

Dear Men and Women of the Peucinian Society,

The State of Nature is a philosophical construct that seeks to explain man's passions, volitions, instincts, and inclinations through contemplation of human beings in their "natural" (pre-governmental) state. This concept is used to approach the all-important transition between man the animal and man the citizen and to assist in naming the passion that drives men together. The term is used most famously by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, in their respective attempts to lay out a system of association that conforms to the eternal nature of man.

In his *Leviathan: or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil (1651)* Thomas Hobbes postulated that man in the state nature lived in the midst of *Bellum omnium contra omnes*-- the war of all against all-- and that, as such, man would bind himself to a powerful monarch for fear of death. Life in the state of nature is "solitary, poor nasty, brutish, and short", due to the violent and offensive nature of man unfettered by the rule of law. Man is by nature cruel and government, moderating-- therefore the "contract" struck up between them gives ultimate control to the monarch, leaving man no right to a negative space in which he cannot be ruled.

In John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government (1689)* emphasis is placed on considerations of property, or maintaining "lives, liberties, and estates", as the primary concern of primordial man. While the state of nature is anarchic, men are moved by a natural respect for property, arising from cupidity, to be more conservative than the Hobbesian berserker. While there may not be rule of law, still man is morally obligated to respect the unwritten laws of a natural theism-- created equal by God, he owes consideration to his fellow man, though no government forces his hand. Conservative consideration of property lead man to desire a peaceful state in which he can enjoy his property, and the to-be-governed join together to legitimize a government for that end.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality (1754)* established a more positive vision of man in the state of nature. Rousseau's natural man is a gentle, flighty solitary-- he couples only briefly for copulation. He has in himself not a tendency to cruelty in his passions, but to moderation-- the natural sentiment of empathy with pain is strong with him. He is quite similar to a ape or chimpanzee, except that he has will and the ability to learn, termed "Perfectibility" by Rousseau. Once a man makes the artificial decision to cordon off land and term it his "property", an artificial system of government becomes necessary to regulate this process.

Fear, cupidity, a gentle aloofness-- which facet, if any, has occupied center stage in the rise of civilization? Is this method of consideration profitable from the perspective of political theory-- does the State of Nature legitimize the contract theory of government, or is it the other way around? Can one create a workable theory of politics without reducing man's instinct to one dominant passion? Is there any essential relationship between the "nature" of our ancestors and the "nature" of man in our much changed society? Where do you stand?

Resolved: Contemplation of Man Must Begin at the "State of Nature".

Affirmative: Edgar Allen Poe '14

Negative: Adam Smith '14

Meet in the Faculty Room of Massachusetts Hall at 7:30 PM on Thursday, April 12th.

And as you know, "The Apparel oft proclaims the Man". Or Woman.

Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus,

Heraclitus the Black