

## Why Have a State

David N. Green, 2017

There are a number of reasons we might like to have a state. These include Hobbes' idea that it delivers us from our true or normal state of nature, where we all tend to barbarously fight among ourselves, and always live in fear. Similarly, but slightly less sad, is Mill's idea that it offers a way to avoid one bringing harm to another, perhaps not so much because we are a barbarous lot, but simply because egregious actions can happen from time to time – people make mistakes, and there are particularly badly behaving people – and we all would rather avoid them. Finally, though perhaps quite broadly, the state could be a vehicle to increasing our well being, or happiness, through say facilitating positive accomplishments only possible by larger groups, or say the organized pooling and dissemination of knowledge and learning.

Of these ideas, the first seems not only unpleasant to think of as being true, but is also the most difficult to accept as valid. Taking Hobbes' assertion that we naturally tend to be at war with each other as his "first law", then his "second law" is that we always strive to be at peace however we can, primarily via bowing to some pacifying authority. This would seem to be his explanation not only of why we might want to have a state, but why we do indeed tend to always have one. This idea seems the least plausible justification for a state, of the three noted above. It is not that it is so hard to imagine constant brutish violent interactions; crimes are being reported frequently in overseas conflicts, and of course are described and seen in books and movies of dark futures without a state. However, in Western comfort, taking this course on Revolutionary Ideas, this author has only known a relatively peaceful life, so the proposed brutish existence is simply too far from experience and mind. Secondly, the idea that we would desire to bow before an authority is also not something familiar; it could be for some, but not this author. To summarize the argument, it is not so much that Hobbes' reason for a state is invalid, but perhaps simply that it seems the least valid of those proposed.

One idea for having a state, that seems particularly persuasive, is the proposal that it promotes happiness, specifically by enabling collective actions; many accomplishments are only possible by larger groups of people. Jean-Jacques Rousseau discussed the idea using a scenario of the hunt for deer. While a single person would probably not encounter a deer on a given outing, and also probably would not be able to bring it down in any case, a larger group (perhaps better, a collection of small parties) would stand a better chance of encountering one and returning with it. The single deer could feed many, and the greatly increased chance of getting one using a group would seem beneficial. Rousseau also mentions a potential problem in practice, where although preferring deer, an individual might encounter a hare, take it, and then not bother to further contribute to pursuit of the deer. Although many collective action problems have this and other confounding characteristics, the group effort would seem to be something sensible to pursue, and in the larger sense by a state.

There is ample evidence of collective action accomplishments facilitated by the state today, such as sophisticated travel and communications networks, and universal health care, which would all be impossible by an individual. One could argue whether these things could be created and administered by an alternative non-state organization, such as a private corporation, however the general collective action benefit idea would still seem to be supported. (Note, there are plenty of dark future fictions that indeed propose large corporations are in fact types of states!)