

2. runde NM i filosofi 20.03.2014: Velg én oppgave

1. Nihilism does not imply a denial of the existence of something good, nor a denial that what is good is a matter of debate, it is rather to deny the existence of evil. (...) Nihilism is to deny that human beings can agree on what is evil.

André Glucksmann: Vesten mot Vesten/ Ouest contre Ouest (2006: 46-49).

2. True cognition is impossible, because the objects of sense impressions change constantly.

Heraklit

3. Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition, which is called war; and such a war as is of every man, against every man. (...) In such condition (the state of nature) there is no place for industry...no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Hobbes, Leviathan, XIII

4. The way you look at a human being; in this way you also treat it – and vice versa.

Peter Kemp: Det uerstattelige (1991)

5. Does science need philosophy?

Criteria of evaluation: relevance to the topic, philosophical understanding of the topic, originality, persuasive power of argumentation, and coherence.

Filosofiforeningen for videregående skole
Norwegian High School Philosophical Association

filosofiforeningen.no

Task 3

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(Hobbes, Leviathan, XIII)

In the famous quote above, Hobbes thoroughly condemns the natural state of man as uncivilized, brutish and nothing but a fight for survival. When compared directly to the modern world, Hobbes was undoubtedly correct that the natural state was a savage and, at times, ruthless place. However, when looked at with a philosophical view, several questions arise. If the condition of war was so savagely, without society or culture, upon which sources does Hobbes base his conclusions? Further, it is obvious that mankind has progressed from “the state of war”, according to Hobbes, through the creation of “a common power to keep them all in awe”. In which way did this common power originate, it being the idea of a deity or civilization, if not from man? It also becomes logical to assume, that if civilization ceased to exist today, all of mankind would revert to the state of war and survival of the fittest. The topic of this essay therefore becomes to explore to which degree “the natural state” was and is such a savage condition and whether man today is merely kept in awe by society.

The hunter-gatherer society of ancient times was obviously not an advanced society. Mankind was not civilized, but depended on each other to survive. When looked upon in a historical perspective, in which ways did humanity progress? Not through eradication or oppression of our kin. Not through slavery or pillaging. No, the advent of human civilization came through cooperation and the division of task and responsibility. While violence naturally did occur and life was no dance on roses, one can hardly claim that man was a brutish beast. Our basic human conscience is not an ability that ceases to exist in the natural state.

Quite the contrary, our conscience should become of even greater importance in the natural state since we would be to a larger degree empowered to act upon our moral obligations. It is not coincidental that human beings all over the world share the same fundamental attitudes towards injustice or violence. Throughout history, different and isolated civilizations have condemned murder and shared many opinions about right and wrong, something that points towards their conscience being quite similar. The question then becomes why?

Among men of different ages and places, one essential fact overshadows all else: That they were all human beings and had certain primal instincts. These instincts, concerning survival and life, are the origins of our conscience and humanity's shared beliefs. As a result, we can separate right from wrong, good from evil and judge our own actions. The primal instincts, which tasks are to ensure our survival, could have made us ruthless, emotionless and cold. They did not. Instead we are conscious and moral beings, not harbingers of destruction. While man is capable of great evil and wrongdoings, we generally agree that a child, not scared by the machinations of the world, is not. If Hobbes quote is true, then children, uninfluenced by "the common power to keep them in awe", should be prime representatives of "the condition of war", a statement which seem odd to say the least.

Immanuel Kant once said; "The two things I wonder most about is the starry sky above me and the inner voice inside me". The quote points at both the mystery and magnificence of our inner conscience. Something, as previously stated, that undoubtedly guided and influenced men in the natural state. Hobbes claims that humanity is kept out of the condition of war through a common power to keep them in awe. In other words, we are limited from acting on our impulses due to the danger of retaliation, either in the form of society, revenge or religion. However, if the state of nature is as primitive as Hobbes claims, how was humanity able to limit itself in the first place? A condition without industry, knowledge or society would not be able to create a common power, either secular or religious, to progress from the state of nature. This leaves two remaining options: A situation of "Deus ex machina (?)" or human cooperation built upon conscience and instincts.

Seeing that the role of conscience in the natural state would have been considerable, it is relevant to assume that divine intervention was not the case.

Moving on, it is quite interesting to attempt to analyze Hobbes view on freedom. The world described by him in the quote is a world of ignorance, survival of the fittest and fear of violent death. However, it is also a free world. It is a world where man would be able to realize and carry out his or her dreams. A world where the inherent possibilities of every human being would not be limited by society, but by our own conscience. For what is the basis of the laws and norms of the society of today? It is hardly cold and inhumane reason, for such a basis would violate our moral standards and principles. Rather, it is our sense of right and wrong which lays the fundament of laws. Our individual conscience therefore shapes “the common power” which Hobbes claims keep us down. However, there is no reason that our moral standards would vanish overnight if we tomorrow reverted to a state of nature. Again, they would actually increase in importance as the primary goal of any free man or woman should be follow ones inner conscience. Therefore, it is highly doubtful that mankind would dissolve into a battle for survival.

While the state of nature historically in human history was a rough and primitive time, there are certain aspects of it which has its merits philosophically. The lack of civilization or control provides freedom and places great responsibility in our conscience. It is upon this foundation that humanity successfully has progressed forward till this day. It is apparent that “the natural state” is not as dark and bleak as Hobbes claims, lest humanity would never have progressed at all. The claim that men is only limited by “a common power to keep them in awe” also places little trust in humanity, especially since the “common power” of today, the law, is to a large degree influenced by the human conscience. A condition of nature with complete freedom will probably never return for mankind, a fact Rousseau saw and regretted during the enlightenment. However, in these modern times of productivity and cold reason, humanity could actually gain from remembering our forefathers, and what played a pivotal role in their survival, and our evolution as a species; *Conscience*.