

THOMAS HOBBS: THE MODERN ECONOMIST

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the influence of Thomas Hobbes's work on the modern economic thought, especially within the Marxist, Neoclassic and Keynesian schools. Instead of just focusing on philosophy or law, this philosopher's theoretical work displays a methodological, anthropological and institutional purpose that has profound significance, and which offers an in-depth look at commercial society, the role of the individual, the marketplace, and the State as basic institutions of his time. Hobbes is the inspiration for a tradition that assumes the State and society as a monolithic unit. Attempts by a large part of the tradition of economic thought can be understood, according to his legacy, as ways of technically justifying the central planning of individuals' thinking and the control of their social actions.

Keywords: *Economic Thought; Social Engineering; Marxism; Seized Information; State.*

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Thomas Hobbes: El economista moderno

Resumen:

El presente artículo busca proponer un acercamiento a la influencia del pensamiento de Thomas Hobbes y su obra en el pensamiento económico. En especial en las escuelas marxista, neoclásica y keynesiana. El influjo de su pensamiento puede evidenciarse en el abordaje metodológico, antropológico e institucional. Se ofrece una Mirada sobre la sociedad civil (comercial), el Mercado y el Estado al mismo tiempo. Hobbes ha sido la inspiración de un concepto de Estado monolítico en lo político, en este sentido, la mirada de la economía bajo el concepto de un gran planificador centralizado, tiene importantes antecedentes en este autor. El ejercicio del control social del individuo como propuesta institucional, en varias escuelas de la economía comparten con Hobbes, varios antecedentes que merecen ser analizados.

Palabras Clave: *pensamiento económico; ingeniería social; marxismo; información secuestrada; estado.*

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Introduction

If we want to understand the history of human thought metaphorically, like stars forming a constellation (stars that, by the way, do not exist beyond the imagination of whom established their trace for the first time in the Ancient world), we will make a huge mistake. Political, philosophical and economic thought must always be understood like series of traditions that emerge, develop, take shape and decline through the years, always formed over the warmth of history. Each philosopher is, without a doubt, a ‘natural’ product of his time. Nevertheless, from time to time, some thinkers represent turning points within their own traditions, and therefore constitute themselves as the foundations for generations to come. In the following pages the reader will find an outline of the importance that Thomas Hobbes has represented for the modern and contemporary economic thought, of how his influence is still felt today in the philosophy but also in the design and carrying out of public policies that aim to constantly modify the social world through the wishes of a planner, a modernized version of the wise legislator found in the Ancient world.

Hobbes has been systematically ignored as a relevant author within the economic thought. There are treatises that have addressed him in detail from the methodological and theoretical point of view, but his importance as an economic thinker has been overlooked. Among the authors that have written about the philosopher of Malmesbury are Ferdinand Tönnies (1988; 2001),

C.B. McPherson¹ (2005), Quentin Skinner (2010), Maurice Marks Goldsmith (1966), James M. Buchanan (2009) and Michael Oakeshott (2000). But if we take a look at any textbook of history of economic thought his name does not appear together with the great authors such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, John M. Keynes or Friedrich A. Hayek. It is true that his work has enjoyed recognition from the fields of political philosophy, law, or even sociology, but it has been ignored from the standpoint of economics, despite the fact that the English thinker would establish a tradition fallen by many sociologists, law theoreticians, economists, and other social sciences thinkers. All of them are in debt with Hobbes in adopting the formal structure of doing ‘science’ *more geometrico* applied to the study of human action. Moreover, Hobbes plays a fundamental role in building up the concepts of both *methodological individualism* and *methodological collectivism*. At the same time it can be pointed out that his anthropological model has been used as the groundings for most of the modern social sciences.

The economists from the Marxist School have incurred great debt with him, a debt not recognized enough, since Hobbes’ work establishes the philosophical groundings for the idea of the *Homo economicus*: the description of the predatory man with infinite longing for wealth and power, and the savage and immoral rivalry for achieving them will be called later on capital accumulation. Hobbes develops a *more geometrico* system of axioms, postulates, theorems and corollaries, to justify a scenario of capitalist self-destructive struggle. And he does this through an anthropological construct by means of which he can establish the archetype of the capitalist individual who is in essence egoist, strategic and a maximizer from the rational standpoint², who has as a universal driving force of his action a possessive longing over the material world and the means to satisfy *ad*

¹ Macpherson’s position is especially favorable to the work of Thomas Hobbes: “Hobbes is generally and rightly considered as the most formidable among the English theoreticians. Formidable not because he is difficult to understand but because his doctrine is at the same time overwhelmingly clear, intimidating and detestable. His postulates on the nature of mankind are unpleasant, his political conclusions are conservative, and his logic seems to deny all way out. Nevertheless, despite his theory being so clear in comparison with so many others, his unusual range and depth have exposed it to very different sorts of critics. It has been repeatedly attacked for theological, philosophical and political reasons, and somehow survived with renewed splendor. Since the direct attacks have only made this theory stronger and provided it with perennial fascination, it has been interpreted and even totally reconstructed in our time” (Macpherson, 2005, 28 & 29).

² For a closer look at the concept of rationalism with all its confusions and ambivalences see Blackham (1961).

infinitum his present and future needs³. His work shapes the notion that the individuals leap on an endless search for wealth, material goods, and capital that will allow universal access to all those goods. The processes of capital centralization and concentration as well as the imperialists and freedom fights can be explained only because Hobbes had previously considered the scenario of total warfare, in which the natural driving force of men leads to the destruction of the social organization. The insight that the individual nature holds the seed of social destruction is also due to Hobbes.

Similarly, the Neoclassic School, without acknowledging it, inherits from the philosopher of Malmesbury the figure of the maximizer, calculating agent who understands rationality only from the strategic point of view, who takes decisions in a self-reference way – considering himself as the ultimate goal of all action –, who is considered in an isolated way, without any influence from tradition, customs or culture. No doubt this anthropologic view counts as one of his less recognized legacies.

The concept according to which men are too bad – *homo homini lupus est*⁴ – or too stupid, driven by animal spirits that lead them to err and to the self-destruction of the business cycle, and because of that a tutor must assume the decisions over him, is an idea rooted in Hobbes. Man, due to his predatory condition, will necessarily feel compelled to destroy the social world in which he coexists with others. Under this consideration and assuming the Hobbesian anthropological pessimism it will not seem too odd that, by virtue of his natural ineptitude, the State had to be in charge of the big dispositions on investment and savings, or on the mechanisms for its direction and control; this can be considered as the foundation of the approach of Keynes for his economic Leviathan.

During the 17th century Europe witnesses a renovation of philosophical, political, moral, scientific and religious ideas. The attempt of the late

³Dalmacio Negro points out the following: “The geometric method would allow to go from the premises to the so evident conclusions that would represent the baconian idea of knowledge is power. [Hobbes] had the insight that, applied to all realms of human behavior, its results would have to be revolutionary, and from that moment on the humanist started his scientific career. Leo Strauss judges this change negatively, since the importance acquired then by the science in the young Hobbes goes against his humanism according to the German writer. For example, he points out that it led Hobbes to substitute the historic method suggested in the translation of Thucydides by the scientific method, which eventually represented the decisive move towards the abandonment of practical philosophy” (Hobbes, 2005, 71).

⁴This sentence is commonly attributed to Hobbes and means “...man is a wolf to [his fellow] man, and no man when he does not know who is the other”. First attested in the Latin comedy *Asinaria* by Plautus (254 BC – 184 BC). As a counterpoint Seneca, in his play *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, proposed the formula ‘*homo homini sacra sacra res*’ (man is something sacred for man), showing this way the humanistic spirit of the Latin culture.

Scholastic to keep grounding a theoretical system through Christian theology definitely loses momentum if compared to the social and political movements that are taking place in that century. It is for this reason that the idea of anthropological optimism suggested by the humanism of authors like Juan de Mariana, Tomás de Mercado, Luis de Molina, or even Erasmus of Rotterdam, though still very powerful at the time of the appearance of their works, will eventually end being substituted by the anthropological pessimism that will push authors like Hobbes⁵. We should not forget in this context the possible political causes for this change: the idea of man as a free and good creature in essence, only to be held accountable of his actions by God, does not provide a reason for the need of the State as an intermediary, controller, regulator of life on Earth. On the contrary, the Hobbesian formula of a predatory man, only driven by the egoist longing of collecting things and eventually of obtaining power clearly shows a being in need of a mediator in order to avoid the self-destruction of the species. In order to do so Hobbes will have to cut down the number of qualities that define the human being (as we shall see later, through a mistaken idea of methodological individualism).

Hobbes is one of the modern forefathers of the idea of socialism. His work suggests two ways of planning over the human action: first, it establishes an indirect mechanism that intervenes before the action takes place by manipulating the own mechanisms of motivation, say, replacing the moral assessment with the imposture of law (the notion of ideological control over the motivation of individual action). Secondly, it establishes a more direct way to determine human action, in which coercion is a threat for those who try to avoid what the State expects (the coercive modeling of individual and social human action by the Leviathan-State, and as an effect of this, of the economic dimension). To justify this systematic way of ideological and social planning Hobbes puts together three basic concepts: first, the idea that the State is the only one capable of conceding property – and at the same time of taking it away –, second, the ideological control, and third, the notion that the State must attend the deprived and defenseless as part of its program of legitimacy of the practice of absolute power. In his works we find already the justification of the State as a despotic institution that plans

⁵ Martin Luther inspires this pessimism from the Protestant Reformation, stating that the man is incapable of saving himself alone since his will is ‘slave’, and therefore God’s will eventually imposes on it and in the Final Judgment decides which souls will be rewarded with Heaven. This counter humanism quickly secularizes within the realm of politics during the 17th century, providing a reason for the absolute and laic State that will end up prevailing in most of Europe.

the ideological factor for the human being, showing him what religion must he profess, which books can and cannot read, which ideas are pernicious and which ones must be banned, abducting the imaginary of the individual, giving him a series of particular deliberations on what is good, beautiful, and admirable, as well as what is ugly, disgusting and reprehensible. Likewise, it can be found in his work the idea that the State is the one in charge of giving to each according to their needs, say, of determining the ways of appropriation of the results of work, of establishing property as a prerogative of the sovereign (who does not comply with any pre-established right of the individuals), and the distribution of incomes and recognitions. Likewise, his totalitarian concept of ruling out the individual as a relevant political entity represents a novelty: stripped from his freedom, ideologically controlled by a tutor who makes all the decisions about his beliefs, acceptable ideas, or religion through a *more geometrico* kind of argumentation.

The unifying thread within the schools related to Hobbes economic thought is what we call the fact of *seized information* brought to the field of theory. That is, the action through which vital information about the definition of human being (related to some aspects of man as a social and biological being) is removed from the method; it gives rise to the concept of *homo economicus*, an alienation and denial of man; this 'subject' is simply a prey for his passions, his stimulus for self-referenced action, his priority is the maximization of consumption utility and of production profit. It is accepted as an automaton without any desire for being sociable or recognized by others, previously subtracted from all mechanisms of control of his behavior. Consequently, this man is depicted as being against any sort of pacific and harmonic relationship, a creature that by his anthropological definition is against any mechanism of self-control. By virtue of this the legislator, the planner, the peacemaker, will provide him with exogenously all the information seized from the method, say, will give him ways of relating, limits and goals to 'human' action. This way the State appears and will take care of making possible a world without social classes (to solve the Marxist problem), without economic crisis – recession and unemployment – (to solve the Keynesian dilemma), and without market errors (to arrive to the promise land of perfect competition of the neoclassic economists). Every theoretical framework is based on the denial and seizure, from the standpoint of the method, of the information that allows a decentralized and harmonic social order, and then give that information back from the standpoint of the institutional proposal, one that it is not based on the 'Kingdom of Ends' as suggested by Kant but on the setting of an ultimate end by the planner (modern version of the Philosopher King), who knows better than the rest of men

what is good for them, a strategy that implies the abduction of their freedom. In a word, Hobbes provides to Marxism, Keynesianism and the Neoclassic economists with the tools that allowed all of them to ‘scientifically’ justify how the State should plan human action, since it is implied that individuals cannot take decisions by themselves, say, the State and society project as a monolithic unity. These items will be developed in what follows.

Methodological and epistemological proposal

In this section a structure to deal with three key questions of the Hobbesian methodology will be suggested. These issues have influence in the modern economic theory. This is the order that we will follow in our exposition of them: first, his epistemological approach; second, the anthropological construction; and third, the institutional proposal. Thus, the following table is presented in which a series of understanding frameworks valid for the rest of the present work will be set through some guiding questions.

Table 1. Nature of knowledge in Hobbes and theoretical construction

	Epistemological Questions	Hobbes Contribution
Gnosiológic	Which one is the primary way of knowing?	Through the senses.
Ontological	Which is the nature of what can be known or which is the nature of reality?	For Hobbes the world is an object that can be known and works as a mechanism: <i>causality</i> (everything that takes place in nature has a cause).
Epistemological	Which is the nature of the relationship between who knows (in this case the researcher) and what can be known?	Dualistic nature. Man separated from the environment.
Methodological	How should the researcher proceed in the quest for scientific knowledge?	By means of the fusion of experience and reason. Dualism of ways of reasoning: inductive and deductive.
Anthropological	What is man?	An asocial and unsociable individual, lacking experience; he acts based on self-referenced criteria.
Institutional	How the individual action of man is articulated with the desires and interests of his fellow men?	By means of coercion, fear and force in the hands of a wise legislator, central planner or sovereign Leviathan.
Social Order	What kind of social organization is proposed?	One that is deliberate, planned and centralized. The individual plays no significant role in it.

Source: Pérez y Soto, A. (2013, 12, 54 and 213)

We shall start with the epistemological question. Hobbes can be easily considered as the modern forefather of the so called *methodological individualism*, which claims to set an ‘objective’ study departing from the particular (atom) aspect towards the general (system) one. In order to do so isolates the individual as the basis of the study of the social organization. It claims that as long as the nature of the dissociated individual can be deciphered we will be able to understand in a more complete and deeper way the laws of social behavior and human organization. By reviewing his epistemological proposal we can find clues of the basis that have used a whole series of authors who have adopted his method – even without being aware of it –, and reproduced it within their corresponding disciplines, being present in every case the result of requiring a tutor that substitutes the individual’s will; nevertheless, this has its origin in a particular approach of the methodological individualism, which expects to deny the individual the information about his appetite for sociability and for the recognition of his fellow men, in a way that he ends up being considered as naturally anti-social. Since self-love is the only reference for human action, devoid of his natural tendency to sociability, Hobbes atom-man is very prone to fight and going to war as a permanent way of acting.

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Such individualism is recreated by Hobbes within a fiction called the ‘state of nature’ (2006) or *world without government or State*. Opposing this idea, contemporary authors like Malinowski (1982) in his *Crime and custom in savage society*, question the insight that primitive life is characterized by its lack of laws, anarchy, the primacy of passions, violence and chaos. According to his findings, this description is part of a special Western mythology (from Hobbes to Rousseau) that considers the savage as an unworried, free creature living in a sort of original Arcady. Nevertheless, hypertrophy and not lack of laws is what can be found in each primitive community. He also argues that in savage societies there is a natural psychological tendency towards “... personal interest, ambition and vanity, which are brought into play by means of a special social mechanism, framework of these mandatory actions” (1982, 46).

These methodological tools present in Hobbes work will be called by Hayek (2007) *false individualism*. It is possible to find a great deal of influence of Hobbes over the economic thought if we take into account his methodological approach, since his way of research has been systematically received and applied by a big part of the current economical tradition. His legacy can be clearly found in the Neoclassical school, since it shares the fundamental structure of the method the philosopher of Malmesbury suggested. This same method, also applied by many within the social

sciences, was adopted among other reasons because supposedly offers rigor and credibility based on the alleged neatness and exactness that the mathematical language has to offer. Hobbes will suggest then a science of human action following the geometrical model, thus, through axioms, postulates, corollaries and theorems. The English philosopher joined this way a dominant trend in his age shared by Bacon, Descartes, and even Locke, in which the mathematical reasoning as a way for knowledge is favored.

The dogmatic dream has granted a 'scientific' base for social engineering in all its forms when proclaiming the use of the 'individual reason' as a totem of explanation. Terms like 'science of proletarian revolution' or 'scientific socialism' are not strange to the scholars of social sciences; in the same way, efforts done by the National-socialist movement or fascism in trying to 'scientifically' demonstrate the superiority of one race over another come to mind. It is not by chance that these projects of totalitarian social engineering have diligently looked for the guise of the scientific, since it grants legitimacy to the claims of developing a social order from scratch implementing the design of a social architect that ends up meaning death and destruction always and everywhere (Pérez y Soto, 2013, 12).

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Hobbes methodological individualism, completely assumed by the Neoclassical school as a way of explaining the economic world, understands the individual separated from the social organization. It places him in a state of 'purity', thus, without the influence of a tradition nor customs. It is understood as an individual "prior to the social relationships". This methodological approach can be considered at first glance as an attempt to establish a simile with the natural sciences, in which the phenomena of nature are being studied in an isolated way, dividing systems in as many parts as possible – the same ways as when studying gravity in a vacuum chamber the experiment gets rid of the influence of air. Nevertheless, it could also be considered as a deliberate attempt to establish some gaps within the anthropological knowledge in order to obtain a concept of man that could be used as the base for a specific political proposal, say, absolutism⁶.

As suggested by Colander (2000 & 2000a), the concept of neoclassical economy refers to a school of thought that was active from 1870 to 1920. It was first implemented by the economist Thorsten Veblen who is well known

⁶ "Both terms 'individualism' and 'socialism' are original creations of the followers of Saint-Simon, founders of modern socialism. They first came up with the term individualism to describe the competitive society which they opposed, and then invented the term 'socialism' to describe the central-planned society in which every activity was run under the same principle applied within just one industry" (Hayek, 2009, 62).

for being one of the inspirers of the so-called *institutional economy*. According to Colander, neoclassical economy rests on three points: 1. Methodological individualism; 2. Egocentric instrumental logic; 3. Theory based on the notion of equilibrium (Colander, 2000a; Colander, 2000b); and we should add another: 4. A non-historical concept of society. The turning point between the old classical economy and the neoclassical can be found in Alfred Marshall, who went beyond the study of the social class to concentrate in the individual and the representative firms – agents – (Marshall, 1887, 1965, 1890, 1961, 1923, 1965). The process in the economic field of turning a positivist science goes deeper with Walras, Pigou, Edgeworth and Pareto, who made lots of efforts to establish it as a technique of pure analysis, away from the political conception of its origins (Schumpeter, 1954; Méndez, 1994).

If from within the method aspects like the cultural, familiar, religious, the State and the ways of spontaneous relationship are eliminated, then the man loses the content of his “categorical imperatives”, thus, he loses the content of the multi-referenced weighing of his individual action and, therefore, the effects that those have on the rest of fellow men.

As a consequence his behavior is self-referred, say, his motivation is exclusively focused on the satisfaction of his own natural and individual desires, taking for granted that this man has no social inclination whatsoever, the reason why he is not interested in cultivating a good image of himself. His sole driving force is the satisfaction of his passions. Consequently, we think of a man with no moral, no sense of honor, no respect for others; he is just a predatory force⁷. Under the logic of the Hobbesian methodological individualism the human being left to his own fate, growing up with no ties to the species, does not enjoy the same information, social (institutions) and economical (production, machinery, forms of organization) technologies, tradition or customs his social organization (culture) does. And as a result he

⁷Opposing Hobbes methodological individualism there was an outstanding attempt for establishing an alternative to this incomplete epistemological approach. A group of thinkers trying to recover the holistic sense of what is known today as social sciences emerged in Scotland during the XVII century. Among those authors we find David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson. Particularly Ferguson was able to show how war is just another manifestation of human condition, and its role in human development is also essential for the construction of a civil organization with strong ties. In an attempt to question Hobbes’ position, Ferguson will suggest the following: “Natural productions are generally formed by degrees. Vegetables grow from a tender shoot, and animals from an infant state. The latter being destined to act, extend their operations as their powers increase: they exhibit a progress in what they perform, as well as in the faculties they acquire. This progress in the case of man is continued to a greater extent than if that of any other animal. Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization” (Ferguson, 2008, 41).

cannot discover the positive effects of social cooperation; on the contrary, all his action is focused on rapacity, the fight for loot, self-defense, mugging, and the barbaric life basically devoted to war.

The state of nature shows the way men would behave, being as they are, if there was no authority whatsoever to enforce the law or contracts. Due to the appetitive and deliberate nature of man (that in *Elements* and *Leviathan* is exposed in the first chapters, and that in *De Cive* is highlighted through an analysis of the behavior of men in the society of his time), this is the way in which necessarily men would behave if compliance with the law and contracts is completely eliminated. This behavior would necessarily be an endless fight of all against all; a fight of each and everyone for achieving power over the rest” (Macpherson, 2005, 30).

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According to this, the economic system is understood as a zero-sum game, as a concept based on the context of the struggle for survival; this way other’s prosperity indicates the poverty and privation of oneself. Consequently, the way of relating with others will be a permanent confrontation, a constant fight for submission that leads to a world organized around a big-scale servitude system, first as the effect of the ‘natural’ essence of men, but then as the effect of the artificial institution that builds up.

The Hobbesian individual will not be contemplated as a dynamic subject that is constantly finding new means to get close to his goals; he is simply an automaton that doesn’t have other information than his own passions, unable to take advantage of the technological innovation and thus he finds himself in a state of irreparable scarcity, thrown to a world of necessity and violence, lacking protection other than his physical capacity and cunning to subdue the others.

This conclusion is coherent with the approach that one of the most prominent classical economists would suggest: Thomas Robert Malthus, who expresses a pessimistic vision of human development in connection with the scarce means (in this case, land):

...there is no limit in the productive ability of plants and animals, but when their number is increased they mutually limit each other their subsistence... But in men the effects of this obstacle are very complicated; lead by the same instinct, the voice of reason that inspires him the fear of watching his children with needs that will not be satisfied can stop him... if on the contrary he is influenced by his instinct, the population grows more than the means of subsistence... So the difficulty of feeding on is always an obstacle for the growth of human population” (Malthus, 1846, 2).

This way he formulates his core idea from his limited empirical test:

Therefore we can consider as certain the fact that when it is not prevented from any obstacle population doubles every 25 years, growing each period in a geometric proportion... But the needed food to feed the greater number will not be obtained easily, since men just have a limited space (Malthus, 1846, 4).

Malthus (1846) recommends a mechanism that would control the self-destructive passions of men and limit population growth. His theory and methodological approach both inspired by Hobbes do not allow identifying the natural mechanism of change and transformation of the resources that technology and technical change can implement. That way his economic theory turns apocalyptic so a savior is needed.

Popper would understand this tendency very well not only in economic terms but for the rest of the social sciences, naming them *positive* and being characterized for their reductionism and for building their own (and selective) meta-languages. Regarding this he states the following:

In my opinion, this group of philosophers gets the worst of both worlds. By their method of constructing miniature model languages they miss the most exciting problems of the theory of knowledge—those connected with its advancement. For the intricacy of the outfit bears no relation to its effectiveness, and practically no scientific theory of any interest can be expressed in these vast systems of minutiae. These model languages have no bearing on either science or common sense... The limitations mentioned were imposed upon the model languages simply because otherwise the solutions offered by the authors to their problems would not have worked. This fact can be easily proved, and it has been partly proved by the authors themselves. Nevertheless, they all seem to claim two things: (a) that their methods are, in some sense or other, capable of solving problems of the theory of scientific knowledge, or in other words, that they are applicable to science (while in fact they are applicable with any precision only to discourse of an extremely primitive kind), and (b) that their methods are ‘exact’ or ‘precise’. Clearly these two claims cannot both be upheld (Popper, 2008, 28).

Anthropological notion: the archetype of the *capitalist* individual

Hobbes work is the expression of Cartesian philosophy within the realm of politics. It is a systematic attempt to capture the philosophical speculation from a *more geometrico* framework. As much as we could say there is a Cartesian trend in epistemology we could talk about a Hobbesian trend in

politics. More than an influence of Descartes on Hobbes we should say it went both ways, a methodological insight prevailing in Europe during their time that tried to fill in the gap left by the fall of the Scholastic and syllogisms as the paradigm for knowledge-building⁸. In order to explain the social organization Hobbes will assume the method of decomposing the system to its constitutive parts so the researcher can reconstruct the whole from the understanding of these forming parts. Hobbes is not a holistic theoretician but rather one that implements a system formed by the addition of its parts.

The seventeenth century, indeed, had on both sides of the Channel been an age in which this constructivist rationalism dominated. Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes were no less spokesmen of this rationalism than Descartes or Leibniz—and even John Locke could not entirely escape its influence. It was a new phenomenon which must not be confused with ways of thought of earlier times which are also described as rationalism. Reason was for the rationalist no longer a capacity to recognise the truth when he found it expressed, but a capacity to arrive at truth by deductive reasoning from explicit premises. The older tradition, which had been represented by the earlier theorists of the law of nature, survived chiefly in England in the works of the great common lawyers, especially Sir Edward Coke and Matthew Hale, the opponents of Bacon and Hobbes, who were able to hand on an understanding of the growth of institutions which was elsewhere displaced by the ruling desire deliberately to remake them (Hayek, 1991, 98).

Hobbes has a materialistic and mechanistic conception of the world. His explanations on the phenomena related with men do not come from any magic or metaphysic views – which Descartes would refer to⁹ – but

⁸ It is plausible to suppose that his scientific approach is a consequence of the intellectual environment of the time. About this point Aguilera suggests: “Hobbes and Descartes were working really hard towards achieving certainty within the intellectual world, true knowledge as in Copernic and Galileo. They did not consider themselves as offering ‘philosophical systems’ but contributions to the development of the research in mathematics and mechanics, and as liberators of the intellectual life from the censorship of the (protestant and catholic) ecclesiastic institutions” (Aguilera, 2007, 323).

⁹ The French philosopher, always skeptical about the senses, would say: Accordingly, seeing that our senses sometimes deceive us, I was willing to suppose that there existed nothing really such as they presented to us; and because some men err in reasoning, and fall into paralogisms, even on the simplest matters of geometry, I, convinced that I was as open to error as any other, rejected as false all the reasonings I had hitherto taken for demonstrations; and finally, when I considered that the very same thoughts (presentations) which we experience when awake may also be experienced when we are asleep, while there is at that time not one of them true, I supposed that all the objects (presentations) that had ever entered into my mind when awake, had in them no more truth than the illusions of my

on the contrary he conceives the social order like a big machine that moves as a result of the aggregated effect of the movement of all human beings that they themselves are mechanisms that move as a result of internal and external forces. According to him, men owe their movement to strings, springs and bellows. Their passions are the effect of a mechanic relation with the world. His approach to the Cartesian individualism, his nominalism and mechanicism result in an anxious individual, with infinite desire of possessing the material things of the world in order to satisfy his immediate and not so urgent needs. Hobbes do not comprehend men as a contemplative being concerned about the transcendence of the after world, or a life dedicated to poverty, the alleviation of desire and passion; on the contrary, life is understood as movement, the opposite to the contemplative since there is no soul to cultivate nor save. According to him, the goal of men is to stimulate the vital movement, which translates in the satisfaction of human desires, infinite by definition. While men are sensitive machines, stimuli do not cease as long as they are alive¹⁰. In his essay *The Passions and the Interests* (1978) Albert Hirschman gives an account of the turning point that took place in Europe when the notion of wealth accumulation stopped having a negative connotation and became the *finis ultimus* of human action. Hobbes is aware of this new anthropological configuration but still understands man as a mechanism that wants and acts driven by the idea of taking over everything he can.

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These small beginnings of motion within the body of man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called endeavour. This endeavour, when it is toward something which causes it, is called appetite, or desire, the latter being the general name, and the other oftentimes restrained to signify the desire of food, namely hunger and thirst. And when the endeavour is from ward something, it is generally called aversion. (...) Of appetites and aversions, some are born with men; as appetite of food, appetite of excretion, and exoneration

dreams. But immediately upon this I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, I think, therefore I am (COGITO ERGO SUM), was so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search” (Descartes, 2011, 38).

¹⁰“But while he refrained from drawing the conclusions from them for social and moral arguments, these were mainly elaborated by his slightly older (but much more long-lived) contemporary, Thomas Hobbes. Although Descartes’ immediate concern was to establish criteria for the truth of propositions, these were inevitably also applied by his followers to judge the appropriateness and justification of actions” (Hayek, 2006, 9-10).

(which may also and more properly be called aversions, from somewhat they feel in their bodies), and some other appetites, not many. The rest, which are appetites of particular things, proceed from experience and trial of their effects upon themselves or other men. For of things we know not at all, or believe not to be, we can have no further desire than to taste and try (Hobbes, 1651, 32-33).

Hobbes establishes here the first important point for the contemporary economic thought: man is a being that has desires but also is constantly creating them, he has a possessive way of looking at things in the world, always generating new needs, an individual that goes beyond the basic needs in terms of food, excretion o reproduction, and leaps on the material world to establish new appetites and constantly experience the effects on him of the material things. If these effects turn out to be pleasant those things will eventually become objects of his desire. A constant discoverer of ends, these will present to him as an increasing concern as long as his needs would increase but the means remain the same. Under this scheme is how the concept of man is put together with the idea of infinite needs, something that later on will be assumed by the Neoclassical school under the name of infinite indifferent curves and budget constrains.

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This motion, which is called appetite, and for the appearance of it delight and pleasure, seemeth to be a corroboration of vital motion, and a help thereunto; and therefore such things as caused delight were not improperly called jucunda (a juvando), from helping or fortifying; and the contrary, molesta, offensive, from hindering and troubling the motion vital. Pleasure therefore, or delight, is the appearance or sense of good; and molestation or displeasure, the appearance or sense of evil. And consequently all appetite, desire, and love is accompanied with some delight more or less; and all hatred and aversion with more or less displeasure and offence (Hobbes, 1651, 34).

According to the epistemological proposal that considers the man left to his own fate, lacking all kind of familiar, neighboring, communitarian or state relationships, his moral precepts and values (always coming from a cultural background) would be removed, thus, the concept of what is good will not correspond to an intersubjective assessment. Therefore, in such scenario the good will be identified as what stimulates the vital movement (to quench desires and needs), and the bad will be what holds this movement up. Ultimately, the accumulation of material goods derived from the desire will be understood here as something good for the individual since it helps

to preserve his vital movement¹¹. Having said that, our philosopher will explain the desire for wealth accumulation, say covetousness or greed, as a simple effect of the nature of men given its mechanical constitution and the possessive eagerness. Greed will not be analyzed then in terms of good or bad but as something natural, in the same sense as gravity, tides or earthquakes. He states:

Desire of riches, covetousness: a name used always in signification of blame, because men contending for them are displeased with one another's attaining them; though the desire in itself be to be blamed, or allowed, according to the means by which those riches are sought (Hobbes, 1651, 35).

Grief for the success of a competitor in wealth, honour, or other good, if it be joined with endeavour to enforce our own abilities to equal or exceed him, is called emulation: but joined with endeavour to sup-plant or hinder a competitor, envy (Hobbes, 1651, 37).

The explanation of greed or covetousness as consubstantial to the human being (a feature unjustly criticized according to him) will be related to the idea that individuals are considered among themselves as rivals when obtaining material objects. Currently we would say that the suggested scenario is the fundamental problem of economics: a man that tries to satisfy infinite desires with limited resources – indifference curves that intersect with a budget constrain. To say that greed is bad means to argue that human nature is also bad. But Hobbes does not reach the point of stating this value judgment. He is simply trying to be a neutral, objective narrator that stresses some relevant points of the human nature. Here is where it can be seen one of the most important consequences of the methodological individualism, say, when contemplating the man without cultural background, tradition, customs, family, society nor State, then the individual will simply be a prey of his own passions and will have an insatiable spirit. Greed will not be the outcome of a moral consideration in which men have freely accepted the way of evil but simply the effect of their most intimate instincts. What is being introduced as scientific objectivity is in reality little more than the

¹¹ Dalmacio Negro agrees with Hayek on the theoretical framework from his epistemological and gnoseological approach: “Hobbes, in wanting to free moral philosophy (that included politics back then) from the typical uncertainty of practical philosophy, replaced it with the certainty of theoretical philosophy and the efficacy of poetic or productive philosophy; that way he decisively contributed to the later development of the *constructivist hybris* – in particular judicial constructivism –, an outcome of the supremacy given to those philosophies and of the complete oversight of the practice of the corpus politics pertains to” (Hobbes, 2005, 16).

costume that wears the author to justify the introduction of a tutor like Leviathan in order to avoid being dominated and destroyed by his animal instincts. Hobbes is not objective. His method is intentionally designed to obtain a naturally predatory individual. This is no coincidence nor it will be its institutional results inspired by the anthropologic aspect.

For the economists this question is key. Man's fulfillment on Earth depends on solving an economic problem. Nevertheless, what Hobbes understands by social interaction is not cooperation but rivalry and competition to obtain objects of desire (a negative concept of competition by the way, because if it is not regulated this will lead humankind to self-destruction). The idea of man that Hobbes has in mind is not that of a political or social animal but a *homo economicus* by nature, since his main concern is not sociability nor recognition but the securing of material objects, say, wealth. His happiness will be basically of economic nature:

Continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering, is that men call felicity; I mean the felicity of this life. For there is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense. What kind of felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour him, a man shall no sooner know than enjoy; being joys that now are as incomprehensible as the word of Schoolmen, beatifical vision, is unintelligible (Hobbes, 1651, 39).

Up to this point Hobbes has just suggested a greedy and possessive ambition for hoarding wealth. But its conceptualization makes a qualitative leap when posing the idea of struggle among men for power, since they will not cease in their ambition. Put it in Marxist terms, we could say that the individual is no longer worried for obtaining goods but capital and work force – considered as the capacity of transforming Nature. Additionally, power in Hobbes is considered as the means to obtain material wishes or to arrange others wills in order to obtain them. Also, Hobbes has in mind the time factor in where power represents the property of present means that will allow the satisfaction of future wishes. It is impressive how his work anticipates the logic of Marxist anthropology. His mechanicism¹², possessive ambition and

¹² Since he turns to a false model of methodological individualism he ignores the non-individual incentives of men, say, he doesn't recognize an appetite for sociability as a key feature for the explanation of human behavior. The predatory instinct of the human being is precisely based on the fact that he doesn't acknowledge other human beings as an element to be considered for his own behavior; on the contrary, the others are assumed as a source

inter-temporal vision sustain the idea of struggle against capitalism as Marx and many of his followers would like to explain¹³. In Hobbes' own words:

The power of a man, to take it universally, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good, and is either original or instrumental. Natural power is the eminence of the faculties of body, or mind; as extraordinary strength, form, prudence, arts, eloquence, liberality, nobility. Instrumental are those powers which, acquired by these, or by fortune, are means and instruments to acquire more; as riches, reputation, friends, and the secret working of God, which men call good luck. For the nature of power is, in this point, like to fame, increasing as it proceeds; or like the motion of heavy bodies, which, the further they go, make still the more haste (Hobbes, 1651, 53).

Although Hobbes suggests the concept of power in political terms as the capacity of submission from one man to another it must be noted that, as stated before, the ultimate concern of the human being is to extend his vital movement, say, to stay alive, and linked to this idea to get the satisfaction of desires always by means of material goods, say, wealth. All efforts in achieving power, this is, in getting means, will be a mechanism to ensure the satisfaction of his present and future desires. In relation to this he stated: "Wealth together with liberality is power because it obtains friends and servants" (Hobbes, 1651, 53).

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According to Marx, the work force is what allows the transformation of the resources of Nature into goods, the ones that satisfy human needs. The capitalist entrepreneur, in his ambition towards obtaining profits, will have to deal with the task of taking away from the worker as much work force as possible in order to materialize it in the market in the form of profits as the outcome of the commercial activity.

of fear and violence. It is worth it to point out here the notions of self-recognition and self-contention that Adam Smith considered as the pillars of his anthropology of moral feelings, which in turn would be applied as the bases for the explanation of commercial society: "The human being naturally wishes not only be loved but be kind, say, to be a natural and appropriate object for love. He naturally fears to be hated and hateful, say, to be the natural and appropriate object of hate. He wishes not only to be praised but also to be laudable or a natural and proper object for the praise, although nobody praises him in practice. Not only he fears the reproval but to be reprehensible od to be the natural and proper object of the reproval, although nobody reproaches him anything in practice" (Smith, 1979).

¹³For an in-depth study of the notion of the Marxist anthropology and its clearly predatory and exploitative contents mixed with a specific notion of gender, see Meillassoux (1987) and Godelier (1986).

If we carefully review what both Hobbes (endless search of present means to satisfy future needs understood as the search of power) and Marx suggest about the accumulation of work force to obtain profits (and that way to satisfy his endless desire for wealth), it can be seen then that both authors apply the same logic. The exploitation of the man by the man keeps a logic structure similar to the formula *homo homini lupus est* by Hobbes. They both presuppose an anthropological pessimism¹⁴ of the logic of anxiety and materialism; and also both suggest a man with no moral to be able to hold a self-destroying human nature. Going back to his words:

Felicity is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is that the object of man's desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions and inclinations of all men tend not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life, and differ only in the way, which ariseth partly from the diversity of passions in diverse men, and partly from the difference of the knowledge or opinion each one has of the causes which produce the effect desired. So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all man-kind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more (Hobbes, 1651, 60-61).

Due to the dynamism of his preferences since he is constantly knowing and desiring new things, the human being must ensure the means to access what he wishes in the present, but he also must secure the means for achieving what he still doesn't know yet. The essence of the struggle for power will be of a completely materialistic nature, the economic problem of the struggle for wealth – the satisfaction of needs – that leads to a politic problem – the rivalry for mutual submission. In any case, wealth will represent power, an instrument to achieve such power, and its ultimate object, as stated by

¹⁴ Bovero suggests a link in Hobbes between the world and Nature that is bad for the human being, what is called anthropological pessimism. Its characteristic expression is associated with the use of language due to its flexibility and the capacity to re-direct the sense of words in order to imprint the meaning man looks for in each strategy to satisfy his passionate desires: “three roots of negativity or ‘evil’ of the world that correspond to three aspects of a negative anthropology according to which man is a violent, passionate, and lying animal” (Bovero, 2003, 59).

Hobbes: “The struggle for wealth, pleasures, honors or other forms of power tends to fighting, enmity and war” (Hobbes, 1651, 60).

The concept of man as the builder of himself, as the author of history, and as the designer of social relations has a fundamental precedent in Hobbes. His theoretical structure, found in the works entitled *Elements of Natural and Political Law* and *De Cive*, tried to be loyal to the literal meaning of the Holy Bible in order to demonstrate that there was no contradiction between obeying the political power and the ecclesiastical power since the ruler should also be the chief and arbitrator of the Church – or churches – and its doctrine. Nevertheless, the reading of the Bible will leave a profound impression in Hobbes, because concepts like fallen nature and redemption in terms of a constant dialectic are present in all his works. Two key moments can be distinguished in the *Leviathan*: in the first one we can notice a man leaning towards error – which bears a clear resemblance to the figure of the sinner – that destroys his environment through his action; and in the second one a mortal God intercedes transforming social relations and man as well.

This way the socialist concept of creating a new man, that man can emancipate from his own capacities, his own weaknesses, and move towards a more perfect nature, has its origin in Hobbes. The individual can overcome his own imperfect nature and move towards a more harmonic stage. This concept of progress was received by many philosophers of the 19th century that were the foundation for most of the philosophy in which contemporary law and economics are based upon¹⁵. As Ludwig von Mises suggests it:

The three most popular pre-Darwinian } philosophies of history of the nineteenth century—those of Hegel, Comte, and Marx—were adaptations of the Enlightenment’s idea of progress. And this doctrine of human progress was an adaptation of the Christian philosophy of salvation. Christian theology discerns three stages in human history: the bliss of the age preceding the fall of man, the age of secular depravity, and finally the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. If left alone, man would not be able to expiate the original sin and to attain salvation. But God in his mercy leads him to eternal life. In spite of all the frustrations and adversities of man’s temporal pilgrimage, there is hope for a blessed future. The Enlightenment altered this scheme in order to make it agree with its scientific outlook. God endowed man with reason that leads him on the road toward perfection. In the dark past superstition and sinister machinations of tyrants and priests restrained the exercise of this most precious gift bestowed upon man. But at

¹⁵ Carl Schmitt states that it is not possible a politics without having a potential or real enemy, without an internal or external menace. In the case of Hobbes and his state of nature, the *external enemy* is anybody other than himself (Schmitt, 2004).

last reason has burst its chains and a new age has been inaugurated. Henceforth every generation will surpass its predecessors in wisdom, virtue, and success in improving earthly conditions. Progress toward perfection will continue forever. Reason, now emancipated and put in its right place, will never again be relegated to the unseemly position the dark ages assigned to it (Mises, 1957, 171).

The Creation of a New Man

It is clear to Hobbes that human nature is something pernicious, harmful for itself and potentially dangerous for the individuals that live with him. If peace is desired it is not enough with the institution of the State-Leviathan, since the solution to the situation of permanent confrontation will necessary require shaping the human condition, extinguishing the greed naturally found in him. In order to achieve it the use of coercion and the proliferation of fear will be necessary to shape a new style of humanity. A servile, obeying, vassal individual by definition is required to blindly follow the plans of the ruler. On Marxist terms we would say that a process of alienation in which man denies himself as a free being is required to become an instrument man, an empty concept that would simply follow the well-meaning guidance of the ruler-Leviathan. It is not a negative legislation limited to the simple prohibition of certain harmful behaviors that could affect the ability of living and working of the individuals. Far from this, what the Leviathan expects is to intervene directly in the sociological motivation of the human being: to interrupt, shape or re-direct his deliberate chain in which profits (pleasures) and difficulties or works (pain) are considered as the effects of a decision. The goal of the law will be to fill with fear to avoid certain behaviors and also as a negative reinforcement, setting up a governing function over human behavior. It should be noted that faith, believes, religious doctrines, and the expression of opinions that can be considered as ‘seditious’ and against peace or the exercise of power by the ruler, these are all regulated. Concurrently to the macro-planning of human action or big-scale socialism there is also the ambition of transforming the man from within, from his emotions, fears, believes, and from the way he sees the world around him. The *finis ultimus* of the hobbesian State is to transform the motivation of human action and surrender it to the interest of the sovereign, achieving this way the preservation of peace when removing the conflict of interests (since the *raison d'état* or general interest would come first).

The application of a Hobbesian-Cartesian false individualism, say, of assuming the idea that man lacks social relations, left its mark on the economic thought. A good example of this can be found in the Physiocratic

school, specifically in the work of Morelly (1755) entitled *Le code de la Nature*, where he defends these ideas:

According to the economists the State not only has to deal with governing the nation, but also to shape it in a certain way; it has the task of shape the spirit of citizens according to some sort of model adopted in advance; its duty consists of infusing certain ideas and to hammer into their hearts those feelings that would consider necessary. In fact, there are no limits for its rights nor boundaries for what it can do; the State does not only reform men but also transforms them; it could turn them into others if it wanted to! The State does whatever it pleases to with men (Morelly, 2010, 256).

This also reminds the socialist discourse which expects to deny, ban or outlaw a certain type of goods or services due to their bourgeois nature and opposing to the interests of the proletarian class, or simply because these can corrupt young minds with inappropriate ideas. These are expressions of what Hobbes suggested and that the systems of central planning have carried out in the Western world. In the political discourse of the last century these references to the suppression of egoism, evil, or ambition from man as a way towards happiness were common.

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Institutional Proposal

Thomas Hobbes received a number of intellectual influences that have had a large treatment in the literature on his work. We should emphasize here the following authors: Thucydides¹⁶, Aristotle, Ockham, Bacon, Harvey, Galileo¹⁷, among many others. The most well-known and brilliant works in this sense come from Ferdinand Tönnies and Karl Schmitt, but also from C.B. Macpherson, among others. Nevertheless, these works have neglected an outstanding influence in his theoretic system: Plato. Hobbes is Platonic both in his epistemological conception and in his institutional proposal. At the same time he shows his disaffection with Aristotle as well as with what the Greek philosopher represents for the method of science – the Scholastic.

¹⁶An interesting vie won the importance of Thucydides, his analytic structure, and the relevance he had for the Ancient and Modern thought can be found in Strauss (2007, 142).

¹⁷“Hobbes had added to his Galilean mechanicism a strong admiration for the methodic rigor of Euclidian geometry. If mechanicism required him to start by sensory perceived reality, his inclination towards the method of geometry allowed him to separate from that basic reality and to elaborate right away the simplest elements of science: signs, names, and first definitions... The fact is that we can find empiric elements in his works but not empiricism; and there is even a certain disdain of the experiment in order to embrace the synthetic method in a very similar way to the continental rationalism” (Torres de Moral, 1992, 246).

Hobbes and Plato extol reason as the universal totem of knowledge. They both are aware of the confusing nature of the senses and the continuous tendency to error men have, and since this is certain it is the duty of the philosophers (those who have a privileged access to the world of Ideas) to exercise legitimate power over the rest of men. Despite the fact that Hobbes stated as an axiom that all men are equal, what is really behind his proposal of the Leviathan is that government is a sort of aristocracy – the government of the best men – where those who are in power have a special access to the world of Ideas and can lead men better than what they could do by themselves. We could not conceive any other way the concept of the big-scale social planner represented by the Leviathan.

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If we follow to the letter the Hobbesian reflection we then discover how ignorant the ruler is with his subjects because all of them are inclined to passions in the same way, they are all prone to error, that fallible nature is present in the actions of both rulers and subjects. That any form of government would have terrible effects since it would mean to grant a man (predatory by nature) with superpowers that would allow him to loot the rest if necessary, leading them to war and famine to secure his power over all of them. This would not be a an uplifting scenario for those who find themselves in the state of nature, since it would not represent a significant or real advance compared to their uncertain situation.

The only way we can explain that society can improve after the agreement *social contract* represents is by supposing that the rulers possess a superior wisdom and can make better decisions. If this were not the case (incompetent rulers) those who are governed would find themselves in a worst situation since they expose themselves to live a situation of servitude facing a group of people in power that have the means and the authorization to invade each field of human action. Such authority will decide, for example, how wealth appropriation will take place according to what they understand by property. The figure of the wise legislator appears here as the logical antecedent of the central planner.

As long as supposedly they understand better than anybody else, these rulers can feel allowed to take the place of the rest of human beings in the decision making. Their actions would not correspond to the interest of individuals but they would be the outcome of vanity, of believing they are superior to the rest, and their mistakes caused by the use of absolute power will have not only immediate effects but will reach beyond their understanding. Hayek will call this behavior the *intellectual arrogance* in the economic science.

The idea of planning the economy, of socializing means of production, will always be considered inspired by Plato. Since the philosopher king can completely access to the world of Ideas (knowledge) can come to the conclusion he knows best what is good for society, he may want to establish a big-scale coordination of human action. Consequently, the figure of the wise legislator is the logical antecedent of the Leviathan State and this, in turn, of the concept of central planning of the economy. Planning, when understood as a tool for an idyllic (utopic) project, is not a modern idea. Even Plato would mention the idea of a primitive communism to be ideally found among the members of the ruling class, in which nobody but the State would be allowed to possess gold in order to avoid disputes among them. In modern times and using the same strategy the State appears as the owner of property to avoid conflicts caused by the ambition of possessing material goods. The State is the one that ultimately decides about the possession, domain, use and benefit of property, something that individuals control temporarily since the State is the owner of the property, and can take it away from them at any time in the name of the reason of State, say, of the ruler's will¹⁸. Hobbes is one of the forefathers of the idea according to which human nature is self-destructive, namely, that man left to his own fate and without any supervision will be the responsible for his own tragedy; eventually, that the individual nature is incompatible with a harmonic social order, and because of this it will be necessary the intervention of a designer imposing his will over the rest of individuals. Hobbes thinks of the State as a big machine created to control the passionate and harmful essence of men. According to its logic all the information seized to the individuals from the method (the forms of coordination of social action coming from the family, tradition and customs) will now be provided by the State. Under its tutelage definitions of good and bad actions, what is admirable and despicable, honorable and

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¹⁸ C.B. Macpherson draws attention to the work of Hobbes stating that it faithfully represents the scenario of a full market economy, and although this statement can be considered a bit out of any historic reality, it is unquestionable that the philosopher of Malmesbury witnessed most of the institutional changes that made possible the organization of a society based on commerce. According to this it is interesting to point out the assumptions of Macpherson's model of a 'possessive market society', and keep them in mind as a guide on the events that took place during the 17th century in Europe: "1. There is no authoritarian allocation of work. 2. There is no authoritarian allocation of compensations for work. 3. There is a definition of contracts done by an authority. 4. Each individual tries rationally to maximize his profits. 5. The working capacity of each individual is his own inalienable property. 6. Land and resources are the alienable property of individuals. 7. Some individuals wish a higher income and power level. 8. Some individuals have more energy, capacity or goods than others" (Macpherson, 2005, 61).

dishonorable will be provided by means of a decision that depends entirely of the will of the ruler.

Hobbes then follows the tradition of the wise legislator in the form of a central planner who will exhaustively intervene on all human dimensions including economics. One of the most profound causes of conflict is the economic activity, namely, the forms of appropriation of wealth and the dispute for the means (capital) to achieve it. Thus the State, in order to eliminate the risk of general confrontation, is introduced as an arbitrator that imposes peace through coercion assigning property.

A radically opposed conception of general confrontation among individuals of a community can be found in the works of the French bishop Nicholas Oresme (Oresme, 1956), who basically argues that the main focal point of such ‘unrest’ within society comes from the ruler whenever he does not behave as such. The context of Oresme’s accusation is the alteration of currency done by the greedy rulers of his age:

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Therefore, from the moment when the prince unjustly usurps this essentially unjust privilege, it is impossible that he can justly take profit from it. Besides, the amount of the prince’s profit is necessarily that of the community’s loss. But whatever loss the prince inflicts on the community is injustice and the act of a tyrant and not of a king, as Aristotle says. And if he should tell the tyrant’s usual lie, that he applies that profit to the public advantage, he must not be believed, because he might as well take my coat and say he needed it for the public service. And Saint Paul says that we are not to do evil that good may come. Nothing therefore should be extorted on the pretence that it will be used for good purposes afterwards (Oresme, 1956, 24).

As clearly state in the quote, the ruler would not differ from the rest of men on his main motivation (greed, in Hobbesian reductionist terms). But when this is the case, according to Oresme, the ruler stops being that wise figure that inspires good actions to the rest of the members of the community so he becomes a tyrant. It is clear that the moral evaluation of the Leviathan would be negative in Oresme, in contrast with the neutrality (or even approval) that Hobbes holds about his absolute will. It is precisely such excess of greed that comes from the government what represents for Oresme the main source of conflict (instead of considering it as the solution like Hobbes does), and not the alleged selfish nature of human beings.

Let us return to the analysis of the framework suggested by Hobbes: while one of the essential problems of the state of nature is that all men have the right to possess all things, and that they can access to *any means* to

achieve them, one of the main tasks of the State will be to plot against this. It will do it two ways: first it will limit the means by setting up limits by law; second, it will establish what has to be assigned to each man. The State becomes this way an arbitrator of the economic activity, assigning how and who gets the appropriation of profits, therefore, the ways of getting access to wealth and capital accumulation. While Hobbes has been considered as a liberal author because of his consideration of all men being equal, the basic task of the State will be to eliminate such equality since this is the only way to secure peace according to him. The allocation of property is a key point in the institutional matter that justifies the idea of the State as a planner of the economic activity in order to promote inequality.

John Maynard Keynes owes a great deal to this argumentation. For example, it helps understand his notion of some ‘animal spirits’ controlling the human behavior, and that for this reason individuals show a considerable tendency to make mistakes, deepening the business cycle with prolonged recessions due to imbalances between savings and investments due to the inability of men to generate a self-sustainable spontaneous order, etc. This is clearly a Hobbesian idea. And, particularly, the idea that the State must play the role of a guarantee of the economic activity in order to limit human ambition. These are all insights shared by both authors.

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The value or worth of a man is, as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power, and therefore is not absolute, but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another... And as in other things, so in men, not the seller, but the buyer determines the price... The manifestation of the value we set on one another is that which is commonly called honouring and dishonouring. To value a man at a high rate is to honour him... The public worth of a man, which is the value set on him by the Commonwealth, is that which men commonly call dignity (Hobbes, 1651, 55).

Without the notions of the wise legislator and the *state of nature*, of men fighting against each other *driven by their passions*, would be impossible to expect that the State could manipulate the incentives for savings and investments, and decide coercively on what to invest and how much interest to collect, coordinating in a centralized fashion the economic growth. Thus, it is not surprising that their institutional proposal of centralized control of investments, savings and labor would show clear signs of totalitarianism:

Nevertheless the theory of output as a whole, which is what the following book purports to provide, is much more easily adapted to the

conditions of a totalitarian state, than is the theory of the production and distribution of a given output produced under conditions of free competition and a large measure of laissez-faire. The theory of the psychological laws relating consumption and saving, the influence of loan expenditure on prices and real wages, the part played by the rate of interest – these remain as necessary ingredients in our scheme of thought (Keynes, 1936, preface).

Thus, Keynes shows the link in his theory between the anthropological pessimism expressed in its psychological ideas about consume, investment and savings, and the political consequences drawn from them: the totalitarian State. It is without a doubt a perfect example of an author that follows the steps of Hobbes from his fundamental presuppositions on the fallen nature of man and the need of a saviour that would rescue him from himself.

Final Note

248 In conclusion, we can say that Hobbes, Marx, most of the Neoclassical economists and Keynes have in common they start from an anthropological pessimism that rejects human condition. Their works depict man as unable of managing himself, prone to error, evil, selfish, animal, human condition at last. Then they recommend how to shape this condition, how to limit it, control it, transform it. Planning becomes then the tool par excellence of the modern State to control human behaviour, and most important, its guidance by means of commands for the action.

Also, Marx and Keynes assume the Hobbesian axiological neutrality criterion. For Hobbes the world is a knowable object that works as a mechanism, so the laws of causality can be identified through the scientific effort and such rationality allows the researcher to find those causes in a natural way, namely, being isolated from the problem and assessing it objectively. Thus, with those two ingredients that Hayek would call methodological dualism, we can reduce phenomena and explain them the same way a mechanic solves the problems found in the machine.

This is the reason why fields like law and economics have become some sort of *social engineering*, and legislation has become a tool for coercion, perverting the law by getting rid of its spontaneous nature and evolution, its tradition and the processes of trial and error, and incorporating some sort of scientific sense from the “economic laws”. All this inspired by Hobbes.

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