

Prompt:

According to Hobbes's first law of nature, "every man, ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of attaining it; and when he cannot obtain it. . . 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" (chapter 14, 404ii).

Explain what Hobbes means (paying attention to both branches of the rule). Why might someone think the law is inconsistent or that there is a tension between the two branches? Is this criticism valid? Why or why not?

A

This paper is well-written and well-organized. Your explication of Hobbes' view is precise, and you do an excellent job explaining the main terms in your own words. You situate all of your citations, and you handle the objection/response section with finesse. Great work!

In Chapter 14 of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes lays out his definition of the first law of nature and separates it into two branches concerning peace and war. This paper will endeavor to explain this law and its two branches along with the inconsistency associated with this bifurcation. However, it will also attempt to reconcile these inconsistencies and argue that the two branches of the first law of nature are not incompatible and in fact both work toward the same end.

According to Hobbes, a law of nature is a general rule which is found by the faculties of reason. Unlike civil law, which is created by government and which only applies to that society, natural law applies and is evident to all men because it stems from universally possessed reason.

He states that all laws of nature confirm the aim of self-preservation. This includes the first law of nature which provides that a man ought to follow this rational aim of self-preservation through two methods. The first method or branch of this law is "to seek peace, and follow it." (Hobbes, 404ii) This means that people in the state of nature should try to cooperate in the interest of

Comment [LGG1]: Good intro, but your thesis statement should give more concrete details as to what you will specifically argue. In other words, briefly state how you will show that the branches are not inconsistent.

Comment [LGG2]: Excellent

common security and stability so that they may live lives that are not “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” (Hobbes, 403ii) The second branch of the first law of nature is “by all means we can, to defend ourselves,” through “all helps, and advantages of war.” (Hobbes, 404ii) Hobbes provides for this right in his first natural law because he sees that in the state of nature “every man, [is] against every man,” (Hobbes, 403i) in a perpetual condition of war. In such a state, everyone has a right to use force in order to protect himself from the violence of others since there is no common authority to provide such protection. This reflects Hobbes’ fundamental right of nature, which is the right to self-defense and preservation of one’s life. (Hobbes, 404i)

Comment [LGG3]: Your explication of the Hobbes’ view is precise and well-written.

Many would argue that the two branches of the first law of nature are inconsistent because seeking peace and using violence are by definition opposite courses of action. It certainly seems contradictory to say that a person should try to establish peace and cooperation with other men but that they should also use violence to protect themselves from those same men. In addition to this substantive contradiction between the two branches, there is also inconsistency in the forms of these two branches. That is, the first branch takes the form of a natural law whereas the second branch takes the form of a natural right. A law implies obligation to do something whereas a right is the freedom to do something without impediment. Hobbes’ law seems to restrict a man’s freedom to use violence with his obligation to seek peace, creating tension between the two branches.

Comment [LGG4]: Avoid sex-biased language

Comment [LGG5]: Yes!

However, the stipulations in the law to seek peace and to use war are not necessarily incompatible. The key here is to notice that Hobbes states that “every man, ought to endeavor peace...and when he *cannot obtain it* [italics added]...he may seek, and use...advantages of

war.” (Hobbes, 404ii) Hobbes acknowledges that because the state of nature is a state of war, cooperation is not natural and establishing peace is most likely futile. Although he sees mutual peace and stability as the ideal case for men, he realizes that human nature is inherently more competitive than cooperative when there is no authority to compel people. Thus, if peace is unattainable, a person is not obligated to be the sole peaceful being among many violent ones but has the right to defend one’s life against the machinations of other people. In the end, the main object of the law of nature is self-preservation, and peace and war are just two different means to attain this same end. Peace is the ideal case which is most effective for self-preservation because it eliminates “fear of death” and fulfills “desire of...things as are necessary to commodious living,” (Hobbes, 404i) but when that fails, self-preservation can also be managed with self-defensive violence. Thus, the second branch acts not as a contradictory element to the first but as a sort of backup plan to ensure self-preservation when peace fails.

Comment [LGG6]: Good

Comment [LGG7]: It would further bolster your argument to draw out the distinction between the laws of nature binding *in foro interno* and *in foro externo*, since the latter only applies in political society.

Bibliography

Hobbes, Thomas. "Leviathan." *Classics of Political and Moral Philosophy*. Ed. Steven M. Cahn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 386-441. Print.