

Capitalism and Morality

HOBBS AND LOCKE: A CONFUSED CAPITALIST AND HIS “COUNTERPOINT”

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The Value of all things contracted for, is measured by the Appetite of the Contractors: and therefore the just value, is that which they be contented to give.

Thomas Hobbes

John Locke (1632-1704) is the modern philosopher regularly associated with economic thought and capitalism because of the *Second Treatise of Government* emphasizes minimal rights and private property. However, most critics do not even realize Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) has a vague economic theory. Instead, Hobbes is viewed as the philosopher that sees government as a living entity, a *Leviathan*. Although *Leviathan* is political philosophy (and an early political science), it alludes to an economic theory that is actually quite similar to Locke's theory expressed in the *Second Treatise of Government*. Even though *Leviathan* has premises and conclusions that are ludicrous, by comparing and contrasting the political philosophies and economic implications of *Leviathan* and the *Second Treatise of Government*, we will see why Locke's economic theory is not a true counterpoint to Hobbes.

Both philosophers were English and Oxford educated, but other than these two similarities, their lives were quite different. Thomas Hobbes was the son of a poor vicar who died when Thomas was young. His wealthy uncle took responsibility for Thomas' upbringing, but by his early teens, he was already off to Oxford. After receiving his B.A. he landed a job as a tutor for the son of an earl. He grew to love Euclid's *Geometry*, adopted Francis Bacon's respect for science, and was inspired by Galileo's theory of motion. Between 1642-1648 he observed the turmoil of the English Civil War. As we will later see, all these factors resulted in the *Leviathan*'s pessimistic outlook towards the Nature of Man, need for stability, and the method used to make his argument (one similar to the method used for geometric proofs).

John Locke was the son of bourgeois Puritan parents. His father was a captain in the Parliamentary army in the English Civil War. Also, his education was pivotal in influencing his philosophy. He went to the Westminster school where he was one of the few students to receive a stipend; after Westminster, he went to Christ Church, Oxford. Like Hobbes he did not embrace the Aristotelian philosophy at Oxford. His middle class lifestyle, father's allegiance in the English Civil War, and his education are evident in his *Second Treatise of Government*.

Two Differing Views on the State of Nature

In both *Leviathan* and the *Second Treatise of Government* the State of Nature is used to illustrate why a social contract and government are preferable to the State of Nature. The State of Nature is a hypothetical illustration of how man would function without a state; it is hypothetical for both writers because there is obviously a functioning state in both of their lifetimes. Hobbes originally used the State of Nature approach in *Leviathan*, and Locke borrows this method but redoes the entire premise and outcome. This method of illustration became common to explain how man functions inherently, outside the boundaries of law. Each philosopher's depiction of the State of Nature is completely different from the other, and this leads to completely different forms of governance.

Hobbes depicts the State of Nature as a state of pure violence. Selfishness leads to a violent conclusion when people kill one another in order to gain what they want. Everyone is equal in Hobbes' State of Nature because each has the ability to kill one another on a whim. There is no moral code in Hobbes' State of Nature; the law of nature is: anything goes. Hobbes explains that even the toughest and strongest are inherently equal in the State of Nature because they are vulnerable when they sleep. Hobbes then explains that man is selfish but also reasonable, and this selfishness will lead to a desire to live, since all men want that. This desire to live, paired with reason, is the basis for the social contract that will soon produce the *Leviathan*.

Locke does not see the State of Nature as such a horrible place. He depicts the State of Nature as a place where family units (man, wife, and children) survive with the help of one another. In the State of Nature, people can use their labor to gain property, and it is only limited by the ability to use what is produced by the land before any goes to waste. The State of Nature has a moral law, implied negative rights, which people generally do not violate. When someone violates this moral code, the innocent have the right to punish the offender, but this can lead to a State of War. The State of War is similar to Hobbes' State of Nature in that fighting continues until the originally innocent are compensated. Locke points out that the State is better at negotiating exits to the State of War than the State of Nature. Locke also explains that the state of Nature's moral code can often be violated since there is no specific law to punish offenders without entering a State of War. With both Hobbes and Locke, this desire for stability, although less violent with Locke, is the primary motivation for establishing of the State.

The Role of the State

For Locke, the State's primary purpose is to protect the citizen's rights to life, liberty, and property of all those that agreed to the social contract. Given his upbringing, Locke highly disliked the idea of the state being ruled by a King; his *First Treatise on Government* was devoted to disproving Sir Robert Filmer's argument for the Divine Right of Kings. Locke explains that there can be a variety of governments, from democracy, to oligarchy, to monarchy, but it is up to the majority to choose which is best for ruling. He stresses the importance of the legislature in governing the state. He addresses the separation of power and its importance in continuing the protection of the citizen's rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke is commonly viewed as a great capitalist in his stress for negative rights and the importance of protecting a person's earnings. We will return to Locke's economic theory after thoroughly digging through Hobbes' *Leviathan* to find his vague economic theory.

Hobbes' *Leviathan* is much more vague than Locke's state, but considering Hobbes' outlook on the State of Nature and Nature of Man, he needs something to control the bloodshed. So the citizens choose to make a social contract to ensure some stability and peace. Given the selfish nature of the citizens, they would be unable to maintain a peaceful social contract with one another. So the citizens willingly enter a social contract where they submit to the will of a separate ruling entity, the sovereign, the ruling force, the *Leviathan*. This sovereign is trusted to make positive laws that will ensure stability and peace of the

people that entered the contract. The sovereign can make any law it deems fit; there are no moral boundaries in the state of nature, nor is there any natural law. The sovereign seems to have an abundance of power, with nothing to keep it in check.

Hobbes argues that the *Leviathan* would not overuse its power to make positive laws because it would fear losing the power it was entrusted. Throughout the *Leviathan* there is a definite fear of civil war. Hobbes' State of Nature was purely civil war, so as far-fetched as blind faith in the *Leviathan* may seem, the sovereign understands that abuse of power will result in a return to State of Nature and loss of lives (primarily those that were part of the sovereign). For Hobbes, the people that enter the social contract, or commonwealth, have the power to overthrow their government. This is an idea that we do not fully grasp today due to the overwhelming power of the military, but in 17th century England, civil war could destroy the existing government. So the sovereign's abuse of power had definite repercussions for the people that make up the sovereign; therefore, the *Leviathan* has a definite reason not to overuse its power.

The *Leviathan* is not as specific as Locke's government. The *Leviathan* has the ability to make and enforce any law it sees fit to ensure the protection of the commonwealth. The *Leviathan* can be one man or a body of men; this shows that Hobbes, unlike Locke, did not take a particular side in the battle between the king and the parliament. Although the *Leviathan* wishes to ensure its continued dominance, if the sovereign consists of men, and men do not have the ability to establish peace without the *Leviathan*, it seems like the *Leviathan* would eventually cave in on itself, since it is made from these same selfish men. Because Hobbes used a technique similar to a geometric proof to write *Leviathan*, his end government is derived from the Nature of Man. So by understanding Hobbes' Nature of Man, we will better understand why he distrusts man but, somehow, trusts the *Leviathan*.

The Economics in Hobbes' Nature of Man

Hobbes had a very simple attitude towards the Nature of Man. Influenced by Galileo, Hobbes only saw man as an organism in motion and mechanism. He expands this by explaining that the senses, speech, and reason are used to satisfy the impulses or appetites and aversions. He explains that these appetites and aversions are what lead to the destructive Nature of Man, and this is why man uses reason to form a stable political system, the *Leviathan*.

To Hobbes, these appetites and aversions are not just part of man's personality, they are the driving force for all action. These include required appetites and aversions, like eating and sleep, but these are only a small part of the appetite. Appetites are continually changing things in each man that drive them to pursue goals, and each man has different appetites (each of differing strength). Hobbes transitions from appetites to man's desire in power (has an appetite for it). Man seeks to have as much as those around him or more power than he already has. This is not power of force, but rather power from riches, reputation, etc.

He then explains that power resists and hinders the effects of others and that this power can command the power of other men. Man continually desires more and more power, and he will only cease striving for it when he dies. Throughout life, man desires to gain more power without losing any of his. Considering Hobbes' definition of power (riches and reputation), he really is describing a free market economy. Hobbes even explains a working value theory: "the value of all things contracted for, is measured by the Appetite of the Contractors: and therefore the just value, is that which they be contented to give." A free market economy is the only thing that would support man's pursuit of power. This is the only evidence for an economic system throughout all of *Leviathan*.

Given this premise that man acts and his actions are towards gaining power, it is no wonder why man fears Hobbes' State of Nature. To Hobbes everyone has selfish tendencies, but the chaos of the State of

Nature allows these tendencies to result in violence. This is why man tries to establish a social contract, so he no longer has to fear loss of power to a person using force. The *Leviathan* is actually created in order to prevent force, since Hobbes views this as the problem with the Nature of Man without political restriction.

Hobbes goes into little detail explaining the actual role of the *Leviathan*. The commonwealth transfers authority to the *Leviathan* in order to maintain peace. So the sole responsibility of the *Leviathan* is to make any law necessary to ensure peace. Hobbes' lack of detail regarding the specifics of the *Leviathan* alludes to a minimal state (since it has no role other than establishing peace). It is still difficult to understand how a political body can ensure peace when man has no sense of peace in the State of Nature. Regardless of the huge holes in the *Leviathan*, we can now see why Hobbes does not neglect the importance of economic theory in his work; he just implies it more than he actually addresses it.

Locke's Up Front Approach to Economics

Unlike Hobbes, who only alludes to his economic theory, Locke spells out the importance of his economic theory in life. He starts by explaining how man possesses his body and the work that the body does. He expands the possession of work to the property he cultivates. Through working land and cultivating it, he gains it as property. Locke then limits it by not allowing man to waste. If he cultivates so much that it goes to waste, he only has the right to possess what he can use without wasting. Money, since it is non-perishable, then becomes the way for people to accumulate wealth. He explains that morals exist and can be violated, but just punishment can be given for breaking this moral code. These violations of the moral code can lead to a State of War, which would be long and bloody (like Hobbes State of Nature); so Locke explains the parliamentary approach to protecting these natural rights.

Rather than leaving the details of government vague in hopes that only a minimal government, Locke spells out the details of his government. The legislative body, that creates the laws, is made up of those who own land (since they wish to protect their right to property). There is a supreme executive to enforce the law, but it does not have the ability to enact law. The executive branch is a very watered down version of a king; Locke realizes the stability of a single executive but does not like how the executive can issue laws favoring himself. There must also be an objective judicial system to try the cases of violation of these rights and laws. This system is almost second nature to Americans since it is the system our forefathers chose to adopt. However, it is obvious that we are only a shadow of what was initially intended.

Hobbes V. Locke

Although most critics view each as a completely different philosopher, their goals were very similar; it was the method that was altogether different. Hobbes took one of the first stabs at political science, but his extremely negative view towards man leaves few in agreement with any form of positive government that method produces. Locke on the other hand was adopted by our forefathers, but as time went on, even the most detailed instructions on how to maintain rights began to crumble. So after understanding the two separately, we can now bring them into comparison with one another.

Passing over Hobbes' pure movement motive, man desired power, but soon violently took it from one another. Locke's view on the eventual State of War is very similar to this. Locke understands that the State of Nature has no proper way to punish the offenders of the moral code. So the reason for establishing government is very similar, both philosophers want stability and want to limit the amount of violence that tends to occur without a political system.

The established governments that result are altogether different, but that is mainly because Locke detested the idea of kings while Hobbes did not care who prevented the violence, as long as it was prevented. As different as these social contracts were enacted, each government has a check against abuse of power: Locke divides the power into branches and Hobbes recognizes that the *Leviathan* will be attacked by its own commonwealth if the *Leviathan* abuses its power. Despite of how they each appear, both forms of government are very minimal.

Regarding economic thought, it is hard to establish direct similarities with one another. Locke explained a method for how labor results in private property, and how the later introduction of money ensures that cultivated goods will not spoil and go to waste. Hobbes sees that desire for riches is inherent in man's grasp for power. Hobbes is very vague, but he does demonstrate that he has an understanding of a theory of value and an economic system that needs stability and peace to work.

After analyzing the two philosophers, they appear to be two completely different routes to the same goal. Hobbes depicts man as a horribly violent and selfish man. There is no doubt that man is selfish and violent, but Hobbes over exaggerates these attributes in the Nature of Man when formulating his political philosophy. Locke used the State of Nature to depict how moral law cannot fully function without a minimal political system. So he crafts a very detailed and intricate system in order to best protect the rights of the citizens who are willing to sacrifice authority for peace and stability.

Both philosophers understand the violent Nature of Man and build a philosophy around the idea that violence must be stopped by the political system. Locke preferred the parliamentary approach and Hobbes just wanted whatever worked. Locke defined the economic system he wished to defend while Hobbes only alludes to a system that is being saved by his *Leviathan*. Although Locke is referred to as Hobbes' counterpoint, their goals are almost identical.

Resources and Further Readings

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