual Tranquillity of mind while we live here; because Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire' (*Leviathan*, 129–30). Human beings, Hobbes argues, seek what he calls 'felicity', continual success in achieving the objects of desire. It is the search to secure felicity that will bring us to war in the state of nature. Ultimately, Hobbes thought, our fear of death would bring human beings to create a state. But without a state, in the state of nature, Hobbes thought that the search for felicity would lead to a war of all against all. Why did Hobbes think this?

One clue can be found in Hobbes's definition of power: one's 'present means to obtain some future apparent Good' (*Leviathan*, 150). So to be assured of achieving felicity one must become powerful. Sources of power, Hobbes claims, include riches, reputations, and friends, and human beings have 'a restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death' (*Leviathan*, 161). This is not only because humans can never reach a state of complete satisfaction, but also because a person 'cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more' (*Leviathan*, 161). For others will also seek to increase their power, and so the search for power, is by its nature, competitive.

Everyone's natural, continual, attempt to increase power—to have riches and people under one's command—will lead to competition. But competition is not war. So why should competition in the state of nature lead to war? An important further step is Hobbes's assumption that human beings are by nature 'equal'. An assumption of natural equality is often used in political and moral philosophy as a basis for the argument that we should respect other people, treating one another with care and concern. But for Hobbes the assumption is put to a quite different use, as we might suspect when we see how he states the point: we are equal in that all humans possess roughly the same level of strength and skill, and so any human being has the capacity to kill any other. 'The weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others' (*Leviathan*, 183).

To this Hobbes adds the reasonable assumption that in the state of nature there is a scarcity of goods, so that two people who desire the same *kind* of thing will often desire to possess the same thing. Finally, Hobbes points out that no one in the state of nature can make himself

invulnerable against the possibility of attack. Whatever I possess, others may desire, and so I must constantly be on my guard. Yet even if I possess nothing I cannot be free from fear. Others may take me to be a threat to them and so I could easily end up the victim of a pre-emptive strike. From these assumptions of equality, scarcity, and uncertainty, it follows, thinks Hobbes, that the state of nature will be a state of 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 owne 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 feare than an other mans single power; if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossesse, 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. (*Leviathan*, 184)

Worse still, Hobbes argues, people seek not only the means of immediate satisfaction, but also power in order to satisfy whatever future desires they will have. Now, as reputation of power is power, some people will attack others, even those who pose no threat, purely to gain a reputation of strength as a means of future protection. As in the school playground, those with a reputation for winning fights are least likely to be attacked for their goods, and may even have goods surrendered to them by others who feel unable to defend themselves. (Of course, those with a reputation for strength cannot relax either: they are the most likely victims of those seeking to enhance their own reputations.)

In sum, Hobbes sees three principal reasons for attack in the state of nature: for gain, for safety (to pre-empt invaders), and for glory or reputation. At bottom, Hobbes relies on the idea that human beings, in the search for felicity, constantly try to increase their power (their present means to obtain future goods). When we add that human beings are roughly equal in strength and ability; that desired goods are scarce; and that no one can be sure that they will not be invaded by others, it seems reasonable to conclude that rational human action will make the state of nature a battlefield. No one is strong enough to ward off all possible attackers, nor so weak that attacking others, with accomplices if need be,

is never a possibility. The motive to attack falls into place when we also recognize that attacking others in the state of nature is often the surest way of getting (or keeping) what you want.

Should it be objected that this depiction of our likely plight in the state of nature relies on an assumption that human beings are unrealistically cruel, or unrealistically selfish? But Hobbes would reply that both objections miss the point. Human beings, Hobbes argues, are not cruel, ‘that any man should take pleasure in other mens great harms, without other end of his own, I do not conceive it possible’ (*Leviathan*, 126). As for selfishness, he would agree that human beings do generally, if not always, seek to satisfy their self-centred desires. But of equal or greater importance as a source of war is fear: the fear that others around you may try to take from you what you have. This can lead you to attack; not for gain, but for safety or perhaps even reputation. Thus we come close to the idea of a war in which everyone is fighting everyone else in self-defence.

Still, it might be said, it is unreasonable to suppose that everyone will be so suspicious of each other that they will always be at each others’ throats. But Hobbes accepts that there will be moments without actual conflict. He defines the state of war not as constant fighting, but as a constant readiness to fight, so that no one can relax and let down their guard. Is he right that we should be so suspicious? Why not assume that people in the state of nature will adopt the motto ‘live and let live’? But consider, says Hobbes, how we live even under the authority of the state. What opinion of your neighbours do you express when you lock your doors against them? And of other members of your household when you lock your chests and drawers? If we are so suspicious when we live with the protection of law, just think how afraid we would be in the state of nature.

At this point it might be argued that, while Hobbes has told us an amusing story, he has overlooked one thing: morality. Although creatures with no moral sense might behave as Hobbes outlines, we are different. The great majority of us accept that we should not attack other people or take their property. Of course in a state of nature a minority would steal and kill, as they do now, but there would be enough people with a moral sense to stop the rot spreading and prevent the immoral minority from bringing us to a general war.

This objection raises two central questions. First, does Hobbes believe that we can make sense of the ideas of morality in a state of nature?

Second, if we can, would he allow that the recognition of moral duty, in the absence of the state, is sufficient motivation to override the temptation to invade others for their goods? Let us consider Hobbes's position on the first of these questions.

Hobbes seems to deny that there can be a morality in the state of nature: 'To this warre of every man against every man . . . nothing can be Unjust. The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice, have no place' (*Leviathan*, 188). The argument Hobbes uses at this point is that injustice consists of the breach of some law, but for a law to exist there must be a lawgiver, a common power, able to enforce that law. In the state of nature there is no common power, so no law, so no breach of law, and so no injustice. Each person has 'the Liberty . . . to use his own power . . . for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his Judgement, and Reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto' (*Leviathan*, 189). One of the consequences of this, claims Hobbes, is that 'in such a condition every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body' (*Leviathan*, 190). Hobbes calls the liberty to act as you think fit to preserve yourself the 'right of nature': its consequence seems to be that, in the state of nature, you are permitted to do anything, even take another's life, if you believe that this will help you survive.

Why does Hobbes take such an extreme position, granting everyone liberty to do anything they think fit in the state of nature? But perhaps his position is not so extreme. We would find it hard to disagree that people in the state of nature have the right to defend themselves. That said, it also seems evident that individuals must decide for themselves what reasonably counts as a threat to them, and further, what is the most appropriate action to take in the face of such a threat. No one, it would seem, could reasonably be criticized for any action they take to defend themselves. As pre-emption is a form of defence, invading others can often be seen as the most rational form of self-protection.

This, then, is the simple initial account of Hobbes's view. In the state of nature there is no justice or injustice, no right or wrong. Moral notions have no application. This is what Hobbes calls the 'Natural Right of Liberty'. But as we shall see, Hobbes's view does have further complications.

In addition to the Natural Right of Liberty, Hobbes also argues that what he calls the 'Laws of Nature' also exist in the state of nature.

The first 'fundamental law' is this: 'Every man ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre' (*Leviathan*, 190). A second law instructs us to give up our right to all things, provided others are willing as well, and each should 'be contented with as much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himselfe' (*Leviathan*, 190). The third, which is particularly important for Hobbes's later social contract argument for the state, is to perform whatever covenants you make. In fact, Hobbes spells out a total of nineteen Laws of Nature, concerning justice, property, gratitude, arrogance, and other matters of moral conduct. All these laws, Hobbes supposes, can be deduced from the fundamental law, although he realizes that few people would be able to carry out the deduction, for most people 'are too busie getting food, and the rest too negligent to understand' (*Leviathan*, 214). But the Laws of Nature can be 'contracted into one easy sum . . . Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe', a negative formulation of the biblical 'golden rule' (do unto others as you would have them do unto you).

The Laws of Nature, then, could easily be called a moral code. But if Hobbes intends these as a set of moral rules which govern the state of nature, then this seems to contradict his earlier statement that there is no right or wrong in such a condition. Furthermore, if people are motivated to obey the moral law perhaps this will make the state of nature rather more peaceful than Hobbes allows. However, Hobbes does not describe the Laws of Nature as moral laws, but rather as theorems or conclusions of reason. That is, Hobbes believes that following these laws gives each person the best chance of preserving his or her own life.

This, however, seems to lead into a different problem. The fundamental Law of Nature tells us it is rational to seek peace. But Hobbes has already argued that the state of nature will be a state of war, because it is rational, in the state of nature, to invade others. How can Hobbes say that rationality requires both war and peace?

The answer, I think, is that we have to distinguish between *individual* and *collective* rationality. Collective rationality is what is best for each individual, on the assumption that everyone else will act the same way. The Laws of Nature express what is collectively rational. We can illustrate this distinction with an example from Jean-Paul Sartre. Consider a

group of peasants, who each farm their own plot on a steep hillside. One by one they realize that they could increase the usable part of their plot by cutting down their trees and growing more crops. So they all cut down their trees. But in the next heavy storm the rain washes the soil off the hill, ruining the land. Here we can say that the individually rational thing for each peasant is to cut down his or her trees, to increase the amount of land available for farming. (Cutting down the trees on just one plot will not make any significant difference to soil erosion.) But collectively this is a disaster, for if they all cut down their trees everyone's farm will be ruined. So the collectively rational thing to do is leave most, if not all, of the trees standing.

The interesting feature of cases of this nature (known in the literature as the 'prisoners' dilemma') is that, where individual and collective rationality diverge, it is very hard to achieve co-operation on the collectively rational outcome. Every individual has an incentive to 'defect' in favour of the individually rational behaviour. Suppose the peasants understand the structure of their situation, and so agree to refrain from cutting down trees. Then any given peasant can reason that he or she will personally increase yield by felling trees (remember that clearing just one plot will not lead to significant soil erosion). But what is true for one is true for all, and so they may each begin to clear their plots, to gain an individual advantage. Even if they make an agreement, everyone has good reason to break that agreement. Hence the collectively rational position is unstable, and individuals will tend to defect, even if they know the consequences of everyone acting that way.

With this in mind, one way of thinking about Hobbes's argument is that, in the state of nature, the *individually* rational behaviour is to attack others (for reasons we have already seen) and this will lead to the state of war. However, the Laws of Nature tell us that the state of war is not the inevitable situation for human beings because another level of behaviour—*collective* rationality—may also be available. If only we could somehow ascend to the level of collective rationality and obey the Laws of Nature we can live in peace, without fear.

The question now is whether Hobbes believed that each person in the state of nature has a duty to obey the Laws of Nature, and if so whether the recognition of such a duty should be sufficient to motivate people to obey the Laws. Hobbes's answer here is subtle. He says that the Laws

bind '*in foro interno*' (in the internal forum), but not always '*in foro externo*' (in the external forum). What he means is that we should all desire that the Laws take effect, and take them into account in our deliberations, but this does not mean that we should always obey them under all circumstances. If other people around me are disobeying the Laws, or, as will often be the case in the state of nature, I have reasonable suspicion that they will break the Laws, then it is simply stupid and self-defeating for me to obey. If someone does obey in these circumstances then he will 'make himselfe a prey to others, and procure his certain ruine' (*Leviathan*, 215). (In the technical language of contemporary game theory, anyone acting this way is a 'sucker'!)

In sum, then, Hobbes's position is that we have a duty to obey the Laws of Nature when others around us are known (or can reasonably be expected) to be obeying them too, and so our compliance will not be exploited. But if we are in a position of insecurity, the attempt to seek peace and act with moral virtue will lead to an individual's certain ruin and so we are permitted to 'use all the advantages of war'. The real point, then, seems to be, not exactly that moral notions have no application in the state of nature, but that the level of mutual suspicion and fear in the state of nature is so high that we can generally be excused for not obeying the law. We should only act morally when we can be assured that those around us are doing so too, but this is so rare in the state of nature that the Laws of Nature will, in effect, almost never come into play.

Hobbes sees the way out of this predicament as being the creation of a sovereign who will severely punish those who disobey the Laws. If the sovereign is effective in keeping people to the Laws, then, and only then, can no one have reasonable suspicion that others will attack. In that case there is no longer an excuse to start an invasion. The great advantage of the state, argues Hobbes, is that it creates conditions under which people can securely follow the Laws of Nature.

We should conclude this section by recalling Hobbes's account of the state of nature. It is a state where everyone is rightly suspicious of everyone else, and this suspicion, not mere egoism or sadism, leads to a war, where people will attack for gain, safety, and reputation. The war is self-fuelling and self-perpetuating, as reasonable suspicion of violent behaviour leads to an ever-increasing spiral of violence. In such a situation life is truly miserable, not only racked by fear, but lacking material

comforts and sources of well-being. As no one can be sure of retaining any possessions, few will plant or cultivate, or engage in any long-term enterprise or plan. People will spend all their time grubbing for subsistence and fighting battles. Under such circumstances there is absolutely no chance that the arts or sciences could flourish. Our short lives would be lived without anything to make them worthwhile.

Locke

The State of Nature, and the State of War, which however some Men have confounded, are as far distant as a State of Peace, Good Will, Mutual Assistance, and Preservation, and a State of Enmity, Malice, Violence, and Mutual Destruction are from one another.

(John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*,
s. 19, p. 280)

It is a matter of scholarly debate whether Locke had Hobbes explicitly in mind when he wrote this passage (published in 1689). His official target was the view of Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653), a defender of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings—that the king ruled with authority granted by God. Nevertheless it is hard to deny that, at a number of points, Locke seems to be arguing with Hobbes, whose work must have been well known to him. As we shall see, comparing the two accounts of the state of nature casts light on them both.

While, as we saw, Hobbes identified the state of nature with a state of war, Locke is keen to emphasize that this is a mistake. Locke supposed that it would generally be possible to live an acceptable life even in the absence of government. Our question must be how Locke managed to draw this conclusion. Or, in other words, how, according to Locke, does Hobbes fall into error?

Let us start at the beginning. The state of nature, says Locke, is first, a state of perfect freedom; second, a state of equality; and third, bound by a Law of Nature. Verbally, of course, this sounds just like Hobbes's view, but each of these three elements is given quite a different interpretation by Locke. Hobbes's principle of equality was a claim about the mental and physical capabilities of all people. For Locke it is a moral claim about rights: no person has a natural right to subordinate any

other. This assertion was explicitly aimed against those, including Filmer, who accepted the feudal view of a natural hierarchy, headed by a sovereign, ruling by divine appointment. Filmer argued that God had appointed Adam first sovereign, and contemporary sovereigns can trace their title back to God's initial grant. For Locke it is self-evident that no one *naturally* has a right to rule, in the sense that no one has been appointed by God for this purpose. Although Hobbes did not mean this by his assumption of equality, he would accept Locke's position here. Hobbes thought that whoever did, in fact, exercise power over the community was, for that reason, to be recognized as its sovereign.

There is, however, greater disagreement between the two on the nature and content of the Law of Nature. For Hobbes the fundamental Law of Nature was to seek peace, if others are doing so, but otherwise to use the advantages of war. This, and Hobbes's other eighteen Laws, were said to be 'theorems of reason'. Locke, too, believes the Law of Nature to be discoverable by reason, but Locke's Law has a theological aspect absent in Hobbes's Laws. The Law, says Locke, is that no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. The reason for this, according to Locke, is that while we have no natural superiors on earth, we do have one in heaven. In other words, we are all creatures of God, his property, put on earth as his servants, 'made to last during his, not one another's Pleasure'. Therefore 'Every one . . . is *bound to preserve himself*, and not to quit his station wilfully; so by the like reason when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, *to preserve the rest of Mankind*' (*Second Treatise*, s. 6, p. 271). The Law of Nature, for Locke, is simply the idea that mankind is to be preserved as much as possible. So, Locke argues, we have a clear duty not to harm others in the state of nature (except for limited purposes of self-defence), and we even have a duty to help them if we can do so without damage to ourselves.

Clearly, then, Hobbes and Locke have significantly different views of the nature and content of the Laws of Nature. A still greater difference lies in their use of the term 'natural liberty'. For Hobbes, we saw, to say that we have natural liberty is to say that it can often be entirely rational, and beyond moral criticism, to do whatever is appropriate to help secure our own survival, even if this means attacking the innocent. Locke's understanding is very different, claiming that although the state of

nature 'be a *state of Liberty*, yet it is *not a state of Licence* . . . The *state of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one' (*Second Treatise*, s. 6, pp. 270–1).

Thus natural liberty, on Locke's view, is no more than the liberty to do what the Law of Nature allows. That is, we are given the liberty to do only what is morally permitted. So, for example, although Locke's Law of Nature prevents me from invading the property of others, this is in no sense a limitation of my liberty. Locke would certainly disagree with Hobbes's claim that in the state of nature everyone has a right to everything, even each others' bodies (although he does accept that we have considerable rights of self-defence).

Do these disagreements between Hobbes and Locke add up to enough to establish Locke's conclusion that the state of nature need not be a state of war? Clearly it is important for Locke that even in the state of nature we have a moral duty to restrict our behaviour. Yet this, on its own, does not seem enough to show that in the state of nature fear and suspicion would not exist. And, as Hobbes argues, fear and suspicion may be enough for the state of nature to tumble into war. To avoid this Locke requires not only that the state of nature be subject to moral assessment, but that somehow or other people will be motivated to act as the Law of Nature instructs.

This suggests a strategy for resisting Hobbes's pessimistic conclusion. Hobbes argued that human beings would be driven by the search for felicity (the continued satisfaction of their desires), and this, at least initially, leads them into conflict. If Hobbes has misdescribed human motivation—if human beings, say, really are strongly altruistic—then peace might easily be achieved. This would be one route to Locke's conclusion. Is it the route Locke takes? Locke does not explicitly put forward a theory of human motivation in the *Two Treatises*, but it seems clear that he did not think that human beings would automatically be motivated to follow the moral law. Indeed he comes very close to sounding like Hobbes: 'For the *Law of Nature* would, as all other Laws that concern Men in this World, be in vain, if there were no body that in the State of Nature, had a *Power to Execute* the Law and thereby preserve the innocent and restrain offenders' (*Second Treatise*, s. 7, p. 271). In other words, the Law of Nature, like all laws, needs a law-enforcer. Without such an enforcer it would be empty.

Hobbes is perfectly prepared to accept that in the state of nature his Laws of Nature are ineffective. Unlike Hobbes, however, Locke cannot accept that the Law of Nature could be in vain: it is, after all, in Locke's view the law of God, who presumably does nothing in vain. Therefore there must be a way of enforcing the law: somebody who has the power to enforce it. But we are all equal in the state of nature, so if anyone has such power then everyone must have it. Therefore, Locke concludes, there must be a natural right, held by each person, to punish those who offend against the Law of Nature. Each of us has the right to punish those who harm another's life, liberty, or property.

The right to punish is not the same thing as the right of self-defence. It is the right not simply to try to prevent or ward off a particular episode of harm or damage, but to make anyone who has overstepped the Law of Nature pay for their transgression. This 'strange doctrine' as Locke calls it, plays a very important role in the derivation of his view of the state of nature. If the Law of Nature can be enforced, then we have good reason to hope that life could be relatively peaceful. Offenders can be punished to make reparation, and to restrain and deter them, and others, from similar acts in the future: 'Each Transgression may be *punished* to that *degree*, and with so much *Severity* as will suffice to make it an ill bargain to the Offender, give him cause to repent, and terrifie others from doing the like' (*Second Treatise*, s. 12, p. 275). It is important that this natural right to punish is not restricted solely to the individual who suffers the wrong. If that were so, then obviously those who commit murders would go unpunished. But, more importantly, the victim may not have sufficient strength or power to subdue, and exact retribution from, the offender. Locke therefore argues that those who break the law are a threat to us all, as they will tend to undermine our peace and safety, and so every person in the state of nature is given what Locke calls the 'Executive Power of the Law of Nature'. Locke has in mind the idea that law-abiding citizens, outraged by the offence, will band together with the victim to bring the villain to justice, and together they will have the necessary power to do this.

Locke realizes that the claim that we all have a natural right to punish offenders may seem surprising. However, in support of his view he claims that, without it, it is hard to see how the sovereign of any state can have the right to punish an alien who has not consented to the laws.

If the foreigner has not consented to the sovereign's laws, then he has not accepted that he is liable to punishment for breaching them. Therefore such a person cannot justly be punished, unless there is some sort of natural right to punish. In effect, the sovereign is in the state of nature with the alien, and so the sovereign's behaviour is sanctioned not by the laws of the land, but by the Executive Power of the Law of Nature. (In fact we will see in the next chapter that Locke has a more obvious strategy to explain the sovereign's right: that the alien *tacitly consents* to the law.)

If the Law of Nature is enforceable, then a number of other rights can be secured, even in the state of nature. For Locke, the most important of these is the right to private property. We can already see what the basic form of the argument must be. God put us on earth, and it would be absurd to think that he put us here to starve. But we will starve unless we can rightfully consume objects such as apples and acorns; furthermore, we will do better still if individuals can securely possess plots of land and rightfully exclude others. For then we can cultivate the land, and be secure in our enjoyment of its products. (We will look at this argument in more detail in Chapter 5.)

To the modern reader, Locke's continual invocation of God and God's purposes may seem an embarrassment. Surely it should be possible to consider questions of political philosophy outside a theological framework? However, Locke also appeals to 'natural reason' in establishing the premisses of his arguments, even if he gives it a lesser role. So, for example, he thinks it absurd, and against natural reason, to suppose that human beings may not make use of the earth without the permission of all others, for if this were the case we should starve. This alternative argument certainly seems plausible, and so some followers of Locke have been prepared to drop the theological underpinnings of his view in favour of this 'natural reason' approach.

To return to the main argument, so far the central difference between Hobbes and Locke seems to be that Locke thinks that, even in the state of nature, there is an enforceable and effective moral law, backed by the natural right of punishment, while Hobbes would be highly sceptical of this claim. We can imagine how Hobbes would reply to Locke. According to Hobbes, the only way of subduing any power is through the exercise of a greater power. So we might all gang up on a villain to exact reparation

and deter future such acts. But then the villain—who may well be an unreasonable person with like-minded friends—might return, armed, with forces united, to gain revenge. Such thoughts could act as a powerful disincentive to those thinking of exercising their executive power of the law of nature. If you want to avoid unpleasantness in the future, don't get involved now. So Hobbes would probably argue that even if people did have a natural right to punish offenders, this would rarely be used with any effect unless a single, stable, authority existed: for example, within a tribe or group an acknowledged leader to adjudicate disputes and enforce judgements. But that would already be a fledgling state. So in the state of nature, even if there were a right to punish, this would be ineffective as a means to peace.

However, there is still one seemingly vital difference between Hobbes and Locke that I have not yet mentioned. Remember that for Hobbes, one of the key factors that brought people into conflict was a natural scarcity of goods. Two people will often desire the same thing, and this will make them enemies. Locke, on the other hand, appears to make a very different assumption: nature has given things richly. There is a natural abundance of land, and plenty of room for everyone, particularly 'in the first Ages of the World, when Men were more in danger to be lost, by wandering from their Company, in the then vast Wilderness of the Earth, than to be straitned for want of room to plant in' (*Second Treatise*, s. 36, p. 293). Hence, Locke implies, under these conditions there is very little reason for conflict and dispute. Most people, presumably, would rather cultivate their own plot than invade their neighbour's, and so we can expect a relatively peaceful climate and few sources of quarrel. If this is right, then peace in the state of nature is secured not only by the natural right to punish, but, equally importantly, by the fact that it would rarely have to be used.

How plausible is this? Hobbes no doubt would point out that abundance of land does not rule out scarcity of finished and consumable goods. It will often be far less trouble to take another's product by stealth, than to go to the effort of ploughing, sowing, and harvesting. Furthermore, if others have similar thoughts then I am wasting my energy by cultivating my own land, for, as Hobbes argued, whatever I will produce will end up in the hands of others. For Locke to refute this he must either show

that the natural right to punish can be used effectively, or that human beings have some fairly strong motivation to obey the moral law. Otherwise a few highly anti-social individuals could ruin things for everyone.

Locke, indeed, comes close to admitting that the state of nature may not be as peaceful as he first supposed. After all, he has to be careful not to paint it in too idyllic tones, for then it would be very difficult to explain why we ever left it and created the state. The primary fault, Locke sees, is with the administration of justice. It is not so much that we will squabble over goods, but that we will squabble over what justice requires. We will, in other words, disagree about the interpretation of the Law of Nature. People will disagree about whether an offence has taken place. They will disagree about its proper punishment and compensation. And they might not have the power to exact what they believe to be its proper punishment. So the attempt to administer justice, even between the would-be law-abiding, is itself a powerful source of dispute. This Locke sees as the primary 'inconvenience' of the state of nature. The only thing that prevents serious trouble is the thought that, given initial abundance of land, disputes would be few.

But Locke sees the initial abundance of land eventually turning to scarcity: not through massive population growth, but through greed and the 'invention' of money. Prior to the existence of money no one would have any reason to take more land than is necessary for their own family's survival. If you grew more than you could use, it would simply go to waste, unless you could exchange it for something more permanent. But once money exists then such exchanges become easy, and it is possible to hoard up enormous amounts of money without the risk that it will spoil. This gives people a reason to cultivate more land to produce goods for sale. In turn this leads to pressure on land which then, and for this reason only, thinks Locke, becomes scarce. Now Locke does not say that such scarcity introduces the Hobbesian state of war, but he recognizes that once land is in short supply and under dispute the inconveniences of the state of nature multiply and multiply. It becomes imperative to establish civil government. So although it is initially peaceful, eventually, even for Locke, the state of nature becomes almost unbearable.

Rousseau

The philosophers, who have inquired into the foundations of society, have all felt the necessity of going back to a state of nature; but not one of them has got there Every one of them, in short, constantly dwelling on wants, avidity, oppression, desires, and pride, has transferred to the state of nature ideas which were acquired in society; so that, in speaking of the savage, they described the social man.

(Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 50)

One way to avoid Hobbes's pessimistic conclusions about the state of nature is to start from different premisses. In particular, life without the state might seem a much more attractive possibility if we adopted a different theory of human nature and motivation. Hobbes argues that people continually seek felicity: the power to satisfy whatever future desires they may have. This, together with fear and suspicion of fellow human beings, in a condition of scarcity, drives the argument for the state of war. But suppose Hobbes was quite wrong. Suppose people naturally and spontaneously desire to help each other whenever they can. Perhaps, instead of competing in a struggle for existence, humans offer mutual aid, and act for the sake of each others' comfort. If so, then the state of nature will look very different.

Although Rousseau does not make these optimistic assumptions about the natural goodness of human beings, his view takes a substantial step in this direction. Like Hobbes and Locke he assumes that human beings are primarily motivated by the desire for self-preservation. Yet he also believes that this is not the end of the story. Hobbes and Locke overlooked a central aspect of human motivation—pity or compassion—and so overestimated the likelihood of conflict in the state of nature. Rousseau believes that we have 'an innate repugnance at seeing a fellow-creature suffer' (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 73). This, he adds, is 'so natural, that the very brutes themselves sometimes give evident proofs of it'.

Compassion, argues Rousseau, acts as a powerful restraint on the drives that might lead to attack and war.

It is this compassion that hurries us without reflection to the relief of those who are in distress: it is this which in a state of nature supplies the place of laws, morals, and virtues, with the advantage that none are tempted to disobey its gentle voice: it is this which will always prevent a sturdy savage from robbing a weak child or a feeble old man of the sustenance they may have with pain and difficulty acquired, if he sees a possibility of providing for himself by other means. (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 76)

Rousseau does not doubt that if modern citizens, moulded and corrupted by society, were placed in a state of nature, they would act just as Hobbes depicted them. But both Hobbes and Locke have projected the qualities of man-in-society (or even man-in-bourgeois-society) on to savage man. That is, they have depicted socialized traits as if they were natural.

Rousseau follows this with a second claim. When we understand how ‘savage man’ behaves—motivated by both self-preservation and pity—the state of nature would be far from the Hobbesian state of war, and even in some respects preferable to a more civilized condition. This does not mean that Rousseau is advocating a *return* to the state of nature, for that would be impossible for us, tainted and softened by society. Still, for Rousseau, it is something of a matter of regret that we have grown civilized. For Rousseau took an extreme, and extremely dismal, view of human progress. His treatise on education, *Émile*, begins: ‘God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.’ And his early essay, the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, argues that the development of the arts and sciences has done more to corrupt than to purify morality.

However, it is important to make clear that Rousseau’s claim that human beings are naturally motivated by pity or compassion is very different from the point we attributed to Locke in the previous section: that human beings in the state of nature will often respect each other’s *rights*. Like Hobbes, Rousseau argues that notions of law, right, and morality have no place in the state of nature, and so, clearly, he cannot mean that we have a natural impulse to follow a moral law. But unlike Hobbes and Locke he claims that we generally try to avoid harming others, not because we recognize that harm is immoral, but because we have an aversion to harm, even when it is not our own. We are naturally sympathetic to others, and are upset by their suffering. So we take steps to avoid this if we can.

It is surely very plausible that by nature human beings often have sympathy for one another. But is this enough to prevent war in the absence of government? The trouble is that Rousseau has given natural man two drives—self-preservation and compassion—and it seems more than possible that the two could come into conflict. If another has what I believe to be essential for my preservation, but I can take it only by causing harm, what would I—or rather the savage—do? It would surely be rare for any creature to put a stranger’s well-being before their own survival, and consequently if goods are scarce the influence of pity must fade. Rousseau more or less admits this. Pity stops the savage robbing the weak or sick, provided there is hope of gaining sustenance elsewhere. But what if there is little or small hope of this? Perhaps, then, in a condition of scarcity we would suffer doubly. Not only would we be in a state of war, but we would feel terrible about all the harm we were doing to our fellow human beings. But the main point is that in a condition of scarcity, natural compassion does not seem enough to hold off the threat of war.

Rousseau tries to avoid this type of problem by supposing that savage man has few desires, and, relative to those desires, goods are more likely to be obtained by hunting and gathering than by taking them from others. This is not because of nature’s munificence, but because the savage, claims Rousseau, is a solitary being, rarely coming into contact with others. Indeed there would not even be families. Rousseau speculates that children would leave their mothers as soon as they could survive on their own, and that among savages there would be no permanent union of man and woman. Compassion is not a strong enough sentiment to create a family bond.

Part of Rousseau’s explanation of the solitary life of the savage is that nature has equipped the savage to survive alone. Strong and fleet of foot, not only a match for wild beasts but generally free from disease (which Rousseau claims to be a consequence of indulgence and unhealthy habits), the savage desires only food, sexual satisfaction, and sleep, and fears only hunger and pain.

Natural solitude rules out any desire for ‘glory’ or reputation, for the savage takes no interest in others’ opinions. Indeed, as Rousseau argues that at this stage the savage has not yet developed language, the opportunities for forming and expressing opinions seem greatly restricted.

Equally, the savage has no desire for power. Hobbes, we saw, defined power as ‘the present means to satisfy future desires’. But, Rousseau argues, the savage has little foresight, and barely even anticipates future desires, let alone seeking the means to satisfy them. Rousseau likens the savage to the contemporary Caribbean, who, he says, ‘will improvidently sell you his cotton bed in the morning, and come crying in the evening to buy it again, not having foreseen he would want it again the next night’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 62). Consequently all of Hobbes’s drives to war—desires for gain, safety and reputation—are either defused or absent in Rousseau’s state of nature.

Still, despite its relatively peaceful character, Rousseau’s state of nature hardly seems a welcoming prospect. Rousseau’s savage may well be king of the beasts, but nevertheless, as portrayed, seems barely distinguishable from the other wild animals. The savage, says Rousseau, is ‘an animal weaker than some, and less agile than others; but, taking him all round, the most advantageously organised of any’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 52). Given that this is all we would have to boast of in the state of nature, why should Rousseau regret that we have now passed to a more civilized era? Furthermore, it is hard to see how such a transition would even be possible. What dynamic is there for change in Rousseau’s picture? It is far from clear how, even hypothetically, we could have got here, from there.

Rousseau himself admits that what he says is no more than ‘probable conjecture’, for the transition could have happened in many ways. And it has to be admitted that it is not always easy to fit together everything Rousseau says on this topic. However, the key is the thought that human beings, unlike brutes, have two special attributes: free will, and the capacity for self-improvement. As we shall see, this latter capacity, Rousseau supposes, is the source of all human progress and all human misfortune.

The state of nature as set out so far lies deep in human prehistory: the condition of ‘infant man’, who spends time ‘wandering up and down the forests, without industry, without speech, and without home, an equal stranger to war and to all ties, neither standing in need of his fellow-creatures nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps even not distinguishing them one from another’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 79). We begin the path to civilization through the first exercise of the

capacity of self-improvement: the development of tools in the struggle for subsistence, a struggle brought about, Rousseau speculates, by an increase in population. It is interesting that Rousseau sees innovation, and not Hobbesian competition, as the primary response to scarcity. Here Rousseau is probably relying on the idea that, as the savage has a natural aversion to harming others, most will prefer to get what they need by working for it, rather than taking things from others. And it is innovation to make work easier—tool-making—that first awakens man’s pride and intelligence.

Another innovation is the idea of co-operation: mutuality of interest spurs collective pursuits, as for example, in the formation of hunting parties. Thus the advantages of living in groups, and making common huts and shelters, become apparent, and the habit of living in these new conditions ‘gave rise to the finest feelings known to humanity, conjugal love and paternal affection’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 88).

In this condition another novelty arises: leisure time. Co-operation and tool-making conquer scarcity sufficiently well to give the opportunity to create goods which go beyond bare survival needs. Thus the savage now starts to create convenience or luxury goods, unknown to former generations. However, ‘This was the first yoke he inadvertently imposed on himself, and the first source of the evils he prepared for his descendants’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 88). Why? Because man now develops what we could call ‘corrupted needs’. Rousseau tells a familiar and plausible story. We become dependent on what were at first considered luxuries. Having them gives us little or no pleasure, but losing them is devastating—even though we once managed perfectly well without them.

From here a number of other negative elements are introduced: as societies develop, so do languages, and the opportunity for comparison of talents. This gives rise to pride, shame, and envy. For the first time an injury is treated as an affront, a sign of contempt rather than simply as damage, and those so injured begin to seek their revenge. As the state of nature begins to transform itself, causes of dissension and strife break out. But, even so, Rousseau says of this stage that it must have been the happiest and most stable of epochs, ‘the real youth of the world’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 91): a just mean between the savage’s natural indolence and stupidity, and the civilized being’s inflamed pride.

Though this is a stable period it cannot last for ever, and the real rot sets in with the long and difficult development of agriculture and metallurgy. From here it is a short step to claims of private property, and rules of justice. But private property leads to mutual dependence, jealousy, inequality, and the slavery of the poor. Eventually:

The destruction of equality was attended by the most terrible disorders. Usurpations by the rich, robbery by the poor, and the unbridled passions of both, suppressed the cries of natural compassion and the still feeble voice of justice, and filled man with avarice, ambition, and vice. Between the title of the strongest and that of first occupier, there arose perpetual conflicts, which never ended but in battles and bloodshed. The new-born state of society thus gave rise to a horrible state of war. (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 97)

Thus we arrive at war: not as part of the initial state of innocence but as a result of the creation of the first rudimentary societies. And at this point: 'The rich man, thus urged by necessity, conceived at length the profoundest plan that ever entered the mind of man: this was to employ in his favour the forces of those who attacked him' (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 98). This was a plan, of course, to institute social rules of justice to ensure peace: rules that bind all equally, but which are greatly advantageous to the rich, for they, after all, are the ones with property to secure. Thus the first civil societies—societies with laws and governments—are born. (We will see in Chapter 3 how far from ideal Rousseau takes these first societies to have been.) And once more we see the emergence of civil society taken to be a response to a situation of war or near-war in the state of nature.

Anarchism

No more laws! No more judges! Liberty, equality and practical human sympathy are the only effective barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instincts of certain among us.

(Peter Kropotkin, *Law and Authority* (1886), repr.
in *The Anarchist Reader*, 117)

Even Rousseau, who believed in man's natural innocence, thought that ultimately life without government would be intolerable. Certain anarchist

thinkers, however, have tried to resist this conclusion. William Godwin (1756–1836), husband of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) (see Chapter 3), differed from Rousseau on two counts. First, human beings, when ‘perfected’ could become not only non-aggressive but highly co-operative. Second, this preferred state for human beings was not buried in the distant past, but an inevitable future in which the state would no longer be necessary. The Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, held a somewhat similar view that all animal species, including human beings, profited through natural ‘mutual aid’. This he put forward as an alternative to Darwin’s theory of evolution through competition. The fittest, suggests Kropotkin, are those species best able to achieve co-operation.

Kropotkin was able to marshal impressive evidence of co-operation within the animal kingdom, and other anarchists have argued—surely correctly—that there are endless examples of uncoerced co-operation among human beings. Many philosophers and social scientists have accepted that even highly selfish agents will tend to evolve patterns of co-operative behaviour, even for purely selfish reasons. In the long run co-operation is better for each one of us. If the state of war is damaging for all, then rational, self-interested creatures will eventually learn to co-operate.

But, as Hobbes would have been quick to point out, however much evidence there is of co-operation, and however rational co-operation can be, there is still plenty of evidence of competition and exploitation, and this will often seem rational too. And, like the rotten apple, a small measure of anti-social behaviour can spread its evil effects through everything it touches. Fear and suspicion will corrode and wear away a great deal of spontaneous or evolved co-operation.

One response open to the anarchist is to insist that there are no rotten apples. Or at least, in so far as there are, that this is a creation of governments: as Rousseau suggests, we have become softened and corrupted. Anarchists argue that we propose government as the remedy to anti-social behaviour, but, in general, governments are its cause. Nevertheless the thought that the state is the source of all forms of strife among human beings seems impossibly hopeful. In fact, the thesis appears to undermine itself. If we are all naturally good, why has such an oppressive and corrupting state come into existence? The most obvious answer is that a few greedy and cunning individuals, through

various disreputable means, have managed to seize power. But then, if such people existed before the state came into being, as they must have done on this theory, it cannot be the case that we are *all* naturally good. Therefore to rely on the natural goodness of human beings to such an extent seems utopian in the extreme.

Hence most thoughtful anarchists have made a different response. The absence of governments does not mean that there can be no forms of social control over individual behaviour. Social pressure, public opinion, fear of a poor reputation, even gossip, can all exert their effects on individual behaviour. Those who behave anti-socially will be ostracized.

Furthermore many anarchists have accepted the need for the authority of experts within society. Some people know how best to cultivate food, for instance, and it is sensible to defer to their judgement. And within any sizeable group political structures are necessary to co-ordinate behaviour on the medium and large scale. For example, in times of international conflict even an anarchist society needs generals and military discipline. Deference to the opinions of experts and obedience to social rules may also be essential in peacetime too.

Such rules and structures are said not to amount to states as they allow the individual to opt out: hence they are voluntary in a way no state is. As we shall see in the next chapter, the state claims a monopoly of legitimate political power. No 'voluntarist', anarchist social system would do this. However, the existence of anti-social people who refuse to join in the voluntary society places the anarchist in a dilemma. If the anarchist society refuses to attempt to restrain the behaviour of such people, then it is in danger of falling into severe conflict. But if it enforces social rules against such people, then, in effect, it has become indistinguishable from a state. In sum, as the anarchist picture of society becomes increasingly realistic and less utopian, it also becomes increasingly difficult to tell it apart from a liberal, democratic, state. In the end, perhaps we simply lack an account of what a peaceful, stable, desirable situation would be in the absence of something very like a state (with the exception of anthropological accounts of small agrarian societies).

Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, anarchism should not be dismissed so quickly. We have seen some of the disadvantages of the state of nature. What about the disadvantages of the state? How rational is it to centralize power in the hands of the few? We are yet to examine

the arguments which have been given to justify the state. If it turns out that these attempts to justify the state do not work, then we will have to take a fresh look at anarchism. And in fact, for just this reason, we will need to raise the subject again.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with Hobbes's famous depiction of the state of nature as a miserable state of war of all against all. The basic argument is that individuals, motivated by the drive for 'felicity' will inevitably come into conflict over scarce goods, and, in the absence of a sovereign, this conflict will escalate into full-scale war. A number of counter-arguments were made in response. Locke suggested that the state of nature is governed by a moral law which could be enforced by every individual. He supplements this with the claim that we are initially in a condition of abundance, not scarcity, and with an implicit assumption that people will often be directly motivated to follow the moral law.

While Rousseau agrees with Locke that Hobbes was wrong to suggest that our natural condition is one of extreme scarcity, he denies that ideas of morality and moral motivation have any place in a state of nature. Instead he proposes that natural pity or compassion will prevent war from breaking out, pointedly remarking that we cannot tell how 'natural man' would behave on the basis of our observations of 'civilized man'. But whatever the force of these responses to Hobbes, both Locke and Rousseau admit that the counteracting causes to war they have identified can only serve to delay the onset of severe conflict, and will not avoid it for ever.

The anarchists are more optimistic in their attempts to avoid this conclusion. We considered three main strategies to defend the anarchist position. The first was to argue that co-operation will evolve in the state of nature, even among self-interested creatures. The second was to claim that human beings are naturally good. The third, and most plausible, is the argument that political and social structures and rules, short of the state, can be devised to remedy the defects of the state of nature. Yet, as I suggested, the gap between rational anarchism and the defence of the

state becomes vanishingly small. In the end, I think, we must agree with Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Nothing genuinely worthy of being called a state of nature will, at least in the long term, be a condition in which human beings can flourish. But whether this turns out to be a 'refutation' of anarchism remains to be seen.