

MYTHSTAKES BOOK FIVE: HOBBIAN HAWKS AND ROUSSEAU DOVES

Introduction

Defining 'Mythstakes'.

Welcome to Book Five of Mythstakes. Before getting into the main topics of this volume, it might be a good idea to remind ourselves of what that word- Mythstake- refers to.

In the Mythstakes series, I argue that human beings are best defined as the 'storytelling animal', because we use our uniquely sophisticated languages to immerse ourselves in narratives to help make sense of a world that is largely of our own intersubjective creation.

Stories can either be fact or fiction. That is to say, either the story is in agreement with or supported by evidence (in which case, it is factual) or the evidence contradicts or does not support the story, in which case it is fiction.

So far this no doubt sounds straightforward. But a Mythstake is a very peculiar type of fictional tale, because it's not promoted as such to the general public.

In order to classify as such, a story requires two characteristics if it is to be called a Mythstake. Firstly, it needs to be a story popularly believed to be true, something "everybody knows", because that's how mainstream expertise presents it. Since it has such popular support from laypersons and experts alike, one would be forgiven for supposing the evidence must weigh in favour of this story. But, the second key characteristic of a Mythstake is that this is definitely not the case. Actually, there's little evidence to support the story, and plenty of evidence to show it can't possibly be valid.

In short, then, a Mythstake is a story almost everyone accepts as true, even though the evidence is very much against it.

There are some features that distinguish a Mythstake from other fictional stories. It has to be a story that has popular support, so those beholden to fringe beliefs like flat Earthers or vaccine skeptics don't count. Furthermore, belief in the story has got to be genuine so far as we can tell. Those who support it must sincerely believe in it, so that rules out fraudulent tales, scams and things like that, because those who spread such tales know perfectly well they are not true and just want to fool people into thinking they are. Finally, it has got to be a story that is contradicted by evidence. If the evidence is too uncertain to make a call either way, or it's unclear what evidence could possibly falsify the story, then it's not a Mythstake. So, for example, you can't call belief in a god, or atheism, a Mythstake.

In books one to four, we focused on a Mythstake that tends to get retold whenever one inquires into the origins of money. Ask anyone how they think money and markets came to be, and it's highly likely that they'll say something like: "We have money because, before its invention, people had to rely on barter. But since individuals swapping stuff back and forth among themselves encountered all kinds of difficulties with such exchanges, money was invented in order to simplify such processes".

The reason why they'll almost certainly claim money's origins lay in barter is because that's precisely what mainstream experts in such matters, such as economists or monetary historians, will have told them is the true story of how money and markets came to be. This story invariably takes place in an imaginary social setting not all that different to a village or small town, only one where nobody has heard of 'money'. There's a good reason why those retelling this story always prefer to set it in an imaginary place rather than a real tribe or community or whatever, and that's because whenever people like anthropologists have gone out and looked for real places where people commonly adopted barter as the means of facilitating exchanges, they find little evidence that any community ever did so, and a great deal of evidence pointing to the fact that, whatever origins money and markets do have, barter has very little to do with it.

We should know, then, that the belief that money and markets have their origins in friendly swaps among individuals can't possibly be true; that the barter story is false. After all, that's what the evidence tells us. But, nevertheless, it's still popularly believed by laypersons and experts alike that the root of money and markets lie in barter exchanges.

We shan't go into detail concerning the wealth of evidence refuting the belief that money and markets evolved from systems of barter because, after all, that's all covered in Books one to three. What we will be uncovering in this book are the ways in which the simplistic theories of money and markets that the barter mythstake created are not the only cartoons needed for modern economic theories to function properly. It was also necessary to create cartoon people, in other words simplified models of human behaviour based on assertions of "human nature" that, for all the confidence of those who insist "this is the way that people are", actually have little evidential support and plenty of evidence that shows people are not simply like this.

CHAPTER ONE

Before we talk about the cartoon model of humans and human behaviour mentioned in the introduction, we shall begin Book Five with a look at a debate that was going on in the seventeenth century, one to do with the true nature of money and the state's involvement in its creation.

Mostly, this debate did not focus on 'money' per se, but rather coinage. It could be said that coinage has some advantages when it comes to figuring in our histories of money. One is that, being typically made of very durable materials like metals, coins can persist for perhaps thousands of years before being dug up by archaeologists. But credit systems, existing as they do almost entirely in the collective minds of a People, don't leave much to be discovered once those people and the society in which they lived go extinct.

The educated classes were preoccupied with questions that, one way or another, were concerned with metal: "Bullion is leaving the country, how can we stop this?". "There is a crippling shortage of Coin, what should be done about it?". Questions such as "how is trust to be maintained within local systems of credit" hardly ever got asked in the upper echelons of society in the 17th century, because this was a class wholly committed to the belief that money was gold, and that the essence of human life was commercial exchange.

As such, when merchant-adventurers and colonists brought back reports of people who, eventually, would come to be seen as living in primitive societies, the educated classes failed to appreciate the deeply communal and communistic nature of their economies. Nor did they appreciate that economies in these societies were more concerned with rearranging human relationships within the realm of Values, rather than with swapping stuff back and forth in barter exchanges operating in the sphere of Value.

But what the juxtaposition of so-called 'developed' and 'primitive' civilisations did do, was to give European philosophers cause to ask questions about the origins and nature of such matters as law and morality. By the time we got to the 18th century, expert opinion was that the native cultures that had been discovered in Africa and North America appeared to support Biblical tales of a past when Mankind had lived in a garden of Eden. They asked themselves: absent any kind of formal legal system, or indeed anything that could be called a society, what laws would people nevertheless still be compelled to obey? If there was a 'state of nature'- a pre-social condition in which the only thing people had to obey was personal desire- how then had States emerged, societies in which common rules of social engagement were agreed upon?

Also, assuming states, governments and formal legal systems had to develop eventually, what form of government was ideal, and to what extent should the people be able to hold the authority figures who ran the political and legal system to account? Questions of this sort seemed particularly pertinent to radicals of the day, the sort of people who complained about the abuse of the common man at the hands of landed gentry and government officers. They were also the sorts of questions that thinkers in political philosophy asked.

A Universal Agreement In The Existence of Natural Rights

As we shall see, the question of what form of government was ideal, produced different answers among those who pondered it. But one thing that met with near-universal agreement was the idea that humans had once lived in a state of nature, and that in that state we had been endowed with inalienable rights that are above any artificial legal system and cannot be revoked by any human authority. 'Natural Rights' was a concept that particularly appealed to radicals, since it gave them something to use when railing against what they saw as State abuses.

Now, the concept of 'natural law' was not invented in the 17th century. In Italy in the 13th century, the Dominican monk, St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) wrote his 'Summa Theologiae'. In this work, he set himself the rather ambitious task of describing all the 'natural' or 'divine' laws governing everything, from gravity to human morality.

Following Aristotle (384-322 bc), St Aquinas assumed that to be a human was to be a fundamentally social being. He saw humans as essentially political animals who naturally desired to live in society. He also assumed that Man had always been a conscious and rational being, and was therefore equipped with the faculties to figure out which universal 'natural laws' applied to Man. In Aquinas' view, the secular laws of the State were derived from natural or divine law, so if that secular law could ever be shown to contradict natural law, that would be sufficient to invalidate it.

Natural Law and Individualism

Given that it was a concept that argued for the existence of laws above those of State-based rules, we can perhaps appreciate why Aquinas's idea of 'natural law' should have come to dominate in the 17th century, a time when radicals and philosophers were questioning the rights of rulers and the reach of their power. His appeal to rationality also resonated well in the resolutely materialist 17th Century.

But there was one aspect of Aquinas' theory of natural law that did not sit well with some of the 17th century's political philosophers. As we saw, Aquinas had argued that people were naturally social beings and that the Political had evolved out of this innate desire to be in a society. It's hardly surprising that philosophers prior to the 15th century would have thought about people in a social rather than an individual context, because the sense that we are each distinct, unique individuals didn't really exist in ages past when nobody got a clear look at themselves, when autobiographical writing or thinking did not exist, and when one's personal survival was utterly dependent upon active and ongoing close relations with fellow community members.

But by the 16th century, many of the innovations needed to encourage a more individualistic outlook had been established and had grown to the point where perspectives were really starting to change. Looking-glasses had become more affordable, giving more people a way to get a good, clear look at themselves. Literacy was on the rise, and autobiographical writing was moving away from its old form, in which the author's relationship with his or her God and community was what was written about, to the modern form in which one's own private, inner thoughts, centred around an 'I', are expressed. And, for the more affluent

classes, increased individualism was evident in the changing subject of paintings. Where artists had once been commissioned to produce devotional works depicting Biblical scenes, now they were commissioned to put the paying customer into the picture as the focus of attention.

So, with a growing sense of one's being a unique, autonomous individual, it's not surprising if at least some thinkers shifted away from the Social and towards the Individual. The 17th Century witnessed the writing of a famous work in political philosophy, one that combined St. Aquinas's theory of natural law but stripped it of any fundamental society. This philosophical figure would give the world one of the dominant stereotypes of human behaviour. His name was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679).

CHAPTER TWO

Thomas Hobbes was born in 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada. For most of his life, he worked as a tutor to the children of the Earls of Devonshire. By 1640, England was sliding toward civil war, and the political climate became tense as citizens became bitterly divided over whether to remain Royalist and support the perpetuation of the Monarchy, or to oppose and overthrow the monarchy as Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) wanted to do.

Hobbes was very much a royalist. Indeed, at a time when tension was in the air and civil war over the necessity of a Monarchy was looking increasingly inevitable, Hobbes went and published a book that argued the case for a strong and centralised Ruler. Somehow, he managed to express views that were unpopular with both sides, and had become a pretty controversial writer by the time he was fifty.

When civil war did break out and the Monarchy was overthrown by Cromwell, Hobbes as a committed Royalist fled for France. There, he became the tutor of a future King- Charles II (1630-1685)- who at this time was living in exile. This was also the time when he wrote his- and quite possibly the- most famous work arguing in favour of a Monarchy: 'Leviathan'. He wrote it in France while the English Civil War was going on, and even though it argued strongly in favour of a Monarchy, it proved to be an unpopular piece of political philosophy among the royalists in exile.

So, Hobbes, whose controversial views had necessitated a flight from turbulent England towards France, had now made himself unpopular enough to have to cross back over the channel and try to live in Cromwellian England. He did manage to survive Cromwell, and when the Monarchy was restored in 1660, he was given a pension from the King, Charles II. But he never really escaped controversy and was ultimately accused of heresy. This led to him being banned from printing anything else on Politics. He died in the year of 1679, at the age of ninety.

Hobbes And Machiavelli

Seeing as how Hobbes was so strongly in favour of a monarchy, it's not hard to see why his views would have been unpopular with the anti-royalists. But why would Leviathan have also proved unpopular with the exiled king?

The solution to that puzzle is probably best solved by looking at the thoughts of another prior political philosopher who influenced Hobbes, namely, Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527).

What Machiavelli had done was to argue that religious belief should be entirely removed from Politics, and Hobbes very much agreed with this. He saw politics and religion as a potentially dangerous combination and, fittingly for someone who put the individual at the foundations of his political philosophy, he expressed that danger in very personal, individualistic terms.

Hobbes pointed out that people tended to believe in their own, personal interpretation of Scripture, and that when they took action they did so from their own religious conviction. But, when you have people firmly believing they are right and others are dangerously wrong,

what you have is a powderkeg of extremism that is likely to blow up in religious persecution and civil war. It was safer, therefore, to keep Religion out of Politics.

So, when he argued in favour of a monarchy, Hobbes framed his argument in an entirely secular way. He completely rejected the idea that kings ruled by divine right, and instead used an early form of a branch of game theory known as a 'prisoners' dilemma' in order to argue the logical case for a monarchy. But state rulers had long held the view that they were gods, or appointed by the gods or God to rule. It's therefore not surprising if kings, who believed they had a divine right to reign, should have read the entirely secular arguments laid out in Leviathan, and considered them to be heretical.

John Locke

Now, at this point I think it might be worth also talking about another major figure in political philosophy who also wrote in the 17th century, and doing a sort of compare and contrast of his views with those of Hobbes, namely John Locke (1632-1704). That way, we will be able to introduce the other, opposing popular stereotype of the way people are. While Hobbes is usually credited as the first great modern political philosopher, it's probably fair to say that Locke's political philosophy had the greater practical influence on how later political systems developed and historical events unfolded.

John Locke was born in 1632. Much of his life was spent under the influence of Anthony Ashley Cooper (1621- 1683) who was the first Earl of Shaftesbury (he would also go down in history as the principle founder of the Whig party in English politics). Locke had met the Earl when Shaftesbury had journeyed to Oxford hoping to find a cure for a liver infection, and he soon made Locke his personal physician.

Because of his association with Shaftesbury, Locke became implicated in something known as the 'Rye House Plot', which was a scheme to assassinate Charles II and his Catholic brother who was heir to the throne. Although there was little evidence that Locke was involved in any significant way, having a charge of treason hang over you was a very bad thing, so in 1683 Locke fled for France. In fact, both he and Shaftesbury fled from England and would not return until 1688, which was the year of the Glorious Revolution which replaced James II (who was Catholic and lived from 1633-1701) with the Protestant William of Orange (1650-1702).

Now, we saw earlier how Hobbes had argued that people interpret scripture in a personal way and therefore acted according to different religious convictions, thereby leading him to agree with Machiavelli that Religion should be kept away from Politics.

In a similar way, both Locke and Shaftesbury were suspicious of Roman Catholicism, partly because it always seemed eager to burn dissidents but also because it demanded one place a higher loyalty to the Pope than the constitution. This did not sit at all well with Locke's patron, since Shaftesbury was opposed to any form of absolutism.

Just like Hobbes had done, Locke tackled the question of a monarch's divine right to rule. He did this, in part, by writing a dialogue with 'Patriarcha', a text that was written by Sir Robert Filmer (1588-1653). Filmer had made the claim that kings in fact did have a divine right to

rule. They were divinely appointed, holding a place in society akin to a father with a natural authority over their large families. Hence, the title of his work, 'Patriarcha'.

Locke could appreciate why an assumption of divine rule was so popular with kings, since it was an idea that assumed the relationship of the Sovereign to the state was akin to landownership. But he pointed out some flaws in the theory of divine right to rule. If a king had indeed been appointed by God, then how come usurpers were ever successful in their attempts to seize the throne? The notion of divine right and its comparison to landownership also bothered Locke, because it argued in favour of almost limitless power in the hands of one person, while everybody else was defined as subjects without property rights.

So, like Hobbes had done, Locke argued against the notion of divine right to rule. But, in contrast to Hobbes, he also argued against Absolutism and Monarchy.

Ok, well, that's a brief overview of the life and politics of Hobbes and Locke. In the next chapter, we'll dig deeper into their major philosophical works, which was 'Leviathan' in Hobbes' case and 'Two Treatises Of Government' in the case of Locke.

CHAPTER THREE

Reductionist Political Philosophy

In the last chapter, it was said that Hobbes is often thought of as the first great modern political philosopher. He was not, however, the first person to subject politics to philosophical inquiry. We already mentioned Machiavelli, whose most famous work, 'The Prince', was unusual in that it was concerned with how politics was actually conducted (whereas almost all political philosophers before and since have preferred to write about how politics should be).

Going back even further in time, there was Plato (427-347 BCE) who examined the true nature of justice in works like 'The Republic', and presented a blueprint for what he saw as an ideal society. Following on from Plato there were many other Greek and Roman philosophers. Christianity produced figures in political philosophy too, such as St. Augustine (354-430) and St. Aquinas. So, what was it about Hobbes that made him not just another political philosopher but the first modern political philosopher?

Well, he earned this accolade by changing the focus of discussion. Political philosophers prior to Hobbes had a general line of inquiry when it came to politics. They were concerned with questions like 'what is justice?', and 'what form of rule is best?'. But Hobbes was different, in that he made the individual central to his political theory.

As a philosopher working in the seventeenth century, Hobbes was writing his thoughts down at a time of resolute materialism, and when the scientific method was become quite well established. One thing that particularly impressed him was the field of geometry, and in particular the way it could be built up from a handful of elementary axioms. This got him wondering if political theory could likewise be developed out of a few self-evidently true statements.

With that goal in mind, Hobbes adopted methods borrowed from scientists of the era, such as Galileo (1564-1642). He learned from the works of such people how powerful Reductionism can be in aiding one's quest to understand something. This method entails taking something in the world, reducing it down to its simplest relevant bits, and from that basis you then describe the forces and motions that push and pull those relevant elementary bits and how all that cause-and-effect builds the something you wanted to explain.

Now, notice that I said 'simplest relevant bits'. In most of our investigations into some aspect of reality, there is no need to go all the way in reducing the world to its ultimate fundamental building blocks or whatever lies at the absolute foundations of all existence.

For example, in evolutionary biology, reductionism need take us only as far as the level of the gene. The task of the evolutionary biologist is then to show how genes interact in the environment, replicating or failing to do so and being edited by natural selection in a non-random way, all that resulting in complex forms with the appearance of having been designed. As far as evolutionary biology is concerned, the molecular level of chemistry and chemical reactions is the absolute furthest you need go in terms of reductionsism. Of course, in reality there are many other levels below that of molecules that we know of, because

molecules are built from atoms which in turn are made of still more elementary bits like protons and electrons. But none of this need concern evolutionary biologists.

Evolutionary biology was not the topic that concerned Hobbes, but rather Politics. What was the simplest relevant 'bit' as far as his line of inquiry was concerned? Since politics is obviously a social issue, Hobbes figured that the things which form societies had to be the relevant elementary bit. In other words, in order to explain the aspect of the world he was concerned with, he would have to build up a model of human behaviour. Furthermore, since it was an aspect of society that he was attempting to explain, his reductionism had to take him further than 'people'. His starting point had to be the individual.

With the individual as his elementary bit, Hobbes once again turned to Galileo's work for guidance. One aspect of the pioneering physicist's studies that impressed Hobbes was something Galileo had called the 'Principle of Inertia'. This principle states that once a body is set in motion it will stay in motion forever, unless another force intervenes to stop it. Take a marble, for example. If you push it, it will roll. But then, soon after, the force of friction will cause the marble to slow and stop. If there was no force of friction, once you set that marble rolling it would continue rolling in the same direction forever, just like the planets have been orbiting their stars for many billions of years since whatever force first set them in motion.

Hobbes took this Galilean principle and developed an idea based on the assumption that everything in existence is ultimately based on 'moving matter'. Everything, including people. But, whereas the marble was set in motion with a physical push from your finger, and made to stop by friction, Hobbes imagined the individual as a being that is unstable and forever restless, 'pushed' towards things (abstract as well as physical) by their appetites and pulled away by their aversions.

Continuing the marble analogy, you can picture an individual's head as being full of tiny little balls, some of them 'desires' and others 'aversions', all moving around in our minds, sometimes colliding. The motives and beliefs we have are the end results of a series of colliding desires and aversions.

So far, all of this may well sound like Hobbes was imagining the individual as mindless matter, pushed and pulled by competing forces. But, actually, he also believed the individual fundamentally came with something else, and that meant there was a bit more control going on. That something else was 'Rationality'. What makes humans rational is that they have the capacity to plan how to go about fulfilling desires and how to avoid harm (although actually there is a sense in which all animals could be said to be rational. For example, other creatures seek out potential sexual partners and avoid things like fire which are hazardous to their bodies, all entirely rational strategies for the spreading of genes). But in the Hobbesian view, this planning is utterly selfish. It sees the human in terms of 'psychological egoism', or as a creature programmed to be interested, ultimately, in just one thing: One's own prospects and survival.

At this point you might be wondering if Hobbes was really serious. It's fair to say that some people would come to take Hobbes seriously because, as we shall see, they treated his thoughts on humans in a state of nature like it was intended to be the groundwork for a theory of the evolution of human history. But not everyone thinks this is the correct way to

read Hobbes. According to the alternative view, Hobbes had noticed that England was descending into civil war, and what he presented in *Leviathan* was really an allegory of that situation. As for the primordial state of nature that we'll get into in a moment, the belief this viewpoint holds is that Hobbes didn't really think there had ever been a time when everyone originally lived under such conditions, anymore than Orwell (1903-1950) believed pigs could actually manage a business like they do in his allegorical *Animal Farm*.

Anyway, we have our elementary building blocks of Hobbes's theory, which is the Individual. Once we have established what 'forces' (what drives and temperaments) push and pull people, we can then move on to society as a whole. Because we are psychological egoists in the Hobbesian conception, we are not just individuals but individualistic. Furthermore, we each recognise no bounds to our freedom, making us each individualistic and infinitely free. But, at the same time, we are each mortal and know this to be the case. Each of us therefore lives with the constant fear of death and, in a 'State Of Nature', we are each born with only one fundamental right, which is the right to preserve our life, resist harm, and seek prosperity.

Hobbes and Power

Although in the Hobbesian point of view people are individualistic, we are not alone. After all, we share the world with other people. Any worthwhile study of the Political has to include the ways and means by which people interact with one another.

In order to go about thinking about human interaction, Hobbes threw 'power' into the mix. But what did that mean in this context? Hobbes' definition of 'power' was "the ability to use a present means to obtain a future good". The more easily you are able to use things available to you now in order to get what you want, the more powerful you are.

From such a definition, it follows that many things may determine an individual's power, such as one's strength, one's social standing, indeed, anything that can be said to directly impact on the ability to do or get what you want. Also, any number of reasons may lie behind the ways in which people use power, and not all of them are bad. As 'infinitely free' individuals, there is nothing to stop us using our powers in order to help others. But, at the same time, there is nothing (other than what power others can call upon) to stop us from maliciously harming others. The potential to use power in malicious ways plays a large part in how we rationalise intentions with regard to our most fundamental aim, which is self-preservation.

Another important point about power in this context is that there is a relative aspect to it. In order to be sure to get what it wants, an individual cannot just be strong, or have friends to call upon. No, the individual's strength, their number of friends, whatever 'power' they may have, it has to be greater than the power others have. That alone is what ensures you can achieve your goals.

If we were to imagine somebody like Robinson Crusoe, a person utterly alone and therefore a society of one (if it makes sense to call this a 'society') such a person would be at liberty to do anything his own personal power permits him to do. But, of course, as an individual with

no assistance to call upon, such boundless freedom would not produce much at all, certainly not in comparison to what one can achieve in collaboration with others.

Normally, though, we do not live as isolated individuals. Hobbes defined power as the extent to which one can use current means to obtain future goods, but he defined 'Value' in a more collective way. He wrote: "the value or worth of a man is as all other things, his price; that is to say as much as would be given for the use of his power". In the Robinson Crusoe case, his value or worth could be said to be zero because, absent any other 'buyer' to sell to, he cannot get anything for his power. In his current situation his power is not worth anything.

"Power", wrote Hobbes, "is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the judgement and need of another...And, as in other things, so in Men, not the seller but the buyer determines the price".

There is only one circumstance in which talking about someone's value in such a way makes sense, and that is under the assumption that power can be traded for 'money'. In what other context would it be sensible to talk of such things as 'buyers', 'sellers' and 'price'? We can see, then, that before Hobbes had even begun to get around talking about the State and what form that should ideally take, he was thinking about people within the boundaries of commercial exchange. Furthermore, given that he spoke of 'boundless freedom' to pursue more of what you want, his 'state of nature' described human behaviour in a Capitalist context.

Equality In Anarchy

Now, in our modern societies we have great disparities of relative power, price and value, from billionaires who are able to direct the actions of thousands of people in order to accomplish goals like building rocket ships or- who knows- perhaps one day establishing cities on Mars, to, at the other end of the continuum, impoverished folk whose power does not extend much further than the freedom to pick over the refuse thrown onto garbage tips.

But, in the initial state of nature in which Hobbes begins his account of humans, nothing like this sort of disparity can exist, because pretty much all of the ways in which such inequalities can be generated have yet to be established. Furthermore, as this is a highly chaotic state, it's almost impossible to begin to get them established.

"In such conditions", Hobbes wrote, "there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the Earth; no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by the sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters".

So, essentially, Hobbes defined his state of nature by the absence of all the things that society provides. Presumably, within such a primitive state, individuals would be roughly equal in terms of intellect and physical strength. After all, what can they utilise in order to gain significant advantage over others, in a world devoid of books, technologies, really any kind of commodity? There is nothing one may use except for the raw materials Nature provides.

What there is, in Hobbes's pre-social state of nature', is an aggregate of psychological egoists, each driven by the desire to draw towards that which satisfies their appetite for positive things like wealth, friends and reputation, and to take whatever rational course of action prevents personal harm. Each individual is also aware that there are other individuals pursuing self-centred plans for maximising gain and avoiding personal harm.

Living in a world full of psychological egoists, it is rational to assume that every person you meet could view you simply as just another resource to be exploited, or as another obstacle standing in the way of something they want. In short, everyone you encounter could be out to harm or kill you. What to do? Since you yourself are a psychological egoist whose top priority is self-preservation, the rational thing to do would be to attack first rather than risk waiting to see if this person has deadly intentions or not. Of course, since the other psychological egoists make the same rational calculation, this only serves to turn the world into the dangerous environment it is imagined to be. It was this logic that lead Hobbes to write one of the most famously dystopian passages in political philosophy:

"In such condition...there is no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of Man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short".

Given this condition of universal war, it's understandable why Hobbes believed the state of nature had to be absent of anything requiring extensive collaboration, or thinking much beyond individualistic short-term planning. But why should anyone desire to live in such a violent and insecure world?

The answer is that this was an outcome that nobody wanted but which resulted from individuals making the rational decision to attack first. This is why I called Hobbes's theory a version of a Prisoners' Dilemma. In Game Theory, a 'Prisoners' Dilemma is a thought experiment in which two prisoners act rationally and in so doing head toward an outcome that's worse for both of them. Hobbes's vision might also be described as a kind of 'Tragedy of The Commons', which refers to a situation in which individuals exploit a common resource in an entirely rational way (if you think selfishly and short-term) but in so doing their actions deplete that commons and destroy something they all depended on.

What is quite disturbing about prisoners' dilemmas and tragedies of the commons is that, although they do allow for ways in which the participants could drive home a result that benefits everyone (or, at least, yields minimum possible harm) you can also see, given the way the premise is set up, why the most likely result is the worst possible outcome- and for entirely rational reasons.

Similarly, if Hobbes's initial premise about humans being 'psychological egoists' is accepted, then his conclusion seems just as logical. His state of nature, his 'Garden of Eden', is no paradise but the chaotic and violent world we would inevitably live in if there was no strong Government to impose order and impartially punish law breakers.

CHAPTER FOUR.

Locke's State Of Nature

By the time Hobbes died, anyone who thought that humanity was indeed nasty and brutish would have had quite a few examples to prove their point. They could have pointed out, for example, that merchants sailing the Spanish Main were in danger of encountering the likes of Henry Morgan (1635-1688), who were not exactly outlaws but rather privateers operating within a system of government-sponsored piracy. And, in 1649, England's king (Charles I) had been tried and beheaded.

With all that pirating and bloodshed going on, you would be forgiven for thinking that philosophers of the time would all have agreed with Hobbes's dystopian state of nature. But, in the late 1670s, John Locke wrote his 'Two Treatises of Government', a work of political philosophy that had quite a different state of nature to the one Hobbes imagined.

Whereas Hobbes had imagined humans lived nasty, brutish and short lives in a state of nature, Locke believed that people would have lived mostly peaceful, harmonious lives in such a state. Whereas Hobbesian logic led to universal war, in Locke's theory, people's ability to follow natural reason results in his state of nature being a condition of harmony.

Another thing that helps Locke's state of nature avoid degenerating into the condition of universal war that typified the view set out by Hobbes, is because he imagined primitive Man to be less psychologically determined or detached. In the Lockean state of nature, rights extend a bit further than an entirely selfish right to life and prosperity. Along with the right to self-preservation, there is a general understanding of the difference between right and wrong that incorporates others as well as oneself.

Locke wrote, "an American savage who makes a promise to a Swiss gentleman in the backwoods, knows that promises are binding". This knowledge that promises are binding and that breaking them is wrong, is not something that has to be learned. Simply because every individual is innately aware of the 'laws of nature' and because they obey them for the most part, the lives, the health, and the liberty of others usually goes unharmed in a Lockean state of nature.

Hobbes justified his dystopian state of nature by pointing out that we all lock our doors, a precaution he considered to be accusing mankind of ill intent just as much as his own words did. Locke likewise pointed to real-life examples to support his claim for a more idyllic state of nature. His example came fresh from the Colonies. It was the Native Americans, tribes who were believed to live mostly peaceful lives. To Locke, it was logical that they so lived, for they were primitives living close to nature.

But, Hobbes's state of nature inevitably fell into the abyss of universal war, so how did Locke's native Americans avoid that outcome? Both Locke's and Hobbes's political philosophy begin in a primitive state of nature absent of any formal legal infrastructure. Nevertheless this is not exactly a world without any 'rules' whatsoever. There are 'natural laws' that, because they are rational, are assumed to be universal and absolute.

No doubt Hobbes's natural laws were considered to be just as universal (after all, he did imagine his primitives to be behaving rationally) but Locke's state of nature included something else that Hobbes arguably did not take into account.

A Celestial Monarch

Locke was vague about how the laws of nature had originated, but he did insist that they were compulsory because they had been ordained by God. This does not necessarily mean to say that God was the one who created those laws, rather, that they had been judged by the Almighty and given the divine stamp of approval. In Biblical language, God had studied pre-existing natural laws and seen that they were good.

What this means is that in Locke's state of nature there is something rather like an absolute monarch- one who reigns in Heaven- before there are any such kingdoms established on Earth. We might also make a comparison to the way markets were run in the Islamic Near West in the Middle Ages. Because Muslims followed laws interpreted by a prophet who, prior to his revelations, had been a merchant, they naturally followed God-ordained laws that supported the exchange of goods in a market, and therefore required only a minimal State to oversee economic activity that was assumed to be founded on mutual aid and, for the most part, entrusted to "a handshake and a glance at Heaven".

In contrast, Hobbes's state of nature seems not to take God into account. Was he an atheist? It's highly doubtful. Everybody believed in a god of some sort or other in the 17th century, and there was no scientific or philosophical teaching that could have led anyone to believe in a Godless world.

But, although he presumably believed in God, Hobbes's thoughts on political philosophy does seem to be rather Godless. Whereas most people assumed that Earthly Kings had a divine right to rule, in the Hobbesian view any divine sanction of the State is denied. It was this denial of the divine right of Kings that had gotten Hobbes accused and found guilty of heresy.

Furthermore, Hobbes's conception of humans as psychological egoists was based on his borrowing the Galilean 'principle of inertia' and deriving from that the idea that everything that exists is 'moving matter', making humans naturally restless, chaotic beings whose motives and beliefs are the result of desires and aversions whirling around in their minds like colliding marbles. This is a resolutely materialistic view of everything, including human consciousness. If there is a God in such a universe, it's one that could reasonably be said to have a non-interventionist approach to governing the world. Once all that moving matter was set in motion, the Hobbesian God stepped back and no longer intervened to guide cause-and-effect towards beneficial outcomes. Humans were, effectively, alone, with nothing but their own psychological egoistic rationality to rely on.

One more thing that may account for these contrasting states of nature is the fact that Hobbes and Locke had different conclusions in mind. Hobbes was a Royalist, and ultimately his purpose was to persuade us that we should accept rule under a powerful, centralised authority as the logical way out of what would otherwise be universal war. It was not useful to his arguments to include a celestial Monarch that humans naturally obey and therefore don't

need any such centralised authority here on Earth. Locke, in contrast, was aiming to argue for a minimal state and a separation of powers, so it was convenient for him to emphasise celestial powers above those of the State. His ideal government is one democratically-elected to defend something Hobbes never really spoke of: Property Rights.

Locke And Property Rights

We saw how Hobbes had set himself the goal of establishing a science of politics by looking for the simplest bits relevant to his line of inquiry and then building up his theory from those elementary components. In a similar way, Locke believed he could take some initial premises that he took to be self-evidently correct (such as “where there is no property there can be no injustice”) and then use such axioms as the natural laws upon which he would erect a whole moral system of ‘deductive ethics’. In fact, the concept of ‘property’, mentioned in the ‘axiom’ above, was the crucial part of his political philosophy.

In Hobbes’s state of nature, people are naturally granted control over their labour power. We are each born with the capacity to act and think rationally and can do whatever it takes to ensure personal survival and prosperity. But, what there is not in a Hobbesian state of nature, is a natural right to private property. Rather, it is the principle of ‘might makes right’ that determines whether the fruits of your labour stay in your possession or are appropriated by somebody else. Should somebody come along who is more powerful than you (maybe because they are physically stronger, or have more allies to call upon, or are smarter than you and therefore capable of defrauding you) in a Hobbesian state of nature you have no private property rights to call on. It’s just your tough luck if you get robbed or defrauded; indeed, given there is no law such terms are strictly-speaking meaningless.

Locke, though, saw things differently. In his state of nature, people not only have the right to work but also the right to claim the fruits of that work as their private property. Thus, in the Lockean view, might does not make right and if anyone forces or tricks you into giving up your possessions against your will, they are acting in contradiction to the second fundamental right in a Lockean state of nature- the right to private property.

By asserting private property as a natural right, Locke had to provide further explanation that Hobbes’s state of nature never needed to justify. You see, in Hobbes’s theory the Earth’s resources don’t belong to anybody. The entire world, and everything in it, is one big global commons that never becomes anyone’s rightful private property. At best, resources become personal possessions that you get to keep if you are powerful enough to resist those who would take it from you. It’s only later, when we have moved on from this state of nature and live in an artificial society of laws and legal systems and state-based coercion, that we can properly speak of theft and fraud and other crimes that assume there is such a thing as private property.

Now, Locke actually made the same assumption about the Earth’s resources being commonly owned by everyone. But, he wanted to minimise the authority of the State, so private property only as an artificial construct of the State was not something he was interested in defending. Rather, Locke wanted to assert that private property was a natural right that pre-existed any State apparatus.

But, this presented Locke with a problem, because his state of nature had natural laws that appear to be contradictory. On one hand, he, like Hobbes, assumed mankind in its earliest incarnations held all of earth's resources in common ownership. But, on the other hand, Locke also believed the individual had a fundamental right to private property, which is the very opposite of common ownership. Locke therefore had to explain how something that nobody owned could become an individual's private property.

This was a crucial question for a philosopher writing at a time when Capitalism was really starting to form. In fact, it could be said to be of fundamental importance to the moral justification of Capitalism itself. This is because you cannot justify trade and investment unless you can first show that a person can own property and do with it what they want (within reason).

Locke turned to what both he and Hobbes had taken to be the most fundamental right, which was the right to preserve one's own life. We must each do what we can to survive, and one thing we each must do is consume food. But, whenever we eat food we are taking what once had been a commonly-owned resource and incorporating it into our own bodies ('you are what you eat'). Therefore, because we have to eat in order to survive (and personal survival is our fundamental right) some form of private property must also be a fundamental natural right. At the very least, we have the right to take a natural resource, turn it into food, eat it, and make it part of ourselves. If we do not have this right, we have no right to try and remain alive.

Notice I said 'take a natural resource (and) turn it into food'. Locke decided that the moral justification for calling food private property lay in the fact that one necessarily worked to obtain that food. After all, before you eat food you have to at least go to the effort of gathering it or hunting it.

So, in Locke's state of nature, we are each naturally endowed with certain fundamental rights and abilities. In theological terms, God gave the Earth to all mankind and granted each of us ownership over our minds and bodies. He also gave us powers of reason and it's up to us to act rationally in order to utilise the world's resources so that the primary right- the right to life- can be fulfilled. The reason why we can claim a food source as our own was because we worked to acquire it or, as Locke put it, by mixing our labour with an edible resource, we naturally acquired the right to remove that resource from the common store and make it our private property.

Locke expanded this assumption into a general principle, claiming that by 'mixing one's labour' with any resource, a person naturally possessed the moral justification to claim it as private property.

However, Locke also believed that, initially, God had imposed limits on the amount of commonly-owned resources one could claim as private property. A lot of natural resources have a limited lifespan, because given time they will decay and become spoiled. Therefore, Locke added the caveat that one should not hoard supplies to the extent that they spoil before any practical use can be made of them.

But, he made an additional argument which he thought overturned this limit on how much one could privately own. Locke claimed that “men have agreed to a disproportionate and unequal possession of the Earth...a man may fairly possess more land than he can fairly use the product of”. In Locke’s view, humanity had discovered something which permitted this, and that something was ‘money’.

Now, bear in mind that when Locke thought of ‘money’, he was very much of the mindset that equated money with gold or silver coinage. Since gold does not spoil, Locke argued that money, being gold, could be stored indefinitely, with no time limit on when it could be exchanged for other commodities. As a side effect, by engaging in such acts of exchange, the existence of money created labour markets, because it meant that you could get people to work for you, people who would give (or alienate) the fruits of their labour for your money.

We can see, then, that Locke’s conception of ‘money’ did have a social aspect to it. This was because he treated money not just as a physical object that could not spoil, but also as an abstraction that embodied labour. But, because in Locke’s view money should really come in the form of a gold or silver coin, you could buy as much as you could afford with no limit other than the size of your bank balance. There would always be plenty left for those who subsequently got their hands on money to later purchase. Thanks to money, servants could enter into voluntary contracts in which they sold their labour power, resulting in those who had money owning the fruits not just of their own labour but that of the labour power they purchased. In Locke’s view, then, God gave us money as the means by which the productive could be rewarded and social inequality could be justified.

Because he assumed there would always be resources that people could buy, Locke’s defence of private property assumed earth’s resources were without limit. No matter how much wood we chopped and turned into lumber, no matter how much ore we dug up and turned into iron, there would be more left for future workers to exploit.

It’s perhaps understandable that Locke should have assumed Earth’s resources were inexhaustible. After all, he was writing in the 17th century, a time long before there was industrialisation, consumerism and globalism on the scales of the 19th century, let alone the 21st. Our capacity to exploit natural resources were extremely limited in Locke’s day, so it was probably unimaginable that we could ever extract resources at a rate that would put serious strains on the world’s ecosystems (as Book Four explained, this was a word that did not even exist until Arthur Tansley (1871-1955) coined it in the 1920s).

In any case, Locke was arguably not so much interested in justifying the right to exploit the earth without limit for personal gain, but rather in showing that the State had no right to appropriate that property. As the economist Mark Blyth explained, “these arguments (were) being developed in 17th century England, where public debt was the debt of kings, kings who invoke rights given by God to appropriate the property of others willy-nilly. That Locke deploys equally specious rationales for why he and his brethren should have as much of the world as they want is beside the point. Rather, his point is to defend those gains from the state at all costs and to minimise the state’s ability to extract further resources”.

Notice that Blyth called Locke’s argument ‘specious’. This may be because another political philosopher, Robert Nozick (1938-2002), pointed out a significant flaw in Locke’s claim that

the individual has a natural right to private property. Remember, Locke had claimed we acquire such rights through 'mixing labour' with a natural resource. This all seems reasonable on the level of obtaining food. I sowed these seeds, nurtured the plants, harvested the wheat, ground it into flour and made bread out of it and since I did all that the bread is rightfully mine. But, as Nozick argued, if a person was to take a can of soup and pour its contents into the ocean, then according to Locke they would have mixed their labour with the ocean. So does that mean to say they can justifiably claim the ocean is their private property? That does seem like a pretty absurd claim, but if so we cannot say that, simply by 'mixing one's labour', a common resource legitimately becomes private property. Rather, something else is needed, in addition to the act of mixing one's labour, in order to justify private property.

What is that 'something else', exactly? Well, so far, we don't know, because nobody has been able to come up with a generally-accepted account of what that something else could be. Therefore, philosophically-speaking, nothing so far really justifies the assumption that there is a natural right to private property.

CHAPTER FIVE.

Hobbes And Leviathan

When we last left Hobbes, the world in his state of nature was in utter chaos. It was full of psychological egoists squabbling over resources and acting rationally in a way that resulted in universal war. Unlike the societies of communal insects like ants and bees, humans in Hobbes's view had no instinctive ability to form societies. Such organisations were neither 'natural' nor ordained by God. Rather, they had to be artificially created by us. But, how could this be, given our state of nature and its war of all against all?

Well, remember that in the Hobbesian view we are not just psychological egoists but psychological egoists who can think rationally. Hobbes agreed with St. Aquinas that there were natural laws, the primary one being the right of every individual to take steps in preserving one's own life. Rationally, if every person has the right to life there must be a corresponding duty not to injure others. "If it is wrong for you to hurt me, it must also be wrong for me to hurt you". Of course, people can potentially do harm, either deliberately or through actions that indirectly result in harm befalling others (hoarding food to the extent that others go hungry, for example). In some situations, then, it might be necessary to lethally defend oneself. But not always.

Also, Hobbes never denied that individuals could work together for mutual advantage. Rationally, two or more people combining their strength, vigilance etc stand more chance of defending resources than somebody working alone does. Once somebody makes that logical assumption, they only need meet others thinking the same thing before these individuals can form a group that relinquishes the right to kill members in order to gain the added protection of collectively defending resources from outsiders.

Once this understanding is developed among likeminded individuals, and they consent to an agreement to work together, there is what amounts to a 'social contract'. Hobbes argued that such a contract provided the philosophical justification for the commonwealth or political body.

However, at this stage, what political body there is, is a perilously fragile one. After all, it comprises only of a bunch of individual psychological egoists who have agreed to play nice, at least where in-group individuals are concerned. But will each member really honour that agreement, or might one or more be tempted to break the contract for reasons of selfish advantage?

Hobbes decided that the temptation to break the contract would be great, unless there was a coercive power in operation that would punish those who did break the contract. As he himself put it, "covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure men at all". So, while mutual agreement might have provided the philosophical justification for the commonwealth, it was coercive power that ensured the social contract persisted.

In Hobbes's view, people could only transcend the anarchic state of nature and universal war if they relinquished the right to self-govern. Once this was done, every person would still be an egoistic individual, only now they are egoistic individuals who have no rights. Where have

those rights gone? They have been transferred to a ruling authority that acts sort of like a legal fiction representing everybody and which has absolute power over everybody. Hobbes called this legal fiction 'Leviathan'.

Being rational beings, the people can appreciate the gains to be had from this arrangement. It is one that allows them to live happier, more prosperous lives. As this is preferable to complete autonomy in an anarchic hell, the people make a trade, one in which they exchange their natural right to all things in nature for a society with greater peace and security enforced by a supreme ruler with absolute authority.

Now, we saw earlier how a social contract provided the philosophical justification for the commonwealth or political body. But what sort of political body was best? Well, first we have to determine what the alternatives are. Hobbes believed that the commonwealth came in three possible forms, those being a monarchy, a democracy, or an aristocracy. In order to be able to successfully uphold the peace and protect individuals and their property, Hobbes argued that the political body would have to be a strong, centralised government. He also claimed that no aspect of religion should be permitted to claim greater authority than the commonwealth. Whatever your personal spiritual insight may be, it could not be permitted to rival civil law.

That point about the political body being strong is one that's worth emphasising. Although this whole arrangement is a contractual relationship, and 'contract' would seem to imply volition, there is actually a great deal of coercion being assumed here. Simply put, the reason why a world of psychological egoists keep to the social contract is because the political body wields sufficient force to compel them to do so. It is an arrangement in which nobody has any rights or, rather, one in which the rights of everyone else has been transferred to a single authority, leaving everyone else free to do only what the political body permits them to do.

By now it should be possible to see that we are in a very different kind of society to the one in which we began. We started off in the Hobbesian state of nature, an anarchic hell of egoistic individuals, all of whom had equal rights to any and all parts of the natural world at any time, and where no one could assert any law that condemns or justifies any action other than 'might makes right'. We have ended up in a world in which individuals are stripped of their one fundamental right, which has now been transferred to a political body or commonwealth that has absolute authority.

Also, given that Hobbes believed the commonwealth should be strong and centralised, you can probably guess which of the three alternatives Hobbes preferred. Since he wanted to minimise the risks of division and corruption within government, Hobbes asserted that absolute sovereign power should be granted to a single monarch.

Although the people contracted into this arrangement, the sovereign him- or herself doesn't enter into any kind of contract. This feature of the 'Leviathan' appears to be a precautionary one. Because the sovereign does not enter into any contract and in fact exerts absolute authority, nobody can question that authority, as some might if the sovereign did enter into a contract of some kind. Hobbes feared that questioning the sovereign might lead to distrust growing to the point where civil war breaks out, and before you know it, we psychological

egoists have descended back into our natural state of anarchic hell. Better to place the sovereign above such questions.

Describing the Leviathan's authority as 'absolute' makes it sound as if the sovereign wields unlimited power. But, actually, Hobbes argued that there was something that placed limitations on the absolute power of the sovereign, and that something was natural law. In particular, there was the natural right of self-preservation, which in Hobbes's view was the primary natural right from which all others were derived. Since this natural law remained primary, the sovereign could only apply laws in a way that was both universal and impartial. It could only exercise its right to punish individuals when there was good reason to do so, and not just because the sovereign felt like throwing his weight around. Individuals can only ever rebel if the sovereign sets out to deliberately kill or injure without just cause. However, whatever restrictions on the sovereign's power there may be, these never become the 'rights' of individual citizens. All rights have now been transferred to the sovereign.

What did contemporary critics make of all this? Well, they didn't exactly warm to it. In fact, it's fair to say that they reacted with horror, both at what they saw as a very cynical definition of human beings, and at a political philosophy that described state sanctions in entirely secular terms, denying any divine sanction.

Furthermore, critics examined Hobbes's theory of the social contract and identified a circular nature to the argument. It is only when the first contract is agreed upon that all other contracts are made binding. But this begs the question: How can the first contract be made compulsory? The people who obeyed that contract before the sovereign power was authorised to enforce it would very quickly find themselves preyed on by those not obeying the contract.

What solution did Hobbes propose? Initially, his answer was to make the whole process an instantaneous gamble that all parties undertake simultaneously. Everyone just agrees to transfer their rights to all things in nature to a Leviathan in exchange for security, all at the same time.

This seems rather unlikely, and it seems like Hobbes also recognised things couldn't work out quite like this in practice. He admitted, at the end of 'Leviathan', that most states probably didn't result from mutual agreement, but were something that had been forced on their inhabitants.

CHAPTER SIX

Locke And the Minimal Government

When we looked into John Locke's political philosophy, we noted some similarities with that of Hobbes. Just as was the case with Hobbes, the starting point for Locke was the rights man had in a state of nature. Another shared assumption was that a contract lay at the root of society. But there were also differences, which is not surprising given that Hobbes and Locke had different goals in mind. For, whereas Hobbes was out to persuade us that a sovereign with absolute authority was necessary, Locke intended to show that the political body should preferably be a civil government operating within a structure for society that lent itself to Capitalism. The purpose of Locke's government was to act as a protectorate, but Locke denied his ideal political body any absolute power. On the contrary, he argued that if the government of the day should subject people to absolute rule, the people should be free to replace that government.

When we spoke about Locke's state of nature, we saw how it differed somewhat from Hobbes. The one thing that is granted to all people in Hobbes's state of nature is control over one's own body. But, in Locke's state of nature, we have not only a natural right to work but also a right to call the fruits of our labours private property. Locke attempted to justify this conversion of commonly-owned resources into private property by arguing that one's labour had necessarily been mixed with a resource to render it fit for consumption.

Other philosophers argued that Locke never really made a convincing case that 'mixing your labour' with land entitles you to exclusive rights over it, but putting up a defence of private property or social inequality was not something Locke was particularly interested in doing. Indeed, comments he made, such as "it is plain that the consent of men has agreed to a disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth", suggests he thought of social inequality as making so much common sense we might as well just accept its existence as we accept that one plus one makes two.

No, when it came to property, Locke was less interested in explaining why it should exist, and much more concerned with arguing that its existence (whatever its origins were) far pre-dated any political body or formal society. This was markedly different from Hobbes's view, since in his state of nature it's only once a highly monopolised, central government is formed that things like Society and private property won't quickly collapse and a chaotic state of nature reassert itself. In contrast, in Locke's state of nature, individuals always had property ownership, and this natural right gave the individual inviolable rights, one of which was freedom from State interference.

So, Locke's state of nature is rather more peaceful and sophisticated than Hobbes's. In that latter case, individuals in their natural state are more or less equal, whereas Locke allows for servant classes and landed gentry. In fact, it's more or less the same society as the kind Locke himself lived in, in the 17th century, only without a State.

But, it's not a society that's exclusively peaceful. Sometimes, people are tempted into doing bad things, and others know such temptations exist. Since this is a society that pre-dates the State, there are no formal legal systems in place, regulating how guilt is determined and

crimes punished. Locke saw that, in a world in which every individual is the judge of their own cause, endless vendettas could arise. Possibly, some could follow the Hobbesian logic and resort to pre-emptive acts of violence.

So, although Locke's state of nature was generally more peaceful than Hobbes's, it still had some inconveniences that encouraged the transition into other forms of political organisation. In particular, Locke argued, there was a need to clarify the rather ambiguous dictates of natural law into a clearer, more enforceable positive law. It was the desire to have more clarity on the issue of wrongdoing, Locke argued, that led to the first agreements among individuals to form a contractual 'society'. However, at this early stage the 'society' is not a State. It's more akin to a joint-stock company that you might freely enter into for the reciprocal advantage you expect to gain.

In the Hobbesian state of nature, people don't really form peaceful societies until an absolute monarchy is established and law and order imposed. But, in the Lockean case, the people have already made themselves social. So, whereas in the case of Hobbes, the Monarchy creates Society, in the Lockean case it is Society that creates the State. Moreover, since it is already a fairly peaceful society, the options for what sort of commonwealth it should be are not restricted to an absolute monarchy. The People don't need Absolutism, all they require is a national authority that punishes criminals and settles disputes in an indifferent manner. Above all else, people agree to the formation of the State in order to ensure the preservation of their property.

Hobbes's state of nature ended with individuals giving up their rights to personally defend liberty and property, and in fact he used his state of nature to argue for the necessity of an absolute monarch. But, in the Lockean case, the fact that a person or institution with the powers to enforce the rule of law has been appointed, is in no way a reason to relinquish individual property or liberty rights. In the Hobbesian case, the Sovereign did not enter into any contract. The Monarch's power was absolute, answering to nobody. In the Lockean conception, government is more of a trustee than a party to a contract. It is therefore the Government that has no rights. Instead, it has certain obligations. Also, there are strict limitations placed on its powers, powers that depend totally on the citizens' consent.

In Locke's view, once you had established a framework in which the letter of the law was clearly laid out, and there were neutral judges and an executive with limited powers, you should then have a stable and peaceful political society. But, Locke also believed you could not guarantee the perpetuation of that peace and stability. The reason why not was because Government had to be entrusted with power, and even though it was far less authoritarian than Hobbes thought the political body needed to be, there was still the possibility of that power being abused. Another form of power therefore had to be present if you were to ensure continuing peace and stability, and that power was citizens' rights to remove those entrusted with State power, should they abuse their privileges. If the ruler turned tyrannical, the people had the right to remove that ruler by force.

Locke was writing at a time when such concepts were not just the stuff of political philosophical speculation. In 1688, England had its Glorious Revolution, in which the people really had deposed the King. Limiting the powers of authority figures had also actually happened. After the Glorious Revolution there followed the Bill of Rights. What this Bill did,

was to remove from the King the ability to intervene in the law or the workings of parliament. It also removed the King's ability to authorise cruel and unusual punishments, and if the King wanted to levy his own army or his own taxation, he could no longer do so unless Parliament first authorised it.

Locke didn't just set out to restrict the power of the King, he also thought about how to limit the power of Parliament. Whereas Hobbes had argued for a monopoly of power, Locke argued for a separation of powers as a way of ensuring no one politician institution would become monopolistic. It is the job of the 'Legislature' to determine (after due debate and discussion) what laws ought to be made, but the Legislature does not carry out those laws. That's the responsibility of the Executive. The judiciary was assumed by Locke to be part of the Executive. In the event of there being a dispute between them, Locke argued that the Legislature should always take precedence over the executive. The reason why, was because it was the rule of law that was important, and not the government of the day.

The people had rebelled against King Charles I in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and it would happen again in the 18th century, when colonists in North America rebelled against King George III (1738-1820). Locke's ideas about such things as 'checks and balances' and 'separation of powers' had a definite influence on how the American Constitution was written, although actually the USA's founding fathers mostly knew of Locke's ideas not from their original source, but rather from the works of a French thinker called Charles -Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1688-1755).

Also, even though Locke's political philosophy influenced radicals like Thomas Payne (1733-1809), who raised many of the points Locke had in defending the rebellious colonists, Locke himself was no revolutionary. In fact, he didn't believe it was ever legitimate to overthrow Government, and only argued for the deposing of a ruler in exceptional circumstances. It was not enough for the ruler to be inept or corrupt. Only when the ruler was completely oppressive did Locke deem forcible removal a legitimate act. He argued that a despotic ruler should be considered a rebel against the political society itself, and therefore rising up against such a ruler was an act that allowed the proper functioning of the political regime to carry on. It was a way of restoring the status quo.

That status quo was a government with very limited powers, particularly in comparison to what governments are often expected to do in modern societies. Locke's government exists primarily to referee and clarify the rules governing the transference of property. In Locke's political philosophy, the State's role was not to engage in any kind of wealth redistribution, nor was it tasked with maintaining public welfare. It defended the country from invaders, guaranteed the weight and purity of coinage (money is assumed to be gold or silver coinage, remember) and protected property rights, and that is all the State should do, according to Locke.

Since the Government existed primarily to protect property, Locke argued that only those who inherit property should have the vote. He thought the Poor should not be permitted to vote, partly because they necessarily lacked any substantial property and also because they were too much crushed by drudgery and hardship to think much about anything outside of their immediate concerns, and therefore couldn't be trusted to use their vote in a way that somebody really educated in Politics should.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Locke and Money

As well as attempting to establish a moral justification for property rights and describing a minimal government that would protect the property and not interfere much in the workings of the market, John Locke also had things to say about money.

The 1690s was an important decade as far as money is concerned, because 1694 had seen the founding of the Bank of England, the world's first independent national central bank. The paper money issued by the bank soon developed into Europe's first national paper currency.

Another important point is that the 1690s was also a time when British coinage went through something of a crisis. The roots of this trouble lay in the fact that the value of silver had been going up and up, until it got to the point where new British coins were not as valuable as the metal from which they were stamped. Understandably, those who got hold of such coins were loathe to relinquish possession of them. The highly collectible coins were hoarded and pretty much vanished from circulation. What remained in circulation were older coins susceptible to 'clipping'. This referred to the practice of shaving off some of the metal of coins until you had enough to mint yourself an additional coin (this was the bullion equivalent of forging money, an illegal act). But even these dubious coins were becoming ever rarer.

So, one year after the Bank of England was founded, there was a big argument over what to do about this worrying shortage of silver coinage. Although this debate centred on metal, it was actually about the very nature of money.

The Treasury's proposed solution was to bring British coinage below silver's market price. Once that had been done, the Treasury anticipated, people would no longer have so great an incentive to hoard the coins and would instead spend them into circulation. How would the Treasury achieve this goal? By calling in the coinage and re-issuing it at a 20- to 25-percent lower weight.

There was precedence for such a move. In prior times kings had manipulated coinage quite a bit in order to suit their purposes. They would regularly issue decrees that revalued their own coins in relation to the money of account. They would often readjust the silver or gold content of coins, sometimes calling in the entire supply before reissuing it. The fact that everyday folk continued in their economic activity, calculating the relative value of stuff without actually handling metal, has been taken as proof that money need not necessarily be coinage, or even that we don't necessarily need banks (Book One presents such an argument). Indeed, in the Middle Ages, when this sort of manipulation was going on, scholastics had adopted the Aristotelian conception of money as a mere social convention. Not coinage per se, but whatever we agreed it was.

Now, with the Treasury proposing to manipulate coinage once more, those who supported this proposal were again justifying it with Aristotelian arguments. One such person was Nicholas Barbon (1637-1698). He made two main arguments. Firstly, he pointed out that most money was already credit. Indeed it was, for most everyday folk had, for many a

century, relied on popular credit systems and hardly touched metal at all, except to pay their taxes. Also, the Bank of England had been built to take advantage of financiers' ability to endlessly multiply the value of bullion through paper manipulation, leading to a growth in impersonal credit. So, yes, most money in the 1690s was indeed credit.

The second thing he did was to deny the intrinsic value of silver. Its value did not come from the metal itself, he argued, because "money is a value made by law". On this point, Barbon naturally attracted the backing of those who adopted the Chartalist conception of money (a topic Book Six will explore), because his argument fitted neatly with the idea that money is not really coinage, but more fundamentally a measure established by the State.

So that was one side of the argument. The opposing view was put forward by our old friend, John Locke. In the 1690s, Locke had an additional role, along with that of being a liberal philosopher. He was acting as adviser to the Warden of the Mint, who at that time was Sir Issac Newton (1643-1727). It's likely significant that Locke had close ties to the very originator of Newtonian physics. In a way, it played a key role in his winning this debate.

We'll see why later. For now, though, let's look at how Locke dealt with Barbon's Aristotelian arguments. Fittingly for a liberal philosopher famous for minimising the powers of the State, he did so using arguments that minimised the State's right to manipulate coinage.

Whereas the Chartalists had said that silver has no intrinsic value, Locke said that it did and, furthermore, that this was a value recognised by everyone. The State therefore had no business in tampering with the weight or purity of a coin. To do so was just cheating. To press home this point, Locke used an analogy. If you are a short man, can you actually make yourself taller, just by persuading others that there are now fifteen inches in a foot? Clearly not. But why, then, should it be possible to change the value of a small piece of silver just by relabelling it as a shilling?

In Locke's view, to manipulate coinage as the Treasury proposed to do, was to abuse the authority of the State. The government stamp had but one legitimate purpose, which was to attest to the weight and purity of a coin, certifying that it accurately represented the universally-recognised value of silver.

Now, we saw earlier how the soaring price of silver had resulted in new coins vanishing from circulation, leaving only older, clipped coins being used in exchange. You might have wondered why people were not clipping the new coins like crazy in an attempt to artificially expand their supply. The reason why was because the mint had adopted a method that rendered coins resistant to clipping. If you look closely at a coin, you'll notice that it has a milled edge. This feature had been added to coins in the 1690s, and it meant nobody could clip coins without this tampering being obvious.

However, the State itself could still tamper with the weight or purity of coinage, as the Treasury's proposal demonstrated. Locke argued that this was actually as criminal an act as any coin-clipping:

“The use and end of the public stamp is only to be a guard and voucher of the quality of silver which men contract for; and the injury done to the public faith, in this point, is that which in clipping and false coining heightens the robbery into treason”.

Having accused the State of treason, Locke then demanded that the currency be recalled and restamped so that it said it was the same value it had been. His argument was so persuasive that this was actually done.

Newtonian Economics

Earlier, it was said that it was significant that Locke had known Sir Isaac Newton. Here's why. Whereas his opponents had all used Aristotelian arguments, what Locke did was to use a sort of Newtonian argument in his stance that money should be anchored to the 'intrinsic' value of silver.

The key phrase in Locke's quote which was just mentioned is 'the injury done to the public faith'. Locke considered it of utmost importance that the public should be able to trust the government. Now, in our age of satirical shows and contests between political opponents in which all kinds of accusations fly, it might seem strange to say we should place much faith in politicians. There have, after all, been no end of manifestos that have promised to reform this and fix that, but some issues remain stubbornly unaddressed.

But, actually, when Locke spoke of the public faith, he did not mean that we should trust that the State will honour all of its promises. Instead, his point was that the ruling classes should act like scientists. Sometimes, Science, like Politics, makes promises it cannot keep, such as when an amazing new technology is promised to be 'just over the horizon' but then unforeseen circumstances pushes its release into the indeterminate future. But, if you are to be properly called a scientist at all, you should be providing accurate information.

Remember, Locke, like Hobbes before him, had attempted to base his political philosophy on 'natural law'. It's hardly surprising, then, that the 'physical laws' that Newton had so brilliantly laid out in his opus, the 'Principia', should have resonated with Locke. After all, here too we have descriptions of 'laws' that were superior to any rules laid down by any earthly government. The Powers That Be might claim (fraudulently, in Locke's view) that they can change the value of a coin with the mere stroke of a pen, but the inverse square law of gravity was fixed and could not be undone (except, perhaps, by God).

And, speaking of God, Newton's model of the universe appeared to have many of the qualities of a clockwork mechanism, built by a celestial watchmaker. In Newton's view, God had arranged Matter in the universe so that His creation would remain in harmonious balance rather than collapse in on itself because of gravitational attraction. Once carefully set up, this Creation ran in a nicely ordered way, with planets following their orbits, comets appearing in the sky, eclipses taking place, not through the inscrutable whims of capricious gods but because of celestial mechanics whose fundamentals could be described using mathematical tools like the calculus.

If the universe itself ran harmoniously and in balance, why not suppose that the market, with all that buying and selling of commodities and creation and destruction of businesses, should

likewise find some natural equilibrium? The reason why we did not have a harmonious economy but rather one that tended to spiral out of control, Locke insisted, was because the ruling classes were not behaving in a properly scientific manner. They were fraudulently manipulating “the quality of silver which men contract for”, and without accurate pricing information the market was thrown into chaos.

Given his desire to minimise the power and reach of the State as far as possible, it's understandable that Locke embraced what we might call 'Newtonian Economics' (the fundamental assumption of which is that one cannot simply create money through the stroke of a pen, or tinker with it) so wholeheartedly.

But there's another issue to sort out, because Locke was not the only one to embrace this kind of economic thinking. Remember, he won the big debate over the nature of money and his advice was actually carried out. Not only that, but the pendulum swung so fully away from 'money as credit' to 'money as bullion' that Britain adopted a 'gold standard' and the notion that money was gold (or silver) from 1717 and stuck with this position until the last days of its empire.

The strange thing about the State's embrace of Newtonian economics is that the immediate results of its recalling and restriking the currency was disastrous. Just as happened before, the high value of the silver content meant coins were hoarded, to the point where almost no metal currency was in circulation. Without the market's 'lifeblood' of currency (and with other factors having eroded the trust that older systems of credit based on mutual aid needed to function properly, which later books will expand upon) there was a collapse in prices and wages and that led to widespread hunger and disenchantment.

The one group that did not suffer from these consequences was the wealthy, who were insulated from such financial woes, thanks to their being in a position to access the newly-formed paper money. They managed to carry on doing business, trading portions of the king's debt in the form of banknotes. But even they had to put up with some uncertainty, as the value of those notes fluctuated. And, besides, other than this small, mostly insulated group, the consequences of Locke's proposal was rather catastrophic for most of society. It would remain so for quite some time.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

The Religious Roots Of Hobbesian Thinking

In 'Leviathan' Hobbes argued for a vision of humanity that was the very antithesis of that put forward by the likes of Locke or Rousseau (1712-1788) whose work we'll get into later. Whereas he and Locke had presented primitive people as living together in harmony, Hobbes instead set out to deny that any kind of communal solidarity naturally and inevitably developed within society. Rather than portraying people as naturally social beings, in the Hobbesian view we are all isolated individuals, driven in a machinelike way towards personal pleasure and away from personal pain. So strong is this pursuit of self-satisfaction, whenever this drive operated in primitive societies without legal systems that could enforce decent behaviour, it must have resulted in violent, anarchic times where everyone lived in fear of meeting somebody who would overpower them and rob them.

So, whereas in Rousseau's view we only began locking up our possessions when private property and disproportionate allocation of resources introduced artificial wants and needs that made us greedy and jealous, in Hobbes's view the fact that even within families there is the practice of locking things away, is evidence that we are fundamentally, intrinsically greedy and jealous. It was the fact that we are driven by selfish desires to maximise our gain by whatever means available that meant we simply could not be trusted to treat one other justly in the absence of an all-powerful authority figure enforcing good behaviour.

Now, Hobbes was not the only person to hold that people were naturally greedy types who couldn't be left ungoverned and expected to act in a civilised manner. During the Reformation there had been a call to reject private property and the repaying of usurious loans. Martin Luther (1483-1546) had ended up arguing that it was necessary for the State to impose law and order, due to people being flawed and sinful. "This is necessary", he claimed, "in order that trade and society not be utterly destroyed".

But whereas in the past such arguments for a legal system had been expressed in theological language and Biblical references, by the time 'Leviathan' was written all that was dispensed with, and instead human behaviour was expressed in the cold, scientific terminology of rational calculation. No longer was it 'Sin' that made us violent and greedy people that had to be controlled by a powerful State, it was the pursuit of 'self-interest'.

If we trace the roots of this 'self-interest' concept, though, we can reveal that there were always theological assumptions that never really went away. You see, the idea that we are driven by self-interest was not one made up by Hobbes in the 17th century, but rather by an Italian historian called Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540). When he wrote about 'self-interest' around 1510, it was used as an indirect way of talking about a concept that St. Augustine had used, which was 'Self-love'.

In St. Augustine's view, people were pushed and pulled by two different kinds of 'love'. On the one hand there was the 'love of God', and that led us towards treating our fellow human beings benevolently. But, on the other hand, ever since the Fall we had awakened 'self-love', and that pulled us away from altruism and towards an endless desire for self-gratification. It

was that insatiable drive of 'self-love', St. Augustine argued, that meant we could not be left to live our lives unruly without our sinful natures inevitably leading to universal war.

Guicciardini set out to develop a theory of human motivation that retained the notion of an endless pursuit of self-gratification but which dropped the label 'self-love'. But why? What was wrong with such a label? Well, the problem with saying human motivations are driven by 'self-love' is that you're really saying our choices and decisions are motivated by a complex range of emotions, for where there is 'love' there is 'friendship', 'passion', 'pride', 'envy', 'lust', 'anger' and much else besides. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that human life is messy and contradictory, with a turbulent mix of passions and emotions. It was all too messy for a slowly evolving idea that human behaviour should be rationally modelled.

But, what word could be substituted that would dispense of messy emotion while retaining the assumption of insatiable drives? Guicciardini decided the term 'self-interest' suited this purpose. 'Self-interest' was, of course, derived from 'Interest', which itself had come from 'Interesse', a term in Roman Law that referred to a penalty for late payment on a loan. 'Interesse' had morphed into 'Interest' some time in the 14th century, as some started to argue that usury laws should be relaxed in the case of commercial loans.

So, with 'self-interest', Guicciardini had a term that was borrowed from those whose business was in keeping records of financial affairs. This gave the term an objective, mathematical quality, "a way to cut past the welter of passions and emotions that seem to govern our daily existence... and discover that, despite all this, most really important decisions are based on the rational calculation of mutual advantage", as Graeber put it.

But at the same time, underneath all the terminology borrowed from impersonal math, there remained that peculiarly Christian idea of Usury as sin, and human life as having been corrupted since the Fall, leaving us unable to settle for 'enough' and instead demand ever more. For that's what 'Interest' is, isn't it? The demand that money should ceaselessly grow. As Graeber pointed out, "the same was true when it became the term for investments- 'I have a 12% interest in that venture'- it is money placed in the continual pursuit of profit".

Now, Hobbes himself did not use the term 'self-interest' and spoke instead of 'private' and 'common' interests. When Guicciardini began to use the term, the idea that human existence could be reduced to the pursuit of self-interest was regarded by most in polite society as a cynical, Machiavellian concept. Niccolo Machiavelli had witnessed some pretty dirty behaviour in the rulers of the Italian Renaissance, and concluded in his most famous work ('The Prince') that politics was by its very nature a dirty game of treachery and deceit. It so happens that Guicciardini was a friend of Machiavelli, and one wonders if these two developed their cynical views of human life together.

While not many agreed with Guicciardini when he wrote about 'self-interest' in 1512, by the 18th century such ideas had come to be accepted as common-sensical by a majority of educated people. And while Hobbes may not have used the term, the assumptions underlying 'self-interest' nevertheless featured heavily in his most famous work, 'Leviathan'. As Graeber explained, "the very idea that human beings are motivated primarily by 'Self-interest'...was rooted in the profoundly Christian assumption that we are all incorrigible sinners...And as Augustine already anticipated, infinite desires in a finite world means

endless competition, which in turn is why, as Hobbes insisted, our only hope of social peace lies in contractual arrangements and strict enforcement by the apparatus of the State”.

CHAPTER NINE

Having completed our runthrough of Hobbes's and Locke's views on humanity in a state of nature, readers may have noticed that an important question has been left hanging. We have not determined which of these views is the correct one. Were Locke or Rousseau correct in thinking that Man in a state of nature was a noble savage whose peaceful existence was later corrupted? Or was Hobbes right in supposing there was nothing noble about the savagery of humanity's origins; that our brutal, selfish ways had to be artificially reshaped into attitudes and behaviours more befitting a civilised way of life?

Particularly when thinking about people in general, many of us lean towards the Hobbesian view. This generally pessimistic opinion on what people are really like doesn't come from nowhere but rather from the foundational assumptions of our competitive, growth-based market system. Economists have, for many generations, modelled human beings as agents whose decisions are based on cynical, egoistic calculations. It's true that not everyone who shares this outlook on humanity also agrees with Hobbes that monopolistic state power is the only way of preventing a perpetual war of all against all. Some side with Adam Smith in supposing our innate drive toward accumulation and self-aggrandisement will be guided by the market god toward a civilisation of prosperity and peace. But deep down, many agree with the economists that, fundamentally, altruism just doesn't come naturally to us. Rather, selfish opportunism does.

Proof In Paleontology?

Nor are economists the only experts who hold this view. So too do some psychologists. One such example would be Steven Pinker, who sounded decidedly Hobbesian when he wrote, "archaeologists tell us that humans lived in a state of anarchy until the emergence of civilisation some 5000 years ago, when sedentary farmers first coalesced into cities and states and developed the first governments".

Apparently, it's not just archeology that reveals our roots to be Hobbesian but palaeontology too. Back in 1991, while out hiking in the Tyrolean Alps, two hikers spotted what they at first assumed was the victim of a fatal skiing accident, sticking out of a glacier. But then, as the corpse was being removed from the ice, the dead man was discovered to be in possession of a Neolithic copper ax and other things that led archeologists and palaeontologists to the conclusion that he was 5000 years old.

Inevitably, speculations surrounding the discovery of 'Otzi the Ice Man' (as he became known). What kind of life had he lived? How had he died? Forensic evidence determined that the answer was: Violently. Along with his copper ax, Otzi was also found to own a wood-handled dagger and a quiver of fleeced arrows. When DNA analysis was undertaken, traces of blood from different people were found on all his weapons. Otzi himself also had an arrowhead embedded in his shoulder.

Details like these led to a reconstruction of his final days. Otzi had been involved in a raiding party that clashed with a neighbouring tribe. He had shot and killed a man with an arrow before retrieving it, only to kill another man with it. He had carried an injured comrade on his

back while fending off an attack. And then that arrow had struck him and, mortally wounded, he fell down and, 5000 years later, was discovered by those two hikers.

Nor is Otzi the only person from human prehistory to have been a victim of homicide, for Pinker also points to other examples such as 'Kenwick Man' (shot with a stone projectile) and 'Lindow Man' (skull bashed in, neck broken with twisted cord and, for good measure, throat cut. Somebody clearly wanted to make quite certain he died!). These examples of violent death prompted Pinker to wonder, "what is it about the ancients that they couldn't leave us an interesting corpse without resorting to foul play?".

His answer is that life for our ancient ancestors was so violent because a civilising process in which sovereign states that have a monopoly over the lawful application of violence within their borders, had yet to happen. But we moderns live in a world in which such things have been woven into the fabric of life for many hundreds of years. Clearly it has not succeeded in preventing all murders and assaults, but it has vastly reduced the chances of meeting a violent end. If it seems like the world is more dangerous than at any time in history, that's because news media, following the "if it bleeds it leads" rule, constantly reports on whatever rapes, assaults, murders and genocides are happening in the world. But, statistically speaking and compared to the past, those are now very rare events. Life was markedly different thousands of years ago. It was, as Hobbes had supposed, "nasty, brutish and short" for most people.

Counterproof

Or was it? Before we conclude, along with Pinker and many economists, that human beings are naturally pretty nasty creatures, it should be pointed out that by no means do all ancient remains indicate that this is so.

Consider, for example, Romito 2. This name refers to a 10,000 year old burial site (it's named after the Calabrian rock shelter where it was found). The deceased is male, and forensic studies have determined that he was inflicted with a rare genetic disorder known as 'Acromesomelic Dysplasia'. This is a severe type of Dwarfism and it would have made participating in high-altitude hunting (a necessary skill in the environment where he lived) quite impossible. Since that was so, you might suppose that this disabled child was considered to be economically useless to his tribe and left to die without pity.

But here's the thing: Romito 2 is no child. Rather, it is the remains of a young adult. What pathological studies show is that his people actually went to some lengths to look after him, providing him with the same share of meat as anyone else, and doing what they could to ensure he was cared for. Nor did this care cease when he died. He was, after all, granted a careful, sheltered burial and not just dumped somewhere as food for scavengers.

And this is by no means an isolated case. There are other remains that show clear signs of having been afflicted with health-related disabilities but who, having received enough care from their community, lived long enough to make it to adulthood and even continued to hold a special place in their community after death, if the lavish burial that were sometimes given is anything to go by.

According to the archaeologist David Wengrow and anthropologist David Graeber, “if we did want to reach a general conclusion about what form human societies originally took, based on statistical frequencies of health indicators from ancient burials...our species was a nurturing and care-giving species, and there was no need for life to be nasty, brutish and short”.

Are we to conclude, then, that Hobbes was wrong and Locke and Rousseau right? Were our ancestors ‘noble savages’ after all? Actually, no. All these examples show is that it is quite possible to cherry pick among examples of ancient remains in order to find ones that suit whatever argument you are trying to make, whether it be Hobbesian in nature, or it assumes our ancestors lived in peaceful communities as Locke and Rousseau supposed.

In reality, only rather unusual individuals were honoured with a proper burial. Most people were just left to nature after they died. That doesn’t mean to say they weren’t cared for while alive, because archaeological and anthropological studies show we cannot do anything simple like pigeonhole people into character types like Hobessians who were conditioned into civilised behaviour, or as peaceful folk who were subsequently corrupted. Instead, such studies show human life to be much more messy, complex and interesting than such stereotypes imply.

CHAPTER TEN

Two Worlds Meet

There's only so much understanding to be had from examining buried remains. Much more knowledge can be obtained from spending time among living human beings. Since the fifteenth century, explorers and settlers had been given the opportunity to do just that as they expanded their territories into hitherto unknown lands and encountered the people who had already made a home there.

Modern evolutionary theory tells us that all people, and indeed every living thing from the smallest microbe to the largest animal, are all equally modern because life in all its variety has had as much time to evolve from the common ancestor at the very base of the family tree.

But what did our pre Darwinian ancestors make of the people they encountered as they explored the new continent? It's perhaps understandable if one did not recognise a People as fully modern if such folk were found to be living in a forest with no sign of modernity anywhere. No recognisable farming, or legal systems; nothing that looks like money, and construction techniques that, presumably, hadn't changed much since the Stone Age. Surely, one could only conclude that these were primitive people who, for some reason, had never evolved away from the original state of communism (for better or worse) that we first-worlders had once been in, way back in the dim and distant past?

But there's a very good reason for supposing that's not the conclusion that was drawn when the first European explorers to set foot in the Americas encountered such people as the Amazonians, or the Algokians of North America. Their understanding of human history, which came from studying Biblical texts, led to a different appraisal of these people.

After all, great Thinkers like Thomas Aquinas had pointed out that hierarchy had been a fact of human life from the very beginning, with Adam clearly outranking Eve. They would have understood, from reading Scripture, that God Himself had revealed all important knowledge at the beginning of time, and that cities had existed since before the Flood. Armed with such understanding, those earliest European explorers who came across those tribes didn't see them as still living in the egalitarian state of nature that had been Mankind's original condition, but rather as what remained of some ancient civilisation, long since fallen into a degenerate condition. It was certainly possible to lose the wisdom of one's ancestors. The great intellects of the day proved that, as they attempted to regain the philosophical and artistic wonders of Ancient Greece and Rome. These people had simply fallen even further. So far, in fact, to have forgotten even farming, metallurgy and civil governance.

The Original Meaning of 'Noble Savage'

What else did those missionaries, explorers and settlers of the 'New World' make of the people they encountered there? They believed the likes of the Wendat and other tribes to be 'noble savages', but in identifying them as such they weren't at first drawing the kind of conclusion you might suppose. To modern ears, a term like that sounds like a comment on a

people's primitive but exemplary character. It invites us to imagine a simpler time when folk lived in balance with nature and in harmony with their kith and kin.

But, actually, the label 'noble savage' came about after observing how work was organised in these tribes. Duties such as foraging was undertaken mostly by women. As for the menfolk, they seemed to occupy their time with hunting and the occasional bout of war. In other words, the males of these tribes seemed to be preoccupied with the same sort of pursuits that the aristocracy of the old world had long engaged in. Hence, they were viewed as noble savages, not because of any nobility of character, but because their days were spent hunting and fighting, just as the Nobility did back home.

Now, all such conclusions are the sort of reasoning one can do just by observing a people while letting preconceptions colour your thoughts. It might be supposed that the conquistadors, colonists and such who came to these lands never did much to understand the people they found there, because why would an invading force bother to get to know a People they were enslaving and exterminating?

Bad Excuses For Appropriation

In the case of Spanish adventurers like Herman Cortez (1485-1547) they had come to the Americas largely without the authorisation of their rulers, and under the pretence of defending Christianity. But legal scholars identified a stark problem with that excuse. The Old Testament mentioned names like Egypt or Ethiopia (Moses's mistress, Zipporah, came from there, according to some interpretations) and so the people of Africa must have heard- and rejected- the word of God. That meant they were guilty of heresy and thus warranted being put to the sword and their wealth confiscated.

But the Bible made no mention of the 'New World' of the Americas whatsoever, and it soon became clear that none of the people there had ever been exposed to the teachings of Christ. That meant they could not be classed as infidels, since they had never actively rejected Christianity.

The Conquistadors thought they could get around that problem by first reading out a declaration demanding the natives converted to Catholicism and then attacking when they did not. The legal scholars did not agree that addressing people in Latin, a language they did not understand, justified slaughtering, pillaging and enslaving them when they responded with incomprehension rather than obedience.

But, if these people couldn't be accused of heresy or classed as infidels, what other justification called for their extermination? The only possibility left was to establish that these were a people so alien, so outside the bounds of common humanity, they could be treated like animals. That, however, was found to be an untenable position once it was clear that these were people vested by God with powers of reason.

Such a conclusion could not have been reached unless the settlers and conquerors could have counted among them people who took the time to interact more fully with the inhabitants of the new world. It so happened that such people did travel to the Americas. They were Jesuits, recognised as the intellectuals of the Catholic world. The Jesuits came to

the New World trained in classical rhetoric and argumentative methods, and they took the time to learn the languages of the people they found there in order to convert them to what they knew to be the one true Faith.

The 'Savage' Perspective

At the same time the Wendat, Mikmaq and other tribespeople were getting to know these men who had appeared in their midst. What did they make of them? One might suppose that, on encountering these men with their fancy armour and weapons made from some advanced technology, not to mention all the jewels and gold they possessed, the tribespeople saw the invaders as staggeringly rich. But, while that was obviously true in a material sense, those tribes came to realise that, from another perspective, the tribespeople themselves were the ones who lived richer lives.

As Father Pierre Biard (1567-1622) wrote, "they consider themselves better than the French: 'For', they say, 'you are neither generous nor kind'... They reciprocate hospitality and give such assistance to one another that the necessity of all are provided... and they considered it a very bad thing when they heard it said that there were in France a great many of these needy beggars, and thought that this was for lack of charity in us".

From accounts such as these we can see that, while the French and Spanish settlers clearly had more material wealth, the tribespeople could also see there was a sense in which those colonialists were more possessed by such things, for they acted like they were in a desperate race to accumulate ever more riches. Nor were they above betraying one another if there was material advantage to be had from treachery. The Wendat and other tribes, in contrast, had much more ease, comfort and time, simply because they put community way ahead of material acquisition.

They also lived far freer lives than the French, if Jesuit accounts are anything to go by. We find the following in the correspondences of Father Lallemant (1593-1673):

"I do not believe that there is any people on Earth freer than they, and less able to allow the subjection of their wills to any power whatsoever- so much so that their fathers have no control over their children... or the laws of the country over any of them".

Justice Done Differently

Such descriptions may give the impression that these were a lawless people, but that's not really the case. In fact, the Wendat people did have a system of justice. It was just one that worked in a different way to that of old world Justice.

Think of how legal cases are presented in our courts. It's "the Crown (or 'the People' in the USA) versus the Accused". In other words, we see justice in terms of the public demanding due recompense from guilty individuals. But Wendat legal systems worked entirely the other way around. As Father Lallemant explained, "it is not the guilty that suffer the penalty [but rather] the public that must make amends for the offences of individuals". In other words, the Wendat community paid for the crimes of individuals, rather than demanding individuals pay back their crimes to the community.

There was no demand that the community should redeem crimes. "No one is compelled to it", Father Lallemant wrote, "but those who were willing bring publicly what they wish to contribute". He noted that many seemed more than willing to contribute, for it was a way for the wealthier Wendat to signal their status. He also concluded that this was a system of justice that worked pretty well. "This form of justice restrains all those people and seems more effectually to repress disorders than the personal punishments of criminals does in France".

Leaders With No Power To Command

The reference to wealth in that last paragraph suggests that, whatever form of social organisation the Wendat lived under, it was not one of full Communism. Anthropological research has confirmed this was indeed so; some members of the Wendat tribe were wealthier than others and there were formal political offices, so the Wendat community was not egalitarian in anthropological terms. They had money, and some had more than others.

But, just as their systems of justice were different to those of the old world, so too was their money. This was because nothing in Wendat culture- not access to land, or agricultural products, or valuables or money- provided a means of transforming access to material possessions into power over others.

The same thing was true of political office. While those who accumulated and redistributed the greater wealth may have had more aspirations to hold office, once they did so they still couldn't order anyone to do anything or, if they did, such orders would just be ignored. As Father Lallemant commented, "they are free people, each of whom considers himself of as much consequence as the others, and they submit to their chiefs only in so far as it pleases them".

The writings of the Jesuits hardly ever mention 'equality', probably because their Christian beliefs didn't allow them to entertain the idea such a thing was even possible. Instead, their writings about and dialogues with the Wendat were mostly about how much freer those people were.

Nevertheless, one can infer two forms of equality at play here. The French had 'equality' in the sense that all were equal before the Law. As in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the King had absolute authority and, hence, since one man in France was vested with absolute power, everybody else stood in common subjugation to him (or to God who, after all, was addressed as Lord). The Wendat, in contrast, had equality in the sense of everybody being just as able to disobey whatever orders they didn't feel like following as anybody else.

As you can imagine, this did make the Jesuits' mission of converting the tribespeople to Christianity exceedingly difficult. As Graeber and Wengrow pointed out, "even finding terms to translate concepts like 'Lord', 'Commandment' or 'Obedience' into indigenous languages was extremely difficult; explaining the underlying theological concepts, well-nigh impossible".

In a sense, then, Pinker was right: these were, indeed, people living in a state of anarchy. It's just that, like most people, he entirely misunderstood what that means. Contrary to popular

belief, anarchy is not synonymous with chaos and violence. An anarchic crowd is not a mob, baying and fighting rather than waiting in line in an orderly fashion, or otherwise conducting themselves in a civilised manner. No, anarchy is fundamentally concerned with self-organisation. It's faith in people's ability to treat each other with respect and to consider the welfare of others as well as one's own, without having to be coerced into such behaviour by some higher authority. As the tribes of the New World amply demonstrated, given the right conditions people will prove such faith is well founded.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the last chapter, we saw how the French colonists and Wendat tribespeople represented two forms of equality; the former in the sense of everybody being equally subordinate to the King (or God) and the latter in the sense of everybody being at liberty to follow instructions or not as the fancy took them. As one Jesuit missionary remarked, “they (are) rendering no homage to anyone whomsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we fear our captains, while they make a sport of theirs. All the authority of their chief is in his tongue’s end; he is powerful in so far as he is eloquent”.

I think it’s fair to say that, to modern ears, the Wendat way of life- one free of fear of rulers, which allowed for full individual Liberty and which offered the support of a sustainable communal safety net- sounds closer to the ideal than the one the French were living under in the 16th century. After all, we do tend to place a high premium on personal freedom (even if not many of us can imagine society holding together in the complete absence of police, prisons, and other such apparatus of coercion). But whereas modern French or Canadian people would most likely side with the Wendat, those French Missionaries were emphatically opposed to it, for they rejected freedom altogether. They described the personal liberty displayed by the Wendat as “a disposition quite contrary to the spirit of the Faith, which requires us to submit not only our wills, but our minds, our judgements, and all the sentiments of man...to a law that is not of this Earth”.

The Jesuit missionaries (considered the very best debaters of their generation, remember) engaged in lengthy conversations with the tribal leaders, with the purpose of converting them to their faith, only to find that those tribal leaders possessed far superior abilities in the arts of argument and persuasion. As Father Lallemant commented, “I would never have believed that, without instruction, Nature could have supplied a most ready and vigorous character...They nearly all show more intelligence in their business, speeches, courtesies, intercourses, tricks and subtleties, than the shrewdest citizens and merchants in France”.

How Can You Compel If You Cannot Command?

The question is, how did these people, who never had any formal schooling, nevertheless acquire such amazing powers of reason and persuasion that even those inflicting genocidal practices on them were moved to tears by the power of their words?

The answer, perhaps, was hinted at in the comment about chiefs being “powerful insofar as he is eloquent”. As is the case with all human society there must have been work that needed doing and duties to be delegated. But if nobody, not even the chief, could order such work be done, how was it carried out by these people? Well, if you can’t simply boss people about, what can you do? You can try to persuade them, appeal to their best interests, make the case that this job needs doing.

In Book Three we saw how there tends to be a decreasing ability to model other peoples’ minds and apply empathy as one goes up the wealth scale. The lower classes are best at inferring and responding appropriately to what others are likely thinking and feeling, while the Rich are the worst at it. We put this down to the fact that, provided you have enough money in our market system, you can pay somebody else to do all the work involved in completing a

project. No matter what that project is, a large portion of the problems that will need solving will have to do with the emotional states and other foibles of human beings. Indeed, even though we think of work as being primarily 'productive', in actual fact there are all kinds of work to be done that doesn't produce anything, and this has been the case for centuries. But there are no jobs that don't entail working with other people. But whereas employees need to care about what others, and especially the boss, is thinking or feeling, the boss doesn't have to care at all. After all, other employees were hired to take care of that side of things.

That, though, is how things are done in our way of life, where money can be converted into power over others. But that was not an option in Wendat culture. The chief couldn't just say "just do as you're told!", because that would be met with scorn. Nobody in that culture was able to order anyone to do anything, but they could learn the art of persuasion and how to argue their case. After who knows how many generations of debates among free people, those who rose to positions of authority in this culture had come to possess superlative powers of reason.

It sounds like that has to be the explanation, doesn't it? But, as Graeber and Wengrow pointed out, "persuasiveness need not take the form of logical argumentation; it can just as easily involve appeal to sentiment, whipping up passions...appeal to prophecy or revelation". Since that is so, how come the form of persuasion employed by those tribal leaders did manifest as particularly effective logical argumentation?

Curious Dialogues

Now, so far we have only heard from the Jesuit missionaries and not what anyone from the Wendat tribe thought about the situation. We do have a way of finding out what they thought, thanks to a style of literature that became very popular in the 18th century. This was travel literature in which authors recorded dialogues they had had with people they apparently met while on their travels.

One such example was 'Curious Dialogues With a Savage of Good Sense Who Has Travelled'. It was written in 1703 by a French aristocrat by the name of Louis-Armand de con D'Arce, Baron de la Hontan (1666-1716) and it consisted of four conversations with an elder statesman of the Wendat confederation, who was known as Kandiaronk (1649-1701 approx).

At one point in these dialogues the topic of conversation turns to the law and, in particular, how it can be so that the French ran such a punitive system of justice while, at the same time, their society was rife with injustice. Why could the French not behave in a civilised manner, not even when being uncivil led to harsh punishment?

Lahontan's argument was that, while it is true that all humans have the capacity to reason, it's not a capability equally possessed by one and all. Some of us are good at it, while others are lacking in this ability. Therefore, he says, "the wicked need to be punished, and the good need to be rewarded. Otherwise, murder, robbery and defamation would spread everywhere".

Kandiaronk does not accept that it is any inherent corruption of human nature, or religious doctrine of original sin, that marks human beings down as wicked creatures who can only do good under harsh discipline. He points out that the Wendat “are determined not to have laws- because, since the world was a world, our ancestors have been able to live contentedly without them”.

That was not, strictly speaking, true. The Wendat did, in fact, have legal codes regulating their behaviour. But it was true that their society was a lot more peaceful than France’s in the 16th century. “What kind of humans, what species of creature must Europeans be”, Kandiaronk wonders, “that they have to be forced to do good, and only refrain from evil because of fear of punishment?”.

It’s worth pointing out that this was a time when brutal methods of torture could be used to extract confessions, when false testimony and accusations of witchcraft could land someone in the most dire trouble, and when there was pretty blatant differential justice for Rich and Poor. So Kandiaronk had substantial evidence to back up his dismal appraisal of the European character. But, once again, why was that character so bad, even under so harsh a judicial system? After all, the Wendat had no coercive or punitive laws and their society had not degenerated into violent chaos.

The reason why the French behaved so wickedly, Kandiaronk decided, was because, in that country, there was another system that encouraged people to behave in a way that was contrary to the communal thoughtfulness that was a requisite of any workable system of justice. This other system consisted of money and property rights that encouraged a particularly selfish pursuit of material advantage. It led to one disregarding the needs of others. “Fathers sell their children, husbands their wives, wives betray their husbands...friends are false and all because of money. In light of all this, tell me that we Wendat are not right in refusing to touch, or so much as look at, silver?”.

Voting with Feet

If Lahontan’s response to that was this was just Kandiaronk’s opinion and maybe others would rather adopt the European way of life, there would have been a powerful counter to such a suggestion. Throughout the ages, human history has demonstrated a particularly dependable way of highlighting how aspirational a way of life in any village, town, or country is, and that is: voting with your feet. In other words, do people tend to be drawn towards a place, or is something repelling them from it?

These days we are used to migrants wanting to come to first world countries like France and England. Migrant flows is such a hot topic these days, it’s nigh on impossible to miss. It’s also not at all hard to see why people would move heaven and earth to get away from countries in the grip of brutal dictators, where bribes and corruption are taken as given by law enforcers, and move to countries that have a working democracy and a judicial system that, while not perfect, is undeniably fairer and more just compared to certain other places.

But it has not always been the case that Europe was somewhere everybody wanted to be. When the Americas was being colonised from the 15th century onwards, there were cases in which those settlers were sometimes captured or adopted by the native people. And nor was

the flow strictly one way, for Amerindians were sometimes incorporated into European culture. And no, those latter people were not all slaves- some came to Europe through marriage or adoption and became considerably wealthy.

In both cases, colonial history shows that, when given the choice of staying (or returning) to native culture, people much preferred to do just that. This did not just apply to foreigners who ran away to those tribes, but also to children who had been abducted. Once returned to their biological parents, such kids ran back to their former captors at the earliest opportunity. As for those natives who were married into a life of luxury in Europe, they found it extremely hard to adjust to European life and returned to their indigenous society as soon as they could.

So, by voting with their feet, people were showing that there was clearly something wrong with European culture, and something very attractive about Native American societies.

Did these people express any reason for their preference? Yes, and it had to do with poverty. Not so much being subjected to it, but rather being in a society that didn't seem to care much at all if some were left in a condition of destitution. Much as Oscar Wilde once remarked that the advantage of Socialism was not having to listen to poor people's complaints or being confronted with their justifications for complaining everywhere you look, those who chose to stay or return to native culture cited freedom as the main justification: Freedom from toil in pursuit of selfish materialism; freedom from living amidst unnecessary poverty and (if reports of outsiders rising up in the ranks of their adopted society was anything to go by) freedom of opportunity- all of which were pretty much absent in class-based Europe with its punitive laws and its religious doctrine of unquestioning obedience.

Not a Sock Puppet

The idea that there might be places on Earth where people didn't ignore vagrancy like it was no concern of theirs that some should fall so far, and instead built societies that offered far more care and freedom, evidently struck a chord with some people because, by the 18th century, the book 'Curious Dialogues' had been translated into German, English, Italian and Danish and remained in print for a century or more. As is so often the case, this success inspired imitations, and so there was much demand for similarly styled critiques in which a native of Peru or Tahiti or China or some tribe in the Americas, cast a critical eye over the European way of life.

So, for example, in 1771 Parisian theatregoers were entertained and educated by 'L'Arlequin Savage', which told the tale of a Wendat brought to France. Said Wendat gives a series of monologues in which he "attributes the ills of (French) society to private property, to money, and in particular to the monstrous inequality which makes the poor the slaves of the rich". Interest in this play was high enough for it to enjoy yearly reruns over the next twenty years.

Now, in most of these plays and literary works, such words of condemnation are spoken by imaginary Peruvians, Tahitians and Wendat and are not verbatim accounts of anything any real person said. For the longest time it was generally thought that the same had to be true of Kandiaronk. That's not to say he never existed. He definitely did. It is just that, in the past, most experts took the character of Kandiaronk to be a sock puppet of Lahontan himself, a

safe way of expressing ideas that, for the time, were dangerously controversial. Back then you really couldn't publish an open attack on Christendom, because the Church censorship would never let you get away with that if it was your own opinion. You could, however, write up a dialogue in which you defended it from imagined foreign skepticism, even if you invariably lost the argument to your opponent.

It was true that the noble savage archetype became a means of safely expressing ideas that might land you in trouble. So, when 'Kandiaronk' was found to be articulating well-researched critiques of Monastic politics, legal affairs and French society, how could a Native American who lived on another continent have such knowledge? Unless, of course, it was really Lahontan's thoughts this character was expressing?

However, in the case of Kandiaronk, more recent expert opinion is that the critiques attributed to him are, for the most part, authentically his own. It has been pointed out that, in 1691, the Wendat Confederation sent an ambassador to the court of Louis XIV (1638-1715) and, given that Kandiaronk held the office of 'Speaker of the Council', he would have been the obvious person to send. And then there are all those 1st-hand accounts from those who, having had many opportunities to speak with him on many matters, remarked on just how skilled a debater he was. One such person commented, "he was not less brilliant in conversation in private, and (councillors and negotiators) often took pleasure in provoking him to hear his repartees, always animated, full of wit, and generally unanswerable".

In certain other examples of this kind of genre, however, it is a fictional character (rather than an historical figure) who is speaking. One such character is 'Zilia', who was supposedly an Inca princess, the heroine of 'Letters of a Peruvian Woman', which was written in 1747 by Madame de Graffigny (1645-1758). In this tale, which is entirely made up, Zilia is kidnapped and brought to France. Once there she casts a very critical eye over the absurdities of its society. That included wondering why the King of France couldn't do something useful with all the money he was accumulating through heavy taxation, such as the sort of wealth redistribution Peruvians enjoyed under the Supa Inca.

This book would become important for two reasons. One is that it might very well be the first book to introduce the notion of state Socialism to the general public. The second is that, by the time the second edition came out, it inspired an attack on the indigenous critique that would shape how we commonly think human societies developed.

Societal Stages

This person was someone we talked about in Book Two. This was A.R.J Turgot who, as a physiocrat, was involved in a branch of theory that would one day become economics. He became aware of Madame de Graffigny's book after she wrote him a letter asking for suggested changes to the second edition, and it so happened that his own interests were developing in a way that was of relevance to the noble savage (a term now meant in the sense of wise, peaceful people).

What interested Turgot was the idea that you could take material economic progress and turn it into a general theory of history. In his view, as history marches forward, propelled by technological progress, certain things become amplified.

An obvious example would be muscle power. Considered as a naked animal, a human being would seem very weak in comparison to, say, an ox. But, give that man the right machinery and he will be able to lift or transport materials that far outweigh the maximum carrying capacity of ten oxen let alone one.

That's a pretty obvious example. But Turgot pointed out that something else got increasingly amplified as technology advanced, and that was the natural differences between individuals. He asserted that, in modern society (modern for him that is, so 18th century Europe) advances had progressed enough to make the difference in people's natural abilities very significant indeed. This had made ever more complex divisions of labour possible and it had created stark inequalities between Haves and Have-nots.

If complex divisions of labour, a large wealth-gap and other blatant signs of inequality were the features of modern civilisation, what did that say about the freedom and equality that was so often being held up as evidence of the superiority of 'savage' culture? It meant that, actually, the egalitarian nature of Wendat society proved it to be less advanced. Turgot saw the Wendat as having a society that was far more egalitarian, only because it was a society in which households were self-sufficient, which was relatively easy to perpetuate when you are all equally poor.

Turgot found such insights compelling enough to devote many years in pondering them. The result of those years of study was a rather familiar theory of economic development.

In the model that Turgot came up with, such a development goes through certain stages. The most primitive stage of human society is that of bands of hunter-gatherers. That then progresses to the next stage, which is pastoralism which, in turn, gives way to farming. And so things keep on progressing to the stage of urban commercial civilisation, which Turgot took to be the most advanced as it was the most contemporary form of society he knew.

Not every human culture advanced through all those stages, as the existence of pre-agricultural tribes in Africa and the New World proved. But now, such people were to be thought of as the left-behind; vestiges of those earlier stages of development more advanced civilisations had escaped from in their progress towards modernity. If, in progressing towards modern civilisation, Humanity had created unfortunate consequences, such as poverty and dispossession for some, well, that was just the price that had to be paid in order to bring about the sort of prosperity only modern, urban commercial society could offer.

Within a few years, this idea that human society could be broken up into stages of development was featuring in the lectures of other people. One such person was no less a figure than the man often credited as the father of economics, Adam Smith. Those who have read Book One will recall that he was responsible for creating the Mythstake which that volume was concerned with. To recap, Smith asserted that commercial markets came into being because selfish individuals, motivated only by material gain, began swapping things. That then led to more complex exchange networks mediated by coinage and, eventually, credit. And while the State would invariably become involved, particularly once the stage of credit or paper money was reached, it should ideally be a minimal state that protected

national borders, ensured money stayed 'sound' but otherwise left markets alone to find their natural equilibrium.

In the version of history that Smith and other classical economists like Locke and Marx developed, 'egalitarian' tribes whose main method of subsistence appeared to be hunter-gathering were relegated to the bottom of a ladder of prosperity that supposedly began with primitive people using barter as their primary economic system. Actually, as Vol One demonstrated, these thoughts on how Native American people went about their daily lives was not based on any anthropological study of actual tribes. Instead, Adam Smith and all other economists or monetary historians who tell a tale that begins "once upon a time people had to barter", just made up imaginary tribes, villages and towns where commercial activity goes on, much as it does in today's commercial settings, only nobody has heard of money. What actual anthropological studies have proved beyond all doubt is that barter has never been the main mode of exchange.

I cannot resist providing one more thought experiment to show how silly the barter theory of money's origins is. What this story does is take one aspect of modern life, namely exchanges mediated by money, and leaves everything else in place. This is akin to imagining a city like Los Angeles, where one pretty much has to rely on vehicles to make life manageable, and then imagining such a city without access to traffic. "In such a city", the argument would go, "people would have to walk very long distances to get to the shops. Finding this a decidedly inconvenient thing to have to do, they would surely have invented the car in order to make life easier".

But why would our ancestors, living in an age without transport, ever have built a society that, like LA, places the means of living far from your home location? Obviously their pre-vehicular societies were nothing like this and it is absurd to imagine an "LA without vehicles" and then presenting that as the reason why cars were invented. Similarly, one cannot seriously invoke a modern town, only one in which money does not exist, and then claim that the obvious inconveniences this one difference makes provides all the explanation for why money was adopted in the first place.

Nevertheless, despite an abundance of evidence debunking the belief that the first stage of society is always small bands of hunter-gatherers relying on barter, the belief that this must be how societies developed became (and still is) very popular indeed, which is what makes it a Mythstake. It also had a profound effect on how people in the 'First World' thought about North American societies. Whereas they had once been held up as superior people whose egalitarian societies made Europeans seem like slaves in common subjugation to their lords in comparison, now they were seen as lowly, primitive people, languishing on the bottom rung of social development. And, whereas previously such considerations as modes of subsistence and divisions of labour were secondary considerations at best (and more likely entirely trivial matters) now they were considered the most important factors of all when it came to sorting out human societies into ranks of 'basic', 'better' and 'best'.

In this light, 'egalitarian' societies could hardly be held up as exemplary cultures. As Graeber and Wengrow said, "at best, they could provide some insight into how our distant ancestors might have lived; but certainly could no longer be imagined as equal parties to a dialogue

about how the inhabitants of wealthy and powerful societies should conduct themselves in the present".

CHAPTER TWELVE

In the previous chapters, we have seen how encounters with North American people led to an evolution in European thought. When settlers and missionaries first encountered tribes like the Wendat and learned their language so as to argue in favour of the superiority of European civilisations, such arguments at first had nothing to do with 'equality', mostly because the Christian faith denied that there could ever be equality among people (except in the case of us all being equally subjected to God's rule). Instead, those debates were centred around 'freedom' and whether it was a good thing if Man should be in a condition where he had "the liberty of wild ass colts, paying no homage to anyone whomsoever" (as one Jesuit missionary put it).

Whereas the missionaries took the stance that this was a bad way of life as it was contrary to God's law, Native Americans like Kandiaronk argued in favour of a people free to disobey orders, free from a life of toil, and free to remake society as they saw fit. In holding up their own society with its laws that made the community responsible for the damages caused by crime (rather than society demanding individuals pay back their guilt to 'the People', which is how justice worked in European countries) the Wendat and other tribes were presenting an argument centred around the egalitarian nature of their way of life. By the time Turgot and the classical economists had relegated such tribes to the bottom of the ladder of social development, the idea that history begins with primitive egalitarian people had gone from one that was just inconceivable to a fundamental assumption regarding how the human story must have developed.

Rousseau's Essay

One sign of just how much this "primitive stage of equality" was now taken for granted can be seen in the form of a question that was set in 1754. That was the year in which the Academie Des Sciences, Arts, et Belles-Lettres de Dijon announced a national essay competition. The question that was set was: "what is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorised by natural law?". As you can see, the way that question is phrased takes for granted the idea that people had been equal in the past and that something had changed so that now we had classes, divisions of labour and other signs of inequality. So the original state of egalitarian society was not up for debate. Instead, the question sought answers to whether or not modern society should be unequal.

First prize was awarded to one Abbé Talbert. Other than briefly summarise his essay as arguing inequality is rooted in original sin we won't spend any time on it, because an essay submitted by somebody else has gone down in history as far more significant. That person was Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the essay he submitted is one that now follows Hobbes and Locke in political philosophy textbooks.

Although this essay is now popularly seen as an attempt to sketch out a history of societal development, in actual fact Rousseau stated that this was not his intention. "One must not take the kind of research which we enter into as the pursuit of truths of history, but solely as hypothetical and conditional reasonings, better to clarify the nature of things than to expose their actual origin". This was no historical account then, but rather a thought experiment.

In some ways, his essay contained assumptions that were similar to the thoughts of Hobbes and Locke. Like them, Rousseau began his essay with a hypothetical 'state of nature', and then went on to detail how a contractual explanation of consent came about and how that, in turn, made states inevitable.

But there were also important differences. In contrast to Hobbes (who assumed there really had been a state of nature in the form of vicious egoism) and Locke (whose state of nature cast 'savages' in the role of landed gentry), Rousseau denied that humans could ever really be described as perfectly formed individuals with fixed character traits. Rather than human nature being static, Rousseau assumed it evolved according to the sort of civilisations that form it.

Since those were his assumptions, Rousseau did not begin his essay with the assumption that humans were initially in a state of primordial egalitarianism. In fact, he assumed 'early Man' was hardly human at all, and more like mostly harmless primates who lived in ignorance of natural law. I say "mostly harmless" because Rousseau assumed that the first humans were essentially good but nevertheless avoided each other for fear of violence. And so his imaginary state of nature began with primitive, potential humans living in isolation from one another and ignorant of the 'laws of nature'. From this original state there then follows the usual stages, culminating in commercial, urban civilisation.

As I said, Rousseau never intended this to be an actual history of human society, but rather a thought experiment. His essay is therefore best thought of as a parable. The point of this parable? To shed light on how we came to accept there could be such a thing as private property.

In other words, Rousseau was puzzled by the sort of thing indigenous American tribes found so peculiar about European society. It's true to say that an unequal distribution of material goods exists- at least to some degree- in any society. Certainly none of the cultures of the Americas were completely equal in terms of how material goods were distributed. But what did not exist in such cultures was a means of turning such wealth into power over others.

If you think about it, there must have been a first time when somebody marked out some kind of boundary and declared, "this is now mine and nobody else's", or put some sort of crown on their head and insisted that being the wearer of said crown meant others were obliged to carry out the orders of the crown-wearer whether they wanted to or not. The question is: Why did those others not simply reply "Oh yeah? Says who?". After all, hadn't dialogues with Native American tribespeople shown, time and time again, that such people did indeed scoff at the idea of authority figures?

So what answer did Rousseau offer? Basically, he saw private property as being accepted mostly because those 'others' were not intelligent enough to see what sort of trap it represented.

"The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying, 'this is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars and murders, how much misery and horror the human race would have been

spared if someone had pulled up the stakes and filled the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: 'Beware this imposter'".

Rousseau reasoned that this did not happen because the concept of private property "depended on many prior ideas which could only have arisen in successive stages", and that our ancestors, being simple, lacked the intelligence to see that they were entrapping themselves in a world where disproportionate access to material wealth by some could easily be converted into power exercised over all the rest.

According to Graeber and Wengrow, the reason why this essay went on to become so enduring was because, by the 18th century, several certain contradictory positions on the most urgent social and moral concerns had formed, and Rousseau seemingly offered a clever compromise. Those elements consisted of the indigenous critique, the evolutionary stages of development that Turgot had invented and others expanded upon, and the Biblical creation myth known as The Fall.

As was explained in Books Two and Three, the story of Adam and Eve's ejection from the garden of Eden was, like the story of Prometheus stealing fire and giving it to humanity, a myth that explained in a poetic way how come we have to toil for a living and spend most of our waking hours following orders. Once upon a time our earliest ancestors, Adam and Eve, did in fact live a life of ease. But, because they sinned, God punished humankind with a life of toil and struggle, but also gave us the possibility of crudely reenacting His creation through our work.

Thanks to the imagination of thinkers like Turgot and Rousseau, that myth of work as punishment for sin became a story of the stages of human civilisation. Once upon a time, our hunter-gatherer ancestors lived in a state of innocence that was childlike in its simplicity. The reason why it was a childlike society was because, in a sense, that's what those people were- children, their minds not mature enough to allow for any form of human organisation other than tiny bands, the only kind of 'society' small enough and self-sufficient enough to make egalitarianism possible.

But then, temptation came along. Only, it was not a serpent whispering seductive promises of knowledge, but rather wheat and other staple foodstuffs that promised an end to the need to endlessly wander the world in search of substance but instead to settle down and farm produce, creating an abundance the like of which we had never known. However, being simplistic folk, our ancestors could not foresee what else came with a life of farming or, even more so, urban cities: Private property, divisions of labour, classes of haves and have-nots, standing armies, and a bureaucratic way of life that would require us to spend inordinate amounts of time filling in forms and getting permission from authority figures in order to be able to do pretty much anything.

That was the story that Rousseau spun. In some ways, he was in agreement with Kandiaronk. Like that speaker of the council, Rousseau's view of Europeans was that they were not a nice people. Indeed, in each of his imagined stages of development we see a moral decline that pushes humanity further and further away from a condition of innocence.

Another way in which Rousseau's thoughts aligned with Kandiaronk is that, like him, Rousseau saw the invention of private property as being the root cause of the evils of modern society. But there were also important differences between these thinkers. For, as Wengrow and Graeber said, "the one- major- difference between them is that Rousseau, unlike Kandiaronk, cannot really envisage society being based on anything else".

A More Imaginative People.

A major reason why Kandiaronk's society managed to avoid private property becoming the root cause of society's ills was because Wendat culture was organised in such a way as to enable personal liberty to work with a form of communism. As stated before, the money used in Wendat culture could be used to enhance one's chances of increasing social standing, but no matter how much esteem you had, money could never be converted into power over others. The freedom to disobey orders was not for sale in Wendat culture. This, along with the deeply communal nature of Wendat society, meant the individual could rely on community support and needed to cultivate debating skills so as to be an effective member of the tribe.

But, whereas in Wendat culture money could not be converted into power over others, that was possible in European societies, and the reason why was because, in such countries, notions of private property traced back to Ancient Rome and to the power of the male head of a household, who was entitled to treat all who lived under his roof as his own private property. The upshot of this was that, whereas in Wendat culture money and private property was created and maintained in cooperation with others, in Rome and all societies that retained its legal system, private property was exercised at the cost of others- or, at least, there was always the potential for that to happen.

As Wengrow and Graeber remarked, "there's a strong emphasis in ancient Roman (and European) law on the self-sufficiency of households; hence, true freedom meant autonomy in the radical sense, not just autonomy of the will, but being in no way dependent on other human beings (except those under one's direct control)". Such an emphasis has always led to contradictory beliefs and behaviours. Rousseau demonstrated this in the way he claimed, repeatedly, to wish to live a life independent on help from others, but never stopped having all his needs attended to by servants and mistresses. And it can still be seen in modern society, such as when somebody claims to have "become a self-made billionaire through building my business from nothing", when, really, his personal contribution to the success of that business was negligible and 99.99 percent of the various tasks necessary for turning an idea into a profitable business was undertaken by employees toiling away in complete obscurity.

How, though, did Wendat culture manage to keep money and private property from becoming the power to gain at the cost of others and to manoeuvre oneself into a position where you can give commands that others must obey?

The explanation most probably lies in another major difference between the primitive people in Rousseau's thought experiment, and what real Native Americans were actually like. In most of the plays and essays of French enlightenment that feature 'noble savages', those savages are given a voice. They are able to use that voice to give expression to how

European society looks from a foreign point of view, and such descriptions and accusations reveal a deep understanding of how to think philosophically and politically.

The one exception to this rule that the 'noble savage' should be allowed to express opinions is found in Rousseau's famous thought experiment. Not only do they exhibit no capacity to think philosophically whatsoever, they are depicted as having hardly any ability to think at all.

He said of his hypothetical noble savage: "his imagination paints no pictures; his heart makes no demands on him. His wants are so readily supplied, and he is so far from having knowledge which is needed to make him want more, that he can have neither foresight or curiosity". It's little wonder, then, that such unimaginative people had no means of anticipating what kind of trap they were setting for themselves as environments and society evolved in a way that allowed for the development of classes, rulers and bureaucracy, and then moulded human minds to fit that reality.

But, maybe the truth is that cultures like that of the Wendat managed to avoid such things because they were actually as far from this imagined condition of simple innocence as it is possible to get? This was something that was suggested by a French anthropologist called Pierre Clastres (1934-1977). Rather than assume such people were less imaginative than us (or maybe even absent of imagination altogether) he proposed that they might actually be a good deal more imaginative than we are. If that was so, then maybe they could envisage things we find difficult, if not impossible, to imagine?

Like what? Well, like alternative social possibilities. We live in societies dominated by commercial markets and political systems that, for all their insistence on promoting and defending 'freedom', actually operate in a way that takes freedom away from those of us who lack political influence and financial power. You can only travel as far as your budget allows and your paperwork permits you to go. Most probably, you spend most of your waking hours following orders, with little to no say in how things ought to be run. What would it be like to live a truly free life? Most of us find this impossible to imagine and just dismiss the very possibility of such a life as Utopianism.

But people like the Wendat did have the fundamental freedoms: the freedom to travel, the freedom to disobey, and the freedom to experiment with alternative social possibilities. They also had the ability to imagine a reality they had never known: a world of arbitrary power and domination. Having imagined it, and not liking what they foresaw, they consciously built a society that would keep that dystopia from ever coming true, and successfully so, right up until a foreign people, lacking the imagination to create any society apart from the one they were conditioned into believing in, turned up with overwhelming martial superiority and a blinkered faith, and imposed their way of life on the New World.

It's very thought provoking. But really, isn't this all just baseless speculation about an imaginary people? Whether it be stupid savages, noble savages or philosophical savages, aren't these always, in the end, just fantasy people, characters in mythological tales?

Perhaps. But we should bear in mind the key characteristics of the Mythstake, which is a story popularly believed to be scientifically or historically accurate and yet the evidence is very much against it. One such example that is very relevant to what we have been

discussing is this tale of human civilisation developing through stages of tiny bands of hunter-gatherers, to chiefdoms and kingdoms supported by a surplus made possible by an agricultural revolution and the impossibility of maintaining groups larger than 150 individuals without top-down rulers and bureaucratic impositions. In actual fact, the latest archeological and anthropological research has so undermined and refuted the idea that this must be how human history played out that we can call the continued belief in this story another Mythstake to go along with the idea that commercial markets have their origins in barter.

When we imagine what our ancestors might have been like, or dream of what our descendants might be like, we are always creating fictional characters that are very much simpler compared to the complexity of real people. That's just an inevitable outcome of the limitations of human imagination. Even the most celebrated thinkers- politicians, philosophers and scientists whose names and works survive long after their deaths- did not have the ability to fully imagine people and the realities they might construct and so, such thought experiments necessarily turn the world into a cartoon.

But what matters is that such a cartoon model of the world is at least consistent with the evidence, and certainly that it is not in stark contrast to what the evidence suggests. The problem with this story of human development in which bands and tribes inevitably become chiefdoms and kingdoms, which surely will pave the way for global market capitalist democracies which will live forevermore is that it is full of supposition that have no evidential support whatsoever, and not for lack of trying to find such evidence.

In this book we have seen where the stereotypes of humans as either 'Doveish' or 'Hawkish' came from, and how, in reality, we are a much more imaginative, complex, contradictory creature than such cartoon representations imply. This cartoon version of people are the characters used in the cartoon version of markets one gets if one assumes (contrary to evidence) that the barter theory is an accurate account of how commercial markets came into being. Indeed, without reducing people to such stereotypes, those economic models wouldn't work at all.

Nor should it be assumed that the Barter theory is the only mythstake built around assumptions to do with money. Whereas that is a theory of exchange in which debt does not exist, other theories of money's origins took the opposite view, making debt such an important part of society it becomes transformed into a god. This is what we will discuss in Book Six, 'Forgive Us Our Debts'.

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