3 Laws Of Nature – Hobbes Essay, Research Paper

The first three laws of nature were described by Thomas Hobbes as a possible way to put an end to war. These three laws are based on the notion of a contract between two beings that holds a mutual transference of right between the involved parties. In this paper I will define and elaborate on the three laws of nature and how these laws, as described by Hobbes, can contribute to bringing peace in a society.

Since Hobbes sees peace as the cooperation of the three laws of nature it is only fitting that the first law deals with the seeking out of peace. He explains the first law to be where one must seek out peace where possible and if it is not possible to use war. Using war would be necessary as a defense mechanism if the initial promotion of peace isn t accepted. Since using war, according to Hobbes, is one of our natural rights, he states that this be agreed as a natural law.

The second law of nature deals with the surrendering of our natural right in order to achieve peace. The basis behind the law is that one must be willing to lay down their natural right so far as others do as well. If one does not give up their natural right, they are considered a threat to the existence of peace among a society and therefore cannot coexist without the constant threat of war.

The third law of nature is made up from the idea that men perform their covenants made which essentially describes the notion that to ensure peace all individuals will stand by their contracts and fulfill their obligations. If one does not fulfill their obligations they are subject to the consequences of a coercive higher power.

The underlying themes between these three laws is the fact that peace comes about from the fear of death and that man is constantly engaging in self improvement. According to Hobbes, if all individuals in a society strictly followed these laws than the chances for peace are greatly increased. I believe his social contract theory to be the rope that ties all these laws together and that is where the true possibility for peace comes about.

The social contract theory comprises, in one way or another, the three laws of nature and it offers a deeper explanation of how these laws work together to promote peace among individuals in a society. In a social contract there is an agreement that peace will be the outcome of individuals who simultaneously give up their natural rights and follow through with the pacts that they have previously agreed to. Hobbes uses this theory to explain the relationship between an individual and others in a society and how they can live free from constant conflicts. This theory describes that people can be bound morally by a set of rules that will benefit each individual and the group as a whole if they are followed. These rules can be broken under the terms of reciprocity in that the individual can now be subjected to consequences or punishment. This punishment is therefore justified since the initial moral rules were disobeyed.

The relationship between these rules and the social contract theory is best described by Hobbes as he states that in order for everyone to coexist they must allow for a government or mortal god to be established that can offer the security and enforcement of laws and regulations.

In his attempt to persuade Socrates to flee Athens, Crito realizes part of the thought process that Socrates uses in making this important decision. Throughout their dialogue, Socrates is challenged with valid reasons for escaping before his death and he successfully disputes each point. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to interpret what I found in the Crito, and offer my viewpoint on Socrates arguments.

The barrage of arguments for Socrates to flee Athens was initiated with Crito s explanation that he and his friends would gladly pay off whoever needs to be compensated and take the possible risk of losing their property and suffering punishment. Crito is insistent that Socrates could easily escape to Thessaly and be out of harms way and backs this up with the argument that Socrates would not be acting in a right way if he did not take him up on his offer. The issue of right and wrong was elaborated upon by Socrates but I didn’t see it applied to Crito s next argument. I believe this to be the most valid of the dialogue as he explains to Socrates that one must not have children, or one should share with them to the end the toil of upbringing and education. (pg. 48) It is difficult to see that Socrates did not even address this argument directly and rather discussed whether he should value the opinions of one man and not others. Or good opinions from wise men over bad opinions from foolish men. This avoidance of an incredibly valid point for fleeing captivity is something that cannot be overlooked as it says something about Socrates character. Can by doing one right act cause you to create an unjust act? This is a question I wish Crito brought up, because in no fashion can Socrates justify leaving his sons to obey the majority s rulings. Even if Socrates had successfully escaped to Thessaly, he would still have a say in the education and upbringing of his sons. There is a bond that is created when you become a father and unless Socrates had done an act that justified death, you should do all in your power to maintain that bond with your children.

Socrates then goes on to point out the reasons why he should continue to do the right thing since this is what he and Crito have done to this point. He admits he was wrong in his actions and justifies his decision to stay by stating you must never return a wrong action with another wrong action. (pg. 51) This is a valid point that Socrates applies to his current situation, however, he never clearly states if what he did was wrong in his eyes. He only stated that the majority thought he was wrong in his actions and therefore he must suffer the consequences.

He also justifies his decision by ideas that relate to the Social Contract theory when he stated that he came to an agreement that is just with someone and he must fulfill that agreement. (pg. 52) He refuses to harm the city and states that he has a contract with the city and by fleeing would break that contract. I found his foresight into what the city would say of his escaping imprisonment his most profound and well thought justification for staying and facing his execution. The statements Socrates made regarding his loyalty to Athens portrayed the apologetic side of Socrates much deeper than any other part of the dialogue between he and Crito. He stated on what the city would say, …you have no desire to know another city or other laws; we and our city satisfied you. (pg. 54) He continues with, You are breaking the undertakings and agreements that you made with us without compulsion or deceit, and under no pressure of time for deliberation. It is clear that the city has been more congenial to you than to other Athenians. (pg. 55) These statements seem to be the core of Socrates thinking in why he should face the execution and avoid any persuasion by Crito. He has an incredible loyalty to Athens and he should for it has brought him to his highest successes and to his lowest failures.

The last dialogue between Socrates and Crito ended with the words: … and let us act in this way, since this is the way god is leading us. (pg. 56) This statement clearly showed how Socrates attaches what he believes to God, and how he believes what he chooses will be justified by God. This is not surprising considering the times, but it helps to see how Socrates thinks and how he formed his well stated arguments to Crito. Socrates is clearly arguing that he would rather do right as in obeying the city s request and leave his sons than flee and bring them up and educate them. This, according to Socrates, is what God wants and it is the way God is leading Socrates. So if I understand the reading correctly, he puts his priorities in doing the just action and obeying the city that was so loyal to him over the upbringing of his sons. As I stated earlier, this does not make a clear justification in my eyes and it should not have been overlooked.

On page 56, Socrates proclaims he is consumed by the reasoning he just described and therefore must follow them to his execution. Socrates explained his justification for staying very well and has clearly altered Crito s opinion towards the matter. I found myself agreeing with Socrates words in all but one of his theories where he neglects to mention the fate of his children and how they will be affected by his absence. This, in my opinion, should have been the one factor that caused Socrates to rethink his decision and to avoid execution at all costs.