

A REVISED HOBBSIAN ARGUMENT  
FOR CONFLICT AMONG HUMANS

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by  
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A REVISED HOBBSIAN ARGUMENT  
FOR CONFLICT AMONG HUMANS

presented by Arcangelo Quintaneiro,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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A REVISED HOBBSIAN ARGUMENT  
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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hobbes believed that a state of nature (that is, a state without a society) is a miserable condition for humans because human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other. In addition, Hobbes argued that the only way to prevent humans from fighting each other is to have a power to “keep them in awe”. This is Hobbes’ argument for absolutism. In my Master’s thesis, I will reconstruct Hobbes’ argument for the claim that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other. Then, I will criticize that argument by rejecting the third premise and the conclusion. Finally, I will argue that human groups have a natural inclination to fight each other. This new argument is a Hobbesian-inspired argument that is focused on conflict between human groups instead of being focused on conflict between human individuals, and this argument is important because it can be used to revive Hobbes’ argument for absolutism.

## 1. Introduction

According to Thomas Hobbes, a *society* (i.e., a *commonwealth* or *civil society*) is “an artificial person made up of a group of individuals who have agreed with each other, in the social contract, to obey a common sovereign power”.<sup>1</sup> Hobbes believed that a *state of nature*, i.e., a state without a society,<sup>2</sup> is a miserable condition for humans,<sup>3</sup> because human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Hobbes argued that the only way to prevent humans from fighting each other is to have a power to “keep them in awe”.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Hobbes believed that humans can have a pleasant life only when they leave the state of nature by entering a society.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I will reconstruct Hobbes’ argument for the claim that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other. Then, I will criticize that argument by rejecting P3 and C. Finally, I will argue that human groups have a natural inclination to fight each other. This

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<sup>1</sup> S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 161. As Hobbes says, “the commonwealth [...] is one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defence” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 114).

<sup>2</sup> “[T]he state of nature [...] is [...] the absence of a civil state” (S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 211).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Hobbes says that in the state of nature human life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 84).

<sup>4</sup> “[I]ndividuals in a State of Nature will fall into war with each other (*The Elements of Law* I.14.12, *De Cive* I.12, *Leviathan* XIII.8)” (S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 39).

<sup>5</sup> As Hobbes says, the “miserable condition of war [...] is necessarily consequent [...] to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111). And as Kavka says, “Hobbes argues that people living in a state of nature, without a common power over them to keep them in awe, are in a state of war of every person against every other” (Gregory S. Kavka, “Hobbes’s War of All Against All,” *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (January 1983): 292).

<sup>6</sup> As Hobbes says, “The final cause, end, or design of men, (who naturally love liberty, and dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them live in commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent [...] to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants, and observation of those laws of nature set down in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111).

new argument will be a Hobbesian argument that is focused on conflict between human groups instead of being focused on conflict between human individuals.

## **2. Hobbes' argument reconstructed**

Here is my reconstruction of Hobbes' argument for the claim that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other:

P1: All human agents always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs.

P2: In the state of nature all human agents believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other human agent.<sup>7</sup>

P3: In the state of nature all human agents distrust all other human agents to always keep all their agreements.<sup>8</sup>

P4: In the state of nature some human agents pro tanto desire glory.

P5: If (1) all human agents always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs, (2) in the state of nature all human agents believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other human agent, (3) in the state of nature all human agents distrust all other human agents to always keep all their agreements, and (4) in the state of nature some human agents pro tanto desire glory, then in the state of

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<sup>7</sup> To clarify, P2 does not say that the desire that is incompatible is the same with all other human agents. For instance, it is possible that my desire for A is incompatible with John's desire for B, and that my desire for C is incompatible with Mark's desire for D.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in the state of nature John distrusts Mark to always keep all the agreements between John and Mark.

nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals<sup>9</sup> at some moment<sup>10</sup>.

C: In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment. (P1-P5)

In this section, I will explain (1) the content of the conclusion and of each premise, and (2) why this argument is an accurate reconstruction of Hobbes' argument. To do that, I will provide textual support for C, then for P1 to P5.

### 2.1. Textual support for C

Let us begin with C ("In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment"). I will explain the key terms and then I will provide textual support for C.

First, Hobbes' argument is focused on the behavior of individuals in a *state of nature*, which is a state without a society. A society is "an artificial person made up of a group of individuals who have agreed with each other, in the social contract, to obey a common sovereign power".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I say "all other human individuals" because they do not need to be human agents, since non-agents may be subjugated or killed. Also, although non-human individuals may be subjugated or killed, I do not say "all other individuals" because I will only focus on human individuals, since Hobbes is only concerned about conflict among humans.

<sup>10</sup> To clarify, the conclusive desire to subjugate or kill all human individuals can exist at different moments, not all at once. For instance, it is possible that John conclusively desires to kill Mark today but conclusively desires to kill Bob only a month from today.

<sup>11</sup> S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 161. As Hobbes says, "the commonwealth [...] is one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defence" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 114).

Second, Hobbes' argument is focused on the behavior of *human agents*, which are human individuals that have the capacity to intend to satisfy their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs.

Third, Hobbes claims that in the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will *conclusively desire* to subjugate or kill all other human individuals. A *conclusive desire* (i.e., an *all-things-considered desire*) is a desire that is not outweighed by any conflicting *pro tanto* desires. A *pro tanto desire* is a desire, all else being equal, for something, but which perhaps can be outweighed by other *pro tanto* desires.<sup>12</sup> For example, suppose that I desire to sleep now, but I also desire to write this essay now. Then, I think about whether, all things considered, I desire to satisfy my desire to sleep now or my desire to write this essay now. If my desire to write this essay now is stronger, then I form the intention to write this essay now instead of sleeping now. In this case, my desire to write this essay now is a conclusive desire and a *pro tanto* desire, while my desire to sleep now is a *pro tanto* desire but not a conclusive desire. This is because my desire to sleep now is outweighed by my desire to write this essay now.<sup>13</sup>

Fourth, Hobbes claims that in the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to *subjugate*<sup>14</sup> or kill all other human individuals. A *subjugates* B when A limits the liberty of B. *Liberty* is the lack of external impediments to an individual's actions.<sup>15</sup> An

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that this is a *merely pro tanto desire*, since all conclusive desires are *pro tanto* desires that are not outweighed by any other *pro tanto* desire. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will not make this distinction.

<sup>13</sup> Note that I may choose to intend to satisfy a desire in the future, so I do not always have to intend to satisfy a desire now.

<sup>14</sup> In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes uses the term "subdue", but "subdue" is identical to "subjugate". For instance, Hobbes says that "if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end [...] endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83).

<sup>15</sup> As Hobbes says, "By liberty, is understood [...] the absence of external impediments" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86). Also, "Liberty, or freedom, signifieth (properly) the absence of opposition; (by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion;) and may be applied no less to irrational, and inanimate creatures, than to rational. For whatsoever is so tied, or environed, as it cannot move, but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some external body, we say it hath not liberty

*external impediment to an action* is anything that does not originate in the agent that prevents the agent from performing an action. For instance, a prisoner in jail that has the capacity to walk lacks the liberty to walk around the block because the impediment to walk around the block does not originate in the agent. Note that subjugation entails that the subjugated entity is limited by at least one *external impediment*, and when an entity is limited only by an *internal impediment*, the entity lacks *power* instead of the entity lacking *liberty*.<sup>16</sup> For instance, “a person paralyzed from the waist down lacks the power to walk around the block” because the impediment to walk around the block originates in the agent, “while a prisoner in jail lacks the liberty to” walk around the block because the impediment to walk around the block does not originate in the agent.<sup>17</sup> Also, note that in this essay, whenever I refer to subjugation I am referring to *monodirectional subjugation*, which is the situation that consists of one or more entities limiting the liberty of another entity without any of their liberties being limited by that entity. For instance, the relation between a master and a slave is monodirectional subjugation, since the master limits the liberty of the slave but the slave does not limit the liberty of the master. On the other hand, the relation between a husband that controls the food that he and his wife eat and a wife that controls the clothing that she and her husband wear is bidirectional subjugation rather than monodirectional subjugation, since the husband limits the liberty of the wife, and the wife also limits the liberty of the husband.

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to go further. And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chains; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks, or vessels, that otherwise would spread itself into a larger space, we use to say, they are not at liberty, to move in such manner, as without those external impediments they would. But when the impediment of motion, is in the constitution of the thing itself, we use not to say, it wants the liberty; but the power to move; as when a stone lieth still, or a man is fastened to his bed by sickness” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 139).

<sup>16</sup> “It is important to note that lack of liberty is not the same as lack of power; for Hobbes, powerlessness is a matter of *internal impediments to motion*” (S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 185).

<sup>17</sup> S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 185.

Finally, C (“In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment”) is a statement of Hobbes’ belief that in the state of nature there is a perpetual conflict among all humans<sup>18</sup> and that such perpetual conflict involves all human agents having a conclusive desire to fight (i.e., to subjugate or kill<sup>19</sup>) all other human individuals at some moment. Note that, although Hobbes believed that the desire to fight is a pro tanto desire and not necessarily a conclusive desire,<sup>20</sup> Hobbes also believed (or he should have believed, given his reasoning) that it was inevitable for such pro tanto desire to fight to become a conclusive desire at some moment in all humans,<sup>21</sup> otherwise the state of nature would not be a “miserable condition”<sup>22</sup> and a “war of all against all”<sup>23</sup> as Hobbes believed it was. For instance, if all human agents have a pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals, but such pro tanto desire never becomes a conclusive desire (for example, because all humans have a stronger desire to cooperate since they believe that cooperation is more beneficial to them), then it is false that human individuals

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<sup>18</sup> As Hobbes says, “where there is no commonwealth, there is (as hath been already shown) a perpetual war of every man against his neighbour” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 164), and “amongst masterless men, there is perpetual war, of every man against his neighbour” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 142). Also, “the state of nature is a state of continuous and comprehensive war” (Stephen Finn, “Thomas Hobbes: Methodology” in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://iep.utm.edu/hobmeth/> (accessed April 21, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> As Hobbes says when referring to a war or a fight, “if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end [...] endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83).

<sup>20</sup> As Hobbes says, “the nature of war, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 84). Kavka further explains that Hobbes “defines war not in terms of actual fighting, but as a known willingness to fight” (Gregory S. Kavka, “Hobbes’s War of All Against All,” *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (January 1983): 292), and Helen Thornton says that “the natural condition was not necessarily a condition in which each individual was fighting every other individual, but it was a condition in which all had the intention or disposition to fight, if at some point it became necessary” (Helen Thornton, *State of Nature or Eden?* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 71).

<sup>21</sup> As Jespersen says, “Hobbes describes both chaotic interpersonal violence in the absence of a strong ruler and perpetual international warfare as inevitable” (Maija Jespersen, “Challenging Hobbes: Is War Inevitable?” *Global Society* 34, no. 1 (2020): 29).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111.

<sup>23</sup> S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 140. Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 97.

in the state of nature will be in a miserable condition where they constantly fear being attacked by other human agents. As Gregory Kavka says, “this very sorry state of affairs that Hobbes describes would not likely arise out of a war of all (by his definition), unless there was a good amount of actual fighting taking place”<sup>24</sup>, which requires the conclusive desire to fight, “because insofar as people reason as inductivists<sup>25</sup>, as all to some extent do, the willingness of others to fight them would not paralyze them with fear and prevent their engaging in productive activities if they observed over a period of time that no (or very little) fighting ever occurred”.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, “even timid individuals in a violence-free war of all [would] eventually stop fearing violence. So if Hobbes, or a Hobbesian, wishes to argue that the state of nature would degenerate into a state of war with the described consequences, he must show that the state of war in question contains substantial actual violence”<sup>27</sup>, which requires that in the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment, as stated in C.

I believe that Hobbes’ argument for the claim that “in the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment” is unsound and that C is false (thus, Hobbes’ argument for the need for a strong state fails). However, before I evaluate Hobbes’ argument, I will provide textual support for each premise.

## **2.2. Textual support for P1**

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 91.

<sup>25</sup> An inductivist “predicts the behavior of others by generalizing from their past behavior, or the past behavior of people like them, in similar situations” (Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 85).

<sup>26</sup> Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 91.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 91.

P1 states that “All human agents always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs”.

Textual support for P1 can be found in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, since according to Hobbes, felicity<sup>28</sup> is the continual satisfaction of one’s own overall desires relative to one’s own beliefs,<sup>29</sup> and all human agents always intend to attain felicity.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, according to Hobbes, all human agents always intend to attain the continual satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs.<sup>31</sup> Note that although Hobbes does not explicitly refer to maximizing the satisfaction of one’s own overall desires, I believe that it is plausible to assume that maximal overall desire satisfaction relative to one’s own beliefs is what Hobbes has in mind when he refers to felicity. Besides, Hobbes says that all human agents always pro tanto desire as much power as possible<sup>32</sup> because having as much power as possible allows the human agent to satisfy his set of desires as much as possible, which implies maximization.

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<sup>28</sup> Felicity is identical to happiness. As Timo Airaksinen says, “Hobbes offers a surprisingly modern account of happiness, or felicity, as continuous success in life” (Timo Airaksinen, “Thomas Hobbes on Intentionality, Desire, and Happiness,” in *Vagaries of Desire: A Collection of Philosophical Essays* (Boston: Brill-Rodopi, 2019), 163).

<sup>29</sup> As Hobbes says, “Continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering, is that men call felicity” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 41), and “felicity, therefore (by which we mean continual delight), consisteth not in having prospered, but in prospering” (Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic* (Oxford: Thornton, 1889), 30).

<sup>30</sup> As Hobbes says, “the voluntary actions, and inclinations of all men, tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 66). Also, Airaksinen says that according to Hobbes “we cannot avoid wanting to be happy” (Timo Airaksinen, “Thomas Hobbes on Intentionality, Desire, and Happiness,” in *Vagaries of Desire: A Collection of Philosophical Essays* (Boston: Brill-Rodopi, 2019), 172).

<sup>31</sup> As Hobbes says, “Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another, the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is, that the object of man’s desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions, and inclinations of all men, tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life; and differ only in the way: which ariseth partly from the diversity of passions, in diverse men; and partly from the difference of the knowledge, or opinion each one has of the causes, which produce the effect desired” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65-6).

<sup>32</sup> As Hobbes says, “in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 66).

### 2.3. Textual support for P2

Let us now consider P2: “In the state of nature all human agents believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other human agent”. Note that by *incompatible* I mean *empirically incompatible*, which is incompatibility given the history of the world and the laws of nature. Also, note that *logical incompatibility*, which is incompatibility given the laws of logic, entails empirical incompatibility, but empirical incompatibility does not entail logical incompatibility.<sup>33</sup> For instance, suppose that there are two humans: A and B. Furthermore, suppose that A and B each desire one cup of water, but there is only one cup of water available. In this case, A and B have desires that are logically compatible with one another (since it is logically possible to satisfy both desires, such as in a world that has ten cups of water available), but A and B have desires that are empirically incompatible with one another (given the scarcity of cups of water).

Textual support for P2 can be found in Jean Hampton’s *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, where Hampton says that Hobbes believes that in the state of nature, competition (which requires incompatible desires<sup>34</sup>) among all humans is inevitable.<sup>35</sup> At least part of the reason for such inevitable conflict is the fact that the state of nature is a state with scarcity of

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<sup>33</sup> In other words, what is logically incompatible is always empirically incompatible, but not the other way around, and what is empirically compatible is always logically compatible, but not the other way around.

<sup>34</sup> Competition requires incompatible conclusive desires. However, all conclusive desires are pro tanto desires that are not outweighed by any other pro tanto desire, so it follows that competition also requires incompatible pro tanto desires.

<sup>35</sup> On the inevitability of incompatible desires, Hampton says the following. First, “because each person has a different object of desire, conflicts between people as they pursue these different goals are, in Hobbes’s eyes, inevitable” (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 15). Second, “Because each person desires and believes he has the right to so many objects, people will inevitably come to desire and try to appropriate the same object. But, says Hobbes, [...] no one is ready to acknowledge another’s superior right to an object [...], and competition for it [the object] is created” (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 59). Third, “people’s inevitable opposition of interests” (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 100). And fourth, “Hobbesian premisses about the nature of human beings – their self-interested motivations and their inevitable conflicts” (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 106).

resources (at least that is what Hobbes assumes<sup>36</sup>), and scarcity of resources with incompatible desires causes competition among humans.<sup>37</sup>

Note that although Hobbes says that in the state of nature some human agents believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of another human agent,<sup>38</sup> I am not aware of a passage in Hobbes' writings where Hobbes clearly says that in the state of nature *all* human agents believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of *each* other human agent, as stated in P2. However, like Hampton, we should believe that Hobbes accepts P2 at least implicitly. Otherwise, we will not be able to derive Hobbes' conclusion that in the state of nature conflict among all human agents is inevitable, since in the state of nature there would be no conflict among the human agents that believe that they have no pro tanto desires that are incompatible with the pro tanto desires of the other human agent.

#### **2.4. Textual support for P3**

Let us now consider P3: "In the state of nature all human agents distrust all other human agents to always keep all their agreements". Textual support for P3 can be found in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, which says the following: "from this diffidence [i.e., distrust] of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself, so reasonable, as anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles,

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<sup>36</sup> As Hampton says, "insofar as Hobbes is assuming that competition for goods will exist in the state of nature, he is assuming that there will be in that state a 'moderate scarcity of goods'" (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 60).

<sup>37</sup> As Kavka says, "the individuals in Hobbes's state of nature [...] are competing for scarce natural resources" (Gregory S. Kavka, "Hobbes's War of All Against All," *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (January 1983): 306). And as William Allen says, "any community must be characterized by some kind of organization and procedures of resolving the conflicts inevitably emanating from scarcity" (William R. Allen, "Scarcity and Order: The Hobbesian Problem and the Humean Resolution," *Social Science Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (September 1976): 265).

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Hobbes says that "men are continually in competition for honour and dignity, [...] and consequently amongst men there ariseth on that ground, envy and hatred, and finally war" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 113). This quote implies that at least two human agents believe that they have incompatible pro tanto desires with one another, otherwise they would not have felt envy or hatred towards one another.

to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him”.<sup>39</sup> Note that Hobbes says “all men he can”, which implies that the human agent distrusts all other human agents, otherwise he would not attempt to master “the persons of all men he can”. Furthermore, since Hobbes says that in the state of nature there is a war of all against all, we should believe that Hobbes assumes that the reasoning mentioned in this paragraph applies to all human agents, which entails that all human agents distrust all other human agents, as stated in P3.

Additionally, textual support for P3 can be found in Hampton’s *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, since she says that in the state of nature distrust among all humans is inevitable.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.5. Textual support for P4

Let us now consider P4: “In the state of nature some human agents pro tanto desire glory”. Note that *glory* is the pleasure that an individual derives from correctly believing<sup>41</sup> that his power to satisfy his own desires is greater than the power of other individuals to satisfy their own desires.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83.

<sup>40</sup> On the inevitability of incompatible desires and of distrust, Hampton says “Hobbes [...] established two inevitable causes of invasion and quarrel (i.e., competition and fear) based solely on the rational pursuit of self-preservation by each person” (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61). Note that by “fear”, Hampton refers to distrust, i.e., not trusting that the other human individual will keep his agreement. For instance, as Hampton says, “fear that the second party might renege on his part of the bargain” (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 76).

<sup>41</sup> I say “correctly believing” instead of “believing” because I am referring to true glory, not fictitious glory. As Gabriella Slomp explains, “In *Elements of Law* Hobbes compares three forms of glory, namely, ‘true glory’, ‘vain glory’ and ‘false glory’, and provides two criteria for distinguishing between them. The first of the criteria suggested by Hobbes refers to whether these passions are based on either real or imaginary actions (*EL*, p. 37). If one’s feeling of superiority is grounded in real achievements, Hobbes says, the deriving pleasure is ‘glory’; if actions are not real, and thus power is merely imagined either by the glory-seeker or by his adulators, then the resulting pleasure is fictitious and is either ‘vain glory’ [...] or ‘false glory’” (Gabriella Slomp, “From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 554).

<sup>42</sup> As Slomp says, “the pleasure of observing one’s power in attaining one’s objectives is called by Hobbes ‘glory’. Hobbes maintains that the power of man to achieve his objectives is not absolute, but determined by its difference from the power of other men. Thus, a more precise description of glory is the pleasure of superior power with

Textual support for P4 can be found in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, which says that "in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory".<sup>43</sup> Note that P4 leaves open the possibility that in the state of nature all human agents pro tanto desire glory, and there is a debate among scholars regarding whether Hobbes believed that all human agents in the state of nature pro tanto desire glory. For example, some scholars say that Hobbes believed that only some human agents in the state of nature pro tanto desire glory,<sup>44</sup> and Slomp cites passages that support that view,<sup>45</sup> but Slomp also cites passages that support the view that Hobbes believed that all human agents in the state of nature pro tanto desire glory.<sup>46</sup> In this

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respect to others" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 554).

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83. The statement that glory is a principal source of conflict between humans implies that at least some humans pro tanto desire glory, otherwise glory would not be a source of conflict between humans.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, "McNeilly contends that in *Leviathan* glory loses the fundamental role it played in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 552). Also, Kavka says that "in the state of nature [...] some are *dominators* who desire conquest, dominion, and power over others for its own sake, while the rest are *moderates*, who desire power over others, if at all, only as a means to protect and secure themselves and their possessions" (Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 97), which implies that not all human agents pro tanto desire glory over other humans, and Kavka says that "the dominators [...] are a minority amid the moderates, who seek power only as a means of security" (Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 99).

<sup>45</sup> First, "in *Leviathan* and *De Homine* the set of glory-seekers shrinks dramatically" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 564), implying that not all human agents desire glory, at least not conclusively and probably not pro tanto either. Second, "Nor does Hobbes suggest [in *Leviathan*], as he did in *De Cive*, that 'all the minds pleasures refer to glory in the end'" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 567). Third, "throughout *Leviathan* we can still find traces of the earlier position; nevertheless, in spite of the exceptions, on the whole Hobbes seems no longer convinced that glory is the fundamental *universal* desire, and this view is confirmed by his treatment of glory in *De Homine*. Therefore the existence of non-glory-seekers is consistent with the general tenor of *Leviathan*, whereas their presence was inexplicable in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 567).

<sup>46</sup> First, "The claim that glory is the unequivocal source of human discord is made in the concluding chapter of the first part of *Elements of Law*, repeated almost *verbatim* in Chapter 5 of *De Cive* and in the opening chapter of Book II of *Leviathan*. [...] In all three passages glory is viewed unambiguously as the sole source of competition, sedition and war" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 559-60). Second, "in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* the set of glory-seekers contains virtually all people, whereas the set of non-glory-seekers is almost empty" (Gabriella Slomp, "From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 564), although this passage is compatible with the claim that glory is a non-universal reason for conflict among humans in the state of nature, since "virtually all" is not "all" and "almost empty" is not "empty".

essay I will not participate in that debate. Instead, I will assume that Hobbes believed that in the state of nature only some human agents pro tanto desire glory. I will assume this to make Hobbes' argument more plausible.

## **2.6. Textual support for P5**

So far, in this essay I have provided textual support for C, P1, P2, P3, and P4. To finish justifying my reconstruction of Hobbes' argument, I must provide textual support for P5, which says that the combination of P1, P2, P3, and P4 entails C ("In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment").

Textual support for P5 can be found in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII, paragraphs 3-8.<sup>47</sup> While implicitly assuming P1 ("All human agents always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs"), Hobbes claims that incompatible desires, distrust, and glory are "three principal causes of quarrel" in the state of nature (these claims are references to P2, P3, and P4, respectively), and then Hobbes derives C when he says "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". This shows that Hobbes believed that P1-P4 entails C, and thus, Hobbes accepted P5.

## **3. Criticism of Hobbes' argument**

In section 2, I reconstructed Hobbes' argument for C ("In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human

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<sup>47</sup> Paragraph 3 begins with "From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends", and paragraph 8 begins with "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".

individuals at some moment”), and I provided textual support for P1-P5 and C. In this section, I will argue that P3 is false, and thus, Hobbes’ argument for C is unsound. Also, I will argue that C is false. But first, let us consider the other premises.

### **3.1. P1 and P4 are plausible**

To begin with, P1 (“All human agents always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs”) and P4 (“In the state of nature some human agents pro tanto desire glory”) seem plausible to me, so I will not criticize them.

### **3.2. On P2**

I believe that it is plausible that in the state of nature all human agents *have* at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other human agent. However, I am not as confident about the claim that in the state of nature all human agents *believe that they have* at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other human agent, which is what P2 says. Perhaps there is at least one human agent in the state of nature who believes that they do not have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of a loved one, even if their belief is implausible or unjustified. How can I be so sure? Nonetheless, I will accept P2, just to be safe.

### **3.3. On P5**

According to P5, if (1) all human agents always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs, (2) in the state of nature all human agents believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other human agent, (3) in the state of nature all human agents distrust all other human agents to always keep all their agreements, and (4) in the state of nature some human agents pro tanto desire glory, then in the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will

conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment. I believe that P5 is plausible, or that P5 is at least more plausible than its negation. I will justify my belief by analyzing a possible interaction between two human agents.

Suppose that (1) John and Mark always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs. Also, John and Mark each believe that they have a desire to drink two cups of water every day, but they each believe that there are only two cups of water available every day, and thus, (2) John and Mark each believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other. In this case, they could agree to share, i.e., they could agree to drink only one cup of water every day, since they could believe that such an agreement is more beneficial to each other than to fight each other. However, if (3) John and Mark distrust each other to always keep this agreement, then such agreement will not be effective, since such distrust will make it inevitable for them to break the agreement. On top of that, if (4) some human agents pro tanto desire glory (i.e., the pleasure that an individual derives from correctly believing that his power to satisfy his own desires is greater than the power of other individuals to satisfy their own desires), then it is possible that the other individual is such a glory-seeker, which is an additional cause for John and Mark to conclusively desire to subjugate or kill the other individual at some moment. Therefore, it seems to me that P5 is plausible, since it is plausible to me that this analysis applies to any two human agents, including human agents in the state of nature.

### **3.4. Against P3**

P3 says that in the state of nature all human agents distrust all other human agents to always keep all their agreements. I believe that this premise is false, since I believe that at least

some family members and close friends (of long standing) trust each other to always keep all their agreements with them.

Consider the John and Mark scenario once again. (1) John and Mark always intend to maximize the satisfaction of their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs, (2) John and Mark each believe that they have a desire to drink two cups of water every day, but (3) they each believe that there are only two cups of water available every day, and thus, (4) John and Mark each believe that they have at least one pro tanto desire that is incompatible with at least one pro tanto desire of each other. However, suppose that John and Mark are father and son, and they have a very good relationship with a long history of numerous and frequent cases of benefiting each other. For instance, John has been a great father to Mark, and Mark has been a thankful and cooperative son to John. Furthermore, John and Mark care about each other so much that their lives are better when each other's desires are satisfied. For instance, as a good father, John has always cared about Mark's flourishing, and because of John's care for Mark ever since Mark was young, Mark cares about John's flourishing. In this case, it is plausible to believe that, given that they have a good relationship, they will agree to drink only one cup of water every day, or to reach some other kind of agreement. This is because it is plausible to believe that they will believe that complying with such an agreement is more beneficial to each than non-compliance (and the possible breakdown of cooperation). Furthermore, even if the trust is not 100%, it is plausible that the trust will be sufficiently high to the point that it will prevent John and Mark from conclusively desiring to subjugate or kill the other individual at some moment. This seems sufficient to refute P3.

Before I move on, I must reply to the following concern: does mentioning family members count as a counterexample to P3? My reply is that if the family exists in the state of

nature, then my example is a counterexample to P3, but if the family does not exist in the state of nature (i.e., the family counts as a society, which is outside the state of nature), then my example is not a counterexample to P3. There is a debate among scholars as to whether the family exists in the state of nature according to Hobbes.<sup>48</sup> In this essay, I assume that the answer is yes, in which case the John and Mark example that I offered counts as a refutation of P3.

### 3.5. Against C

So far, I have argued that P3 is false, and thus, Hobbes' argument for C is unsound. However, that is not sufficient to refute C ("In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment"). In this section, I will argue that C is false.

C is false because even if humans are in the state of nature, some humans sufficiently care about and sufficiently trust at least one other human, and the presence of such care and trust between at least some humans in the state of nature falsifies C's claim that it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment. Let us analyze.

Even if humans are in the state of nature, some humans sufficiently care about and sufficiently trust at least one other human. For instance, regardless of whether I was brought up

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<sup>48</sup> For instance, on one hand, "The family, in Schochet's reading, plays a vital role in Hobbes's theory, for it is the primary way in which states get their start, whether by institution (men and women agreeing to unite for the production of children) or acquisition (war resulting in conquest). That is, the way in which human society formed had first to be through families, which then formed the foundation for larger associations such as tribes, villages, and eventually states. Thus, the 'state of nature' is not populated by 'abstract individuals' but rather contains families, on this reading" (Nancy J. Hirschmann, "Hobbes on the Family," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, ed. A. P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 248-249). On the other hand, "This is why he [Hobbes] thinks it makes sense to speak of a presocietal 'state of nature' in which men are 'even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other.'" (*DC, EW ii*, 8, I, 109) In his view, when we theoretically sunder society and put men into this natural state, human individuals are not destroyed when they are stripped of their social connections; rather, they are best revealed by that sundering" (Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7).

in a society (like Brazil, my place of birth), it is very important to me that at least some of the desires of my parents are satisfied, especially the desires that are most important to them. Furthermore, I sufficiently care about my parents to the point that if their desires are not satisfied, then I will suffer, especially if their most important desires are not satisfied. Since I desire the satisfaction of the desires of my parents, especially the desires that are most important to them, and since my parents strongly desire to be neither subjugated nor killed, it is not inevitable that I will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill my parents at some moment, since doing so will oppose some of my most important desires. Finally, because there is a long history of numerous and frequent cases where my parents have benefited me, I sufficiently trust my parents to always keep all their agreements with me. All of this is true regardless of whether my parents and I are in the state of nature. No one, including Hobbes, has any good reason to attribute this good relationship between my parents and I to living in a society (like Brazil or the United States) instead of attributing this good relationship to natural familial connections, for example. Therefore, even if my parents and I are, or were brought up, in the state of nature, I sufficiently care about and sufficiently trust my parents, and the presence of such care and trust between my parents and I falsifies C's claim that it is inevitable that I will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill my parents at some moment.

I just gave an example that involves the family, but what if (as discussed in the previous section) for Hobbes the family exists outside the state of nature? My reply is that there are many ways for a human to sufficiently care about and sufficiently trust at least one other human even if humans are in the state of nature. I described one way, namely, through a healthy family relationship, but humans can sufficiently care about and sufficiently trust each other through a friendly relationship (regardless of familial connections) or through a romantic relationship, to

name some examples. For instance, even if Mary and John are in the state of nature, i.e., even if Mary and John “sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other”,<sup>49</sup> given that humans have a natural sexual drive it is possible (and this will happen often between women and men) for Mary to fall in love with John and to thereby care about and trust John, and the more John reciprocates that love, the more Mary will care about and trust John, eventually to the point where it is not inevitable that Mary will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill John at some moment.

What I have said is sufficient to show that C is false because even if humans are in the state of nature, some humans sufficiently care about and sufficiently trust at least one other human, and the presence of such care and trust between at least some humans in the state of nature falsifies C’s claim that it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment.

#### **4. A revised Hobbesian argument**

As I stated in section 1, Hobbes believed that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other, and that the only way to prevent humans from fighting each other is to have a power to “keep them in awe”.<sup>50</sup> In section 2, I offered a reconstruction of Hobbes’ argument for the claim that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other, and in section 3, I criticized that argument by arguing that the argument is unsound (because the claim that “in the state of nature all human agents distrust all other human agents to always keep all their agreements” is false) and the conclusion is false.

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), 100.

<sup>50</sup> As Hobbes says, the “miserable condition of war [...] is necessarily consequent [...] to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111). And as Kavka says, “Hobbes argues that people living in a state of nature, without a common power over them to keep them in awe, are in a state of war of every person against every other” (Gregory S. Kavka, “Hobbes’s War of All Against All,” *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (January 1983): 292).

In this section, I will offer another argument that is inspired by Hobbes, one that is focused on conflict between human groups instead of conflict between human individuals. This is important because if we focus on conflict between human groups, then we may be able to construct a plausible scenario that involves enough conflict to support Hobbes' belief that the only way to prevent humans from fighting each other is to have a power to keep them in awe. Note that this argument refers to conflict in both the state of nature and in society.

Here is the argument for the claim that human groups have a natural inclination to fight each other:

P1: All human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group.

P2: Most human agents believe that to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group it is necessary to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group.<sup>51</sup>

P3: If (1) all human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group, and (2) most human agents believe that to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group it is necessary to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group, then most human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group.

C: Most human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group. (P1-P3)

In this section, I will justify P1 to P3. This will be sufficient to justify C.

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<sup>51</sup> The term "non-beloved group" is merely intended to designate a group that is different from the beloved group in question.

#### 4.1. On P1

P1 states that “All human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group”. *Human agents* are human individuals that have the capacity to intend to satisfy their own overall desires relative to their own beliefs. A *pro tanto desire* is a desire, all else being equal, for something, but which perhaps can be outweighed by other pro tanto desires.<sup>52</sup>

Consider the following six kinds of groups: familial groups (members of one’s own family), friend groups (humans that are one’s own friends), national groups (such as “Americans” and “Russians”), racial groups (such as “Whites” and “Blacks”), religious groups<sup>53</sup> (such as “Christians”, “Muslims”, and “seculars”), and political groups (such as “liberals”, “conservatives”, “racists”, “anti-racists”, “egalitarians”, and “anti-egalitarians”). It is plausible that all human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of at least one group that is an example of one of these six kinds of groups. For instance, as Maija Jespersen says:

One’s “self” [...] has many aspects, including relationships and group memberships. For example, a person may identify as a mother, sister, American, writer, and gardener. Those identifications are fundamental to identity and can be very powerful – more so with “mother” or “sister”, perhaps, than with something like “gardener”, but many people are strongly motivated by nationalism or other large groups they feel make up a fundamental part of who they are. [...] [P]eople

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<sup>52</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that this is a *merely pro tanto desire*, since all conclusive desires are pro tanto desires that are not outweighed by any other pro tanto desire. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will not make this distinction.

<sup>53</sup> By “religious group”, I mean any group related to religion, including groups that criticize religion. Thus, “seculars” is a religious group, even though secularism is not a religion. This is not the best terminology, but it is the only one I could currently think of.

will sacrifice basic needs like food, shelter, and safety for the sake of adherence to an identity, for example soldiers fighting for the ideals embraced by their nation or religion.<sup>54</sup>

Also, Richard Dawkins says that “It is easy to see why our prehistoric [human] ancestors would have been good to their own in-group but bad – to the point of xenophobia – towards other groups”,<sup>55</sup> and there is no good reason to believe that contemporary humans are different. For this essay, we do not need to worry about an explanation of why humans are very discriminatory. Instead, we only need to acknowledge that humans are very discriminatory in favor of some human groups and against other human groups, as is evident from the historical and contemporary evidence that we have.

If we look at the history of humans and the contemporary evidence, then we will find strong cases of discrimination based on one of these six kinds of groups. Wars between groups (such as national wars and religious wars) and the enslavement of some groups are the most obvious cases of strong discrimination, but even in the absence of wars and slavery, strong discrimination is present, such as when there are laws that prohibit some groups (such as foreigners) from having equal social rights. Based on all of the empirical evidence that we have, both nowadays and historically, there is no reason to believe that some human agents do not engage in strong discrimination in favor of some human groups, and thus, there is no reason to believe that some human agents do not have a group that they love so much that they have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of such group.

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<sup>54</sup> Maija Jespersen, “Challenging Hobbes: Is War Inevitable?” *Global Society* 34, no. 1 (2020): 28.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 220.

What I have said is sufficient to show that P1 (“All human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group”) is more plausible than its negation.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4.2. On P2

P2 states that “Most human agents believe that to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group it is necessary to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group”. *Liberty* is the lack of external impediments to an individual’s actions. *A subjugates B* when A limits the liberty of B.

To justify P2, I will offer two examples. Here is the first example. Suppose that John loves Black people, and thus, John has a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of Black people. However, John is aware that all members of the Ku Klux Klan (i.e., the KKK) are anti-Black. It is natural for John to believe that to maximize the flourishing of Black people it is necessary, for example, to kill all members of the KKK. Why? Because all members of the KKK are a threat to the flourishing of Black people, and the more we destroy this threat, the more we promote the flourishing of Black people, and thus, if we do not maximize the destruction of this threat (such as by killing all members of the KKK), then we do not maximize the flourishing of Black people. In short, it is natural for John (and for most human agents) to believe that if all members of the KKK were dead, then Black people would be best off (and the most reliable way to ensure that all members of the KKK are dead is to kill them), and that Black people would be worse off (even if slightly) if some members of the KKK were alive. Why

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<sup>56</sup> Note that a human’s beloved group could consist of only one human or consist of all humans. However, it is still true that all humans have at least one beloved group that consist of two or more humans but does not consist of all humans. Besides, no one loves all humans (anyone that loves all humans would have to love criminal humans and humans that oppose one’s own flourishing, for example), and even if a human agent supposedly only loves one human, the human agent would love anyone that promotes the flourishing of their beloved human.

should anyone believe otherwise? What benefit do members of the KKK provide to Black people that makes Black people's lives better off, such that this benefit would cease to exist if members of the KKK were dead? A similar analysis applies to many cases of conflict that involve groups that most human agents tremendously care about, such as cases of conflict that involve political groups and religious groups. For instance, it is natural for most human agents to believe that egalitarians would be best off if no anti-egalitarians existed, or that pro-abortionists would be best off if no anti-abortionists existed, or that members of the LGBT community would be best off if no anti-LGBT individuals existed, or that anti-religious people would be best off if no religious people existed, or that Christians would be best off if no Muslims existed, and the list goes on, and on, and on.

Here is the second example, which focuses on conflict between nations that are not at war with each other. I will show that even in a seemingly peaceful case such as this, there is still a serious conflict lurking in the background. Suppose that X and Y are nations. It is natural for most human agents to believe that if members of X enslaved<sup>57</sup> or killed all members of Y, then this would make the lives of the members of X best off. For instance, if the members of Y were dead, then the members of X could use the resources (such as food and land) that were previously being used by the members of Y. Furthermore, if the members of Y were the slaves of the members of X, then the members of X could derive benefits from such slavery, such as by using the members of Y for manual labor or for scientific experimentation, or for both. In short, it is natural for most human agents to believe that if all members of another group (i.e., an out-group) were dead or their slaves, then their in-group would be best off, and thus, the flourishing of their in-group would be maximized, since it is natural for most human agents to believe that

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<sup>57</sup> Slavery is a radical example of subjugation. There are more moderate cases of subjugation, such as jailing someone.

there could be no situation that would promote the flourishing of their in-group more, or as much, as all members of the out-group being dead or being enslaved by the members of the in-group.

What I have said is sufficient to show that P2 (“Most human agents believe that to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group it is necessary to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group”) is more plausible than its negation.

### **4.3. On P3**

P3 states that “If (1) all human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group, and (2) most human agents believe that to maximize the flourishing of at least one beloved group it is necessary to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group, then most human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group”. P3 is true because, if a human agent has a very strong pro tanto desire to acquire A, and the human agent believes that to acquire A it is necessary to do B, then the human agent will have a very strong pro tanto desire to do B. This is how all human agents behave regardless of what A and B are.<sup>58</sup>

### **4.4. The importance of the argument in section 4**

As I showed in section 2, Hobbes argued that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other (this is the “individualistic argument”). The conclusion of this argument is “In the state of nature it is inevitable that all human agents will conclusively desire to subjugate or kill all other human individuals at some moment”.<sup>59</sup> In section 4, I have argued that human groups have a natural inclination to fight each other (this is the “collectivistic

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<sup>58</sup> This does not rule out the possibility that the very strong desire may be overridden by a conflicting stronger desire.

<sup>59</sup> In section 3, I argued against this conclusion.

argument”). The conclusion of this argument is “Most human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group”.

The collectivistic argument is more important than the individualistic argument for at least two reasons. First, as I argued in sections 3 and 4, the collectivistic argument is more plausible than the individualistic argument. Second, while the individualistic argument only refers to conflict in the state of nature, the collectivistic argument refers to conflict in both the state of nature and in society.

Finally, although reconstructing Hobbes’ argument for absolutism is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to finish this essay by discussing how the collectivistic argument can be used to revive Hobbes’ argument for absolutism.<sup>60</sup> *Absolutism* (i.e., *political absolutism*) is the belief that the ruler of a society (whether an individual or a group) should be “a supreme, unlimited, undivided ruler who is unaccountable to those who are ruled”.<sup>61</sup> Here is the conclusion of the collectivistic argument once again: “Most human agents have a very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group”. This is crucial because most human agents are like a bomb that can explode at any moment. The only thing that will prevent a human agent from “exploding” (i.e., the only thing that will prevent a human agent from conclusively desiring to subjugate or kill members of at least one non-beloved group) is the existence of a stronger pro tanto desire that conflicts with the human agent’s very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill members of at least one non-beloved group. But what is the most reliable way of preventing such an “explosion” from human agents? Absolutism. At least that is what a Hobbesian can argue.

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<sup>60</sup> I am not endorsing this argument for absolutism. I am merely presenting it as a possible argument that a Hobbesian may offer.

<sup>61</sup> S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 145.

Here is a brief analysis of why absolutism may be the most reliable way to prevent human agents from attempting to subjugate or kill all members of at least one non-beloved group (later I will discuss whether absolutism is the most desirable option). Suppose that X and Y are countries, and that John has a very strong pro tanto desire to subjugate or kill all members of X, whether directly (such as by directly killing members of X) or indirectly (such as by voting for a politician that will use an army to kill members of X). One obstacle for John is disorganization, or lack of unification. For instance, if John wants to attack X only, but Mark wants to attack Y only, then John and Mark will not unite with one another. Another obstacle for John is whether his beloved group (namely, the members of his country) has enough resources (such as weapons) to attack X without being defeated. For instance, if X has a 50% chance of defeating John's country in a war, then it may not be wise for the members of John's country to fight X, so it may not be wise for John to conclusively desire that such a fight occur. However, if John has united with a lot of human agents who conclusively desire to attack X, and they have a sufficiently high chance of successfully defeating X in a war without causing much harm to themselves, then it seems plausible that John (and his allies) should conclusively desire to attack X. In this case, the only way, or at least the most reliable way, to prevent John (and his allies) from attacking X is to have an absolute ruler that is so powerful that makes John believe that, if he attempts to attack X, then the absolute ruler will severely punish John so much that John prefers to avoid such punishment than to attempt to attack X.

Human agents can unite easily at times, so we should not rely on disorganization to prevent humans from attempting to attack other groups. Furthermore, it is very likely that some human groups will be more powerful than other human groups at any moment, so it is not reliable to rely on all groups having a roughly equal amount of power or resources to attack

others or to defend themselves, which would make war risky for either side. In addition, it is not reliable to rely on human agents following “objective morality” or anything similar, since not only is there no strong evidence that there is objective morality, but also, all it takes is one group to not care about objective morality, and once a group attacks another group, this will probably cause a snowball effect where the groups being attacked fight back, and then other groups may also join, such as by making an alliance with one of the groups or by “third-partying” (i.e., by attacking both groups while they are weak, or waiting for the war to end and then attacking both sides since they are now weaker). In short, the most reliable way to prevent wars among human groups is to rely on an absolute ruler to threaten all human groups by saying that whoever attempts to destroy another group will be severely punished, and such punishment is so severe that it is always worth avoiding. Note that absolutism is not completely reliable (for instance, we have no assurance that the absolute ruler will use their power to prevent war rather than to promote war). However, a Hobbesian can argue that absolutism is still the most reliable way to prevent conflict among human groups.

Before I conclude this section, I will reply to the following objection. “Is absolutism the most desirable option? Even if absolutism is the most reliable way to prevent conflict among human groups, should we try to prevent all conflict among human groups? For instance, maybe we should allow John and his allies to attack X, and maybe we should even join John and his allies.” That is a legitimate objection. A Hobbesian can reply to that objection by saying that absolutism is the most desirable option unless you are willing to promote a war among some human groups. In this section, I have assumed that we should try to prevent all conflict among human groups at all costs. However, if you are willing to promote a war among some human groups, then this argument for absolutism should not be convincing to you, since you should

prefer to go to war than to set up an absolutist society for the sake of preventing wars.

Regardless, my point is this: in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond, there will be more conflict and wars,<sup>62</sup> and a Hobbesian can argue that unless you are willing to promote at least one of these wars, you will need to promote absolutism (and on a global scale) because absolutism is the only, or at least the most, reliable way to prevent such wars. In short, a Hobbesian can argue that there will ultimately be only one of two outcomes: either there will be wars among human groups (until one group completely subjugates or kills the other), or there will be an absolutist society that will prevent wars among human groups. It is unrealistic to expect a third outcome.

## **5. Conclusion**

Hobbes believed that a state of nature is a miserable condition for humans because human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other. In addition, Hobbes argued that the only way to prevent humans from fighting each other is to have a power to “keep them in awe”, i.e., to have an absolutist society. However, in section 2 I reconstructed Hobbes’ argument for the claim that human individuals have a natural inclination to fight each other, and in section 3 I criticized such argument by rejecting one of its premises and its conclusion. Still, as I argued in section 4, I believe that human groups have a natural inclination to fight each other, and that this revised Hobbesian argument is more plausible and can be used to revive Hobbes’ argument for absolutism.

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<sup>62</sup> For instance, conflict between national groups, racial groups, religious groups, or political groups.

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