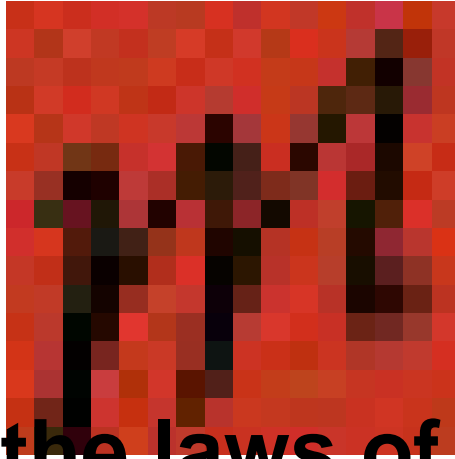


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I.2 On the laws of nature

- The Spirit of Law - Book I. On law in general -

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I.2 On the laws of nature

Before all these laws are those of nature, so called because they derive solely from the constitution of our being. To understand them well, we must consider a man before the establishment of societies. The laws of nature will be those he would receive in such a state.

That law which, by imprinting within us the idea of a creator, urges us toward him, is the first of *natural laws* in importance, though not in the order of those laws. Man in the state of nature would possess rather the faculty of knowing than any knowledge. It is obvious that his first notions would not be speculative ones : he would attend to the preservation of his being before inquiring into its origin. Such a man would at first be aware only of his weakness ; he would be extremely timid : and if on that point we needed evidence, wild men have been found in the forests [1] who quake at everything and flee everything.

In this state, everyone feels inferior ; scarcely can the individual feel equal to another. Therefore they would not be eager to attack each another, and peace would be the first natural law.

The desire to dominate each other from the start which Hobbes attributes to men is not reasonable. The thought of control and domination is so complex, and dependent on so many other thoughts, that it is not the first that would come to him.

Hobbes asks *why, if men are not naturally in a state of war, they carry weapons around with them, and why they have keys for locking their houses*. But we do not realize we are attributing to men before the establishment of societies something that can occur only after such establishment, which causes them to find reasons for attacking each other and defending themselves.

To his feeling of weakness man would add the awareness of his needs. Thus another natural law would be that which would motivate him to seek nourishment.

I have said that fear would incline men to flee each other ; but the signs of mutual fear would soon begin to draw them together. Besides, they would be inclined in this direction by the pleasure an animal feels at the approach of an animal of its own kind. Moreover, the charm which the two sexes inspire by their difference would increase that pleasure ; and the natural way they always solicit each other would be a third law.

Besides the awareness which men have from the start, they further manage to acquire knowledge ; thus they have a second bond which the other animals have not. They therefore have another reason for uniting, and the desire to live in society is a fourth natural law.

[1] Witness the wild man who was found in the forests of Hanover, and who was seen in England under the reign of George I.