

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Investigating the State of Nature

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Nozick, R. (1974). [Chapters 1–2]. In *Anarchy, state, and utopia* (pp. 3–25). Blackwell.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. In chapter 1, Robert Nozick wants to explain why investigating the state of nature is crucial for answering the “fundamental question of political philosophy” (p. 4).
What is that question?
2. Nozick notes some different ways to understand what is meant by the state of nature and why we might want to leave it by forming a (political) state.
What conception of the state of nature does Nozick prefer to consider? Why would that particular conception help us better answer that fundamental question of political philosophy?
3. Nozick also suggests that investigating the state of nature can provide “a fundamental potential explanation” (p. 8) for the (political) state, “even if incorrect” (p. 9).
How is that possible, or even desirable?
4. In chapter 2, Nozick begins his project of showing how a (political) state (or things that look like a political state) might emerge from the state of nature. His approach is similar in spirit, at least, to that of John Locke.
In Nozick’s view, why do we desire to leave the state of nature? How is this similar to what we saw in Locke? Does Nozick agree with Locke that we must then form a (political) state?
5. What does Nozick mean by “mutual-protection associations” (p. 12), a “private protective agency” (p. 13), and “the dominant protective association” (pp. 15–17)?
Why does Nozick see believe that it is, more or less inevitable, that a dominant protective association will arise in the state of nature?
6. What is an “invisible hand explanation” (p. 18)? How does Nozick illustrate such an explanation with his account of the origins of money out of a barter system?
How is his account of the origins of a dominant protective association out of the state of nature also an invisible hand explanation?
7. In what ways is a dominant protective association significantly different from a (political) state?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.