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During medieval times, people were burned at the stake as a legal form of punishment. Joan of Arc died in this manner.

If the Inquisitor wanted to be sure no relics were left behind by an accused (and convicted) heretic, he would select death by burning at the stake as the preferred method of execution. With few exceptions, death came from being burned alive.

One can only imagine the victim's sheer terror as raging flames began to consume human flesh. One can only imagine the piercing cries of anguish as the first flames lapped the victim's body.

Frequently, burning a victim at the stake was cause for a crowd. Not content to merely learn about the spectacle after it was over, the masses wanted to be entertained.

Reflecting on those facts - and realizing that such events occurred "under the law" - one can clearly understand how Thomas Hobbes (this is a contemporary biography) came to the conclusions he did about man in a state of nature.

If mankind is capable of such inhumanity in a state of civilization, of what is he capable when there are no laws and there is no society?

NOTE:

The instruments of torture depicted in this story, and made available in exhibitions throughout the world, are owned by a group of Italian scholars. The purpose of the exhibition is to acquaint people with the types of horrendous torture routinely inflicted during the Middle Ages. For more on the exhibit, follow this link.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BURNING-AT-THE-STAKE-Torture-Instruments-from-Medieval-Times)

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Fig. 341.—The Water Torture.—Fac-simile of a Woodcut in J. Damhoudere's "Praxis Rerum Criminalium;" in 4to, Antwerp, 1566.

Medieval Inhumanity - Illustration

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