The Recondite Revolution:  
War, the “Modified” State of Nature, Human Morality, and the Social Contract Theory

AUTHOR
Leonidas Pollakis

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War, *ab initio*, has always been conceived of as one of the worst crimes against human nature and life; with approximately 14,500 military conflicts having been conducted throughout the history of the world and around 3.5 billion human lives that have been lost to the annals of time during the fightings of such campaigns (if one thinks about it, this is the equivalent of killing off almost two-thirds of the current world population), it is hard *not* to feel like war is the most amoral act on the face of the earth (Mingst 207-208). It is thus quite ironic that Heraclitus, two millennia ago, should have claimed that “War is the father of all”; but this adage has sense to its madness. In the view of an American pastor and early abolitionist, Anthony Benezet, for example, in a sermon of “thanksgiving for the successes obtained in the late war” (i.e. the Seven Years’ War), he describes war as being a malignant practice, something antithetical to true Christian doctrine and faith, pointing to Christ’s order to love “thy FELLOW CREATURE as thyself”\(^1\), and later refers to it as the thing which devours “this unhappy circle, which is, indeed, the great circle of the history of man….War protracted to a certain period, necessarily compels peace; peace revives and extends trade and commerce; trade and commerce give new life, vigour, and scope, to the sensual and malignant passions; and these naturally tend to generate another War” (Benezet 5-6). Although religious in context, this passage presents a belief that we all hold—namely, that we are innately self-serving and egotistical creatures, that war is just a part of our nature, and that it is *war* that is the catalyst that makes the “world go round,” as it were.\(^2\) It is therefore extremely easy for the world to fabricate philosophical theories that seemingly “moralize” the incessant “evil” act of war in order for everyone to cope with the false

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\(^1\) Mark 12:30; it is quoted from the sermon’s text, including the emphasis.

\(^2\) For an interesting view on the “cycles” of war, see historian and Warren Professor of History at Brandeis University David Hackett Fischer’s *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History*. In his point-of-view, it is actually the forces and pulls and inflations and deflations of the economy that actually cause wars, but it is the wars that are fought that actually signal new epochs of history, helping the new ideals that were made at the end of one economic cycle establish themselves in another.
fantasies of war being only fought for defensive purposes (e.g. Just War Theory). This is blatantly clear when one examines the fact that, in the sixty-five wars of the 20th Century before the occurrence of World War II, thirty-two were due to a conflict of the balance of power, sixteen were due to civil strife and war, fifteen were imperialistic in nature, while only two were decidedly defensive.3 We should not validate the act of war just by asking the questions “at what time and under what conditions is war justified?” but by defining what it is to be moral in itself, why we need ethics in the first place (i.e. what is it about human nature that makes us moral?), and then, with the answers to these questions, identify the thing that makes war an occurrence. The best way to understand the necessity of war is not complicated. One can find the answer simply be looking at it through the analogy of Hobbes and his “state of nature.” Even though his anarchical view of the world is just a step far from the reality of our state (something which David Livingstone Smith analyzes at length in his book The Most Dangerous Animal: Human Nature and the Origins of War), it does essentially seize upon our egotistical truth and nature. The only thing it really lacks is a moral sense of devotion and obligation, for in the analogy, it claims that things were always given up to a face-to-face machia of a “constant state of war, of one with all.” But this state, however, is antithetical to the true “conjugal societies” that must have been formed at the very beginning and which Locke describes in his relative philosophy of the same theory (Two Treatises of Government) (Friend). In Locke’s view, there could not have been such a thing as an individual vs. individual world, for what if an individual was to fight against his or her father or son? Was there ever such an amoral state in the history of the “social animal” that would prefer such an irrational reality (i.e. the killing off of your own flesh and blood)? Evolutionarily speaking, there has never, nor ever will be, such a chaotic world as long

3 From the lecture notes of the Fall 2008 Introduction to International Relations Course that I had with Professor Karafotias.
as genes control the heredity of individuals. Also imagine, for example, an Adam without his Eve. If there was no sex (everyone would be killing everybody else all of the time), where did all of the individuals that one could fight come from? Therefore, there had to have been some pacts between the different peoples of the world in order to procreate and carry on the line without the sickness of in-breeding running within their blood. And, if those peoples did not allow the hand of one of their own into wedlock with the other “society,” there was always the possibility of raiding the others in order to pillage their goods and steal their women (something which actually did, and does, happen within the remnant tribes and peoples still existent in the world) (Smith Chapter 4). Thus, one has to adopt this analogy either with prejudiced caution or change the state of nature proposed into a more natural analogy so as to observe the true face of war through the fog. That is why I have decided to alter the analogy of the state of nature with Hume’s belief of morality and the biases that result from such a morality (as related by Smith, except I actually take the theory and alter the initially projected nature, while he only introduces it and relates it to the reason we go to war in a more scientific fashion).

To begin, it is first important to understand how Hume thought about morality. Instead of reverting to the common logic of the time about morality (i.e. that rationality gives us the power to choose what is right or wrong impartially), Hume asserted that the passions controlled the mind and that rationality was its slave. In order to make this clear, I will take the liberty of quoting at length from Smith concerning a particular experiment that was conducted by Harvard University psychologist Marc Hauser:

Hauser asks his research subjects questions about imaginary moral dilemmas such as the devilish scenario called the “trolley problem” devised decades ago by the British philosopher Philippa Foot. Here’s how it goes: A man out taking a stroll
notices a speeding, out-of-control trolley hurtling toward five people who are walking at a leisurely pace along a stretch of empty track. Their backs are toward the trolley, and they are blithely unaware of the mortal danger bearing down on them. By quickly pulling a lever, the onlooker can divert the trolley from its path and save the lives of the five pedestrians. But if he does this, the diverted trolley will run over a lone person who is standing on an adjacent stretch of track. What should he do? What would you do? The picture gets even more interesting if we fiddle with the parameters. What if there is no lever with which to stop the trolley. However, a very fat man happens to be standing nearby at the very moment you realize the danger the five pedestrians are in. Sizing up the situation, you see that if you shove him onto the track, his massive body will stop the trolley. Would you kill one innocent person to save the lives of five? Hauser found that most people—a whopping 89 percent of them—opt for pulling the switch in the first scenario, but the same people recoil at the prospect of pushing a man to his death, even though in both situations one life is sacrificed to save five. Even more interestingly, although most people make the same choices, Hauser found that they give suspiciously varied and often patently inadequate justifications of their decisions. He concluded from this that people make moral decisions unconsciously. They get a “gut feeling” for which they subsequently concoct seemingly rational (or not so rational) justifications. Sometimes, we can’t even manage to scrape together a rationalization, and are tongue-tied when asked precisely why we consider an act to be right or wrong. When we make moral judgments “the emotional dog wags its rational tail.” (134-135)
But this is not all. Our having our passions run our every movement induces a kind of prejudice, if one thinks about it, towards others. We do not have compassion for just everyone under the sun. We care extensively for certain kinds of people. Other people, such as foreigners and strangers, we don’t care about at all (which is one of the reasons why the doctrine of utilitarianism is such a big pill to swallow). Hume thus posits that every human being is innately biased (or cares more about persons who are attributed with these) three things: the bias of kinship, the bias of direct contact, and the bias of similarity—or, in other words, family, friends, and the community (Ibid 137).

Social Contract Ethics, however, in itself originates from a hypothetical state of nature where there is a “constant state of war, of one with all” because of four reasons: necessity, scarcity, equal strength and rationality, and limited altruism. The essential constructs of such a communal document (i.e. for the protection of life, liberty, private property, and all the “commodiousness” that results from such security (e.g. instead of a state of war, we cooperate with one another for a state of peace), we give up our utter free autonomy (i.e. the power to do what we wish to anyone or anything) to that of a sovereign power or government with which we owe our allegiance to through our accepting the laws that are issued from that entity simply because they keep us safe and out of harm’s way.  

Social Contract Ethics, in turn, states that, if a majority of the populace agrees with a particular law, that law is morally viable. Now, let us take the First and Second Natural Laws of Hobbes (they, combined, essentially state that every individual would logically want peace and, 

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4 Socrates was actually the first one who reasoned that there was an allegiance, or social contract, between the citizens of a state and the state itself. While in jail, some of his followers had planned to break him out and, in effect, become a fugitive in exile in some other city-state. Contemplating the morality of this dilemma, Socrates deduces that he, having always followed the laws of Athens—and even going so far as laying with it the responsibility of rounding his current character and knowledge (e.g. inducing his father to care and educate young Socrates)—is obliged to remain in the jail and receive the capital punishment that that city thinks is just, even though he could leave without impasse (Friend).
in turn, may enter into a contract to satisfy that innate demand, just so long as the contract is held by all signatories of the document; a society, however, can disband whenever the other constituents of the contract retract from the agreement and wage war on that individual) and ask if it is moral to conduct war with another individual, or state, given the fact that the constituents of the state signed the social contract for security, peace, and “commodious” living. Naturally, based upon such obligations, the state would want to mitigate any disputes that they have with other states before resorting to war. But since these states are macro-representations of the individuals which have, in consensus, signed the document to make such organizations and institutions of the state possible (since the states, themselves, are individuals born from their constituents’ innate “modified” state of nature characteristics), they should—and do—have the same characteristics of those singular individuals (i.e. moved by self-need and necessity, as well as the knowledge that every other agent is equal in strength and rationality, which are then hemmed in by scarcity and molded into a state of simultaneous fear and awesome desire) but, self-assured as to their allies whom are of such similarity to them that they can easily mass together their collective strength either to defend the positions which they already hold or to work for more land and resources and, ergo, a universal recognition of the power that they have obtained. This is the current theory of balance of power and deterrence that the Realist of International Relations takes. This Realist tradition, however, is ultimately flawed because of the simple fact that the people of the states, having “signed the social contract for the purposes of peace and security,” would not have signed this agreement if they had have known that the ultimate result would be even larger wars than those that had occurred originally (mono-e-mono), thereby putting to risk the whole nation’s demarcated territory and laws and people through seizures of land and life—as well as the selling of any captives into slavery. If even the
ethics of social contract theory—the only theory which speaks of war directly in its philosophical origins and speaks of how man left war rationally through cooperation in order to achieve peace, security, and commodious living—does not approve the current social contracts that have been made between every government, and their peoples, that consist of the world international scene, the problem has to rely in our creating many “individuals” that, in essence, are replicas of those of the same stature and build and who are biased against all those not relatively similar to them, which, in turn, creates the exact same sense of “fear and awesome desire” which was felt by all in the first place (only this time, the sovereigns do all of the moral weight-lifting while most everyone else can lead lives of leisure, having been given the gift of organized society, life, and internal peace)\(^5\). When these governments, therefore, come together as representatives of their communities in the international circle, they are, in a sense, cast into a certain kind of surreal soup: on the one hand, they are the proponents of their constituents who only want to live their lives without being harmed in any way; on the other hand, since they are consigned to the same natural state of their constituents and since they are put into a position where the four main characteristics of the natural state are playing upon their minds at all times, they are essentially “noble savages,” condemned to live in a state of pandemonium and uncertainty and driven by their corrupted states-of-mind. Very literally, they are, in themselves, as ambivalent as the oxymoron that describes them, initially formed for the purpose of keeping the peace among its signatories, but forced to wage war for the same reasons as the singular individual had to wage war against everyone else in the first place, thereby reneging the previous law made between them and their constituents in order to protect the primordial necessity and right to keep one’s life—or, in this case, the lives of the state’s citizens. This, however, raises the question whether

\(^5\) The amount of such leisure and peace experienced by a people, however, depends upon the kind of government and the degree by which a sovereign is enlightened (i.e. Plato’s philosopher-king).
or not these state contracts are viable or not, for what contract would make an entire community be obliged to put their, and others’, lives at risk?

Deontologically speaking, one cannot make the action of killing others into a universal law; neither can the act of committing suicide. So why, then, do we sign these compacts if they are essentially amoral? In order to answer this, we have to look at it through the lenses of Humean utilitarianism (I add the morality of Hume so as to explain completely why we choose to sign these contracts because, if my views of the modified state of nature are true, then we will have to add weights to our relations with one another instead of using the impartial weighting system of regular utilitarianism in order to analyze it). Therefore, before we go on, let us supply the weights based upon the scientific knowledge that backs Hume’s postulates of bias. The original view of utilitarianism would tell us that we are to weigh everyone the same (or, in more contractarian terms, give everyone an equal vote of one)—we will keep this as the minimum amount in the following survey. Now, since science has shown that, if one examines a person from a regular nuclear family, everyone in that family, when compared to that one person, would carry, on average, one-half of that person’s genes; if we have direct contact with someone, we will carry sympathy for them (friendship, acquaintances, etc.)—I will demarcate their amount as one-fourth; when we notice that others are similar to us, we believe that they have at least some, although not much of the same, amount of our genes flowing within their blood, and thus have more familiarity to us than those that do not look like us—I will demarcate their amount as one-eighth; and everyone else carries the minimum amount (unless we despise them…under those circumstances, they have a value lower than one). In order to visualize this weight system better, I will multiply these amounts by two and then add to them the minimum amount. Thus, if we count ourselves with the weight of one, the end amount will be that of three; if one is a member
of one’s family, then they will be weighed with a unit of two; if they are one’s friend, they will
be weighed with a unit of one and one-half; and if they are part of one’s community, they will be
weighed with a unit of one and one-fourth; the rest will be weighed with a unit of one (or, in
terms of hate, less than one) (Smith 138-141). Now, since we are both symbolic creatures and
attach our morality to our passions—more so than to our reason and, ergo, to the system of
biases that I have just extrapolated upon—it would be more emotionally traumatizing for us to
fight our family, friends, and/or communities instead of those strangers whom we have never met
or had any social relations with before. This gives us our own Ring of Gyges—self-deception—
the needed moral wiggle-room with which the states can manipulate the naturally occurring
phenomenon of war into a morally pliable issue—the opposing side is always “evil” and
characterized as being animalistic and without emotion, a disease in need of our nation’s
panacea, the sword, or something which we have a moral duty to exterminate (Smith Chapter
10). And since we are already capable of understanding and creating concepts, such as
communal wine and bread being turned into the blood and flesh of Christ, even though it is not
physically blood or flesh, it is no surprise that we can demonize our fellow beings in the ways
that I have just described (Smith 164-168). To our family, friends, community, and nation we are
all loyal and obligated to for the sense of balance and structure that we gain from participating in
them. It is, then, much better to give away our free autonomy in order to protect those whom we
love and give them a chance for a promising future in a state which can protect them from
disputes both “foreign and domestic” instead of having families kill their own blood, friends
killing other acquaintances, communities killing other similar communities, etc. Thus,
utilitarianistically speaking, it is for the greatest happiness of the greatest number of similar
individuals’ mental states-of-mind that, rather than the spilling of the blood of similar
conspecifics on home soil—possibly in front of our very eyes—the blood of foreigners far away from home should be sacrificed. And anyways, “We won’t be beat! We are invincible! We are of perfect blood and perfect might! They shall all cower at our feet and beg for mercy, for they shall have realized that we are innately their superiors.” Those are the lies that we proffer ourselves almost every single time we go to war; it does not really matter to us whether our war is of “just” character, for it is a certainty to us that the spoils of victory shall be ours. And since we always expect that the battles will be fought far away and that the rest of society (the majority of those that do not go to war) will just wait for their supermen to come back home to them in the end, we let ourselves go into war, saving us from the “real” truth of why we go with the deception of the state—for some things are better left unknown…These expectations, however, never fully realize themselves, but they do help ameliorate the pending doom that will certainly swoop both sides of the conflict—well, at least for a time.

But the most important thing to realize from this entire discussion, however, is that, even though we have an aversion to killing other human beings, we have a greater fear of losing our own lives and of the lives of those that we value (i.e. our families, our friends, and the lives of those members of the collectivities that we have chosen to be a part of). It is a fact that we all would much more prefer to live in a state of total and universal peace but (if we take into account the fact that in primordial times, one would not be able to know—and, therefore, have greater sympathy for—every other individual on the face of the earth) we would, at that stage, never be able to pronounce such a peace, least of all if we remained in that bestial state of living called the “state of nature.” But, with the making of larger individuals, we have increased the possibility of our actually achieving this universal concord. And, since the acquiescence of our total freedom would give us at least some state of security, we have essentially, if one thinks about it, made the
first step towards a total peace with one another by signing that document. Through time, even these newly created “individuals” of collective voice shall, by means of infinite trial and error, war and peace, sign their way into international harmony, not immediately, but in piecemeal. As 1995 Nobel Peace Prize winner Joseph Rotblat put it, just like the original individual, these governments will, with every “international treaty [they] sign, every agreement on tariffs or other economic measures, is a surrender of sovereignty [their own “total freedom”] in the general interests of the world community” (6); each treaty in effect will then further restrict or condemn the actions of war (e.g. Treaty of Westphalia; Geneva and Hague Conventions; The Universal Rights of Man; NPT; Maastricht Treaty; etc.), propelled by the First Natural Law of Hobbes (i.e. the search for a state of everlasting peace via contract), until a united body is formed where all nations are heard and laws are made, not by state individuals, but by the voices of all the nations as one in a modern-day Kantian federation (except, in this federation, they do give up their rights to sovereignty, just like the primordial individual had to relinquish their rights to “total freedom” in order to form the security that is today the state) (Kant) (Lu). Currently, there is such an international body, the United Nations, but it is more like a ferocious tiger with paper teeth. There is no definitive executive amongst them (unless you call the strapadoed Security Council an executive) and both the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice are the two extremely specialized bodies that make up its judicial branch, with limited international jurisdiction, given that the only countries that accept the purview of the courts may be judged. But the good thing about the United Nations, however, is the fact that it is an international forum of ideas, promulgating the rights of human beings and teaching the world to be more cosmopolitan (Kleingeld and Brown). And so, as Rotblat suggests, “Some form of world governance seems a necessary outcome of the evolution of the United Nations” (7). For the sake
of an international social contract among the barbarian states of the world and the success, finally, of a universal peace, let us hope that he is right.

Conclusion

On the plain of our political lives, so many long years ago, the social animal was forced to either live in a constant state of war, where the “conjugal societies” of the world fought amongst the other conjugal societies, or a partial state of peace where even greater numbers of peoples would be killed, it was “passionately” reasonable for these societies to sign themselves into an infernal pit in which the newly created governments of each people were to learn the same hard lessons as the original individuals did, although they have been, as has been seen, festinens lenta [making haste slowly]. We bargained ourselves into mass death, certain that we would always win. But through time, these individuals did actually learn how to create a more peaceful world via international law. It is we who will now have to finish this teleological conundrum and decide to work for this great new world order together. Let us begin…now!!!
Works Cited


