

Can Governments' Actions (Tax Collection, Military Drafts, etc.) that Would be Anti-individualism, be Justified?

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Abstract : *This paper discusses the role of government and whether some of its actions to establish welfare for an entire state are justified by sacrificing citizens' individualism. By evaluating actions including military drafts and tax redistribution through taxes, this paper champions the governments' power so long as it is democratic, not overreaching, and still seeks to protect individual properties.*

Keywords: *government, individualism, welfare, civil liberties, maximization.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Governments originated to provide law and order for its constituents, with maintaining social peace as arguably its fundamental purpose. The United States Constitution's preamble refers to this function when it proclaims the intents to "establish justice," insure domestic tranquility," and "secure the blessings of liberty." From operating as a welfare state to redistribute the fruits of prosperity through taxes, to defending against external vis-à-vis with a military draft, the role of the state has evolved over time since its creation. The separation of the state and the individual has long been contested in political discourse. Individualism, a social doctrine advocating "the liberty, rights or independent action of the individual," oftentimes opposes benefitting the common good (Lyke, 2008). To what extent can the government legitimately limit the liberties of its citizens to serve collective interests? Moreover, has the protection of the law been a pretext for the state to curtail or erode fundamental rights?

As a deep-rooted mistrust of power lingers, fueled by an anti-authoritarian ethos that is innate in civic culture, I acknowledge that the government is justifiable in its maintenance, so long as it is not overreaching. Though people conditionally transfer some of their rights under rule, government is nonetheless imperative in promoting factors necessary for the stability and comfortability of people's lives, liberty and property. This concept was noted in John Locke's Second Treatise of Government, where he states that any men willing to "strip off his natural liberty" will agree to do so in exchange for "the bonds of civil society," where they will preserve a "secure enjoyment of their properties" (Locke, 1988). This essay advocates for and justifies a democratic form of government that protects individual properties and simultaneously seeks to maximize the aggregate happiness of a well-ordered society from a utilitarian standpoint.

II. AGAINST COMPLETE INDIVIDUALISM

In Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes argues that humans have the tendency to be bellicose in their state of nature. This natural condition of mankind is depicted as "a war of every man against every man" (Hobbes, 2012). Because of men's independence from another, they are always in continual states of jealousy that compel them to prioritize their acquisition of power. Additionally, philosopher Jeremy Bentham proposes that we must understand the "interest of the individual," his theory rooted in a psychological hedonism that views one as having a rationalized, natural inclination to pursue self-interest over social interest (Bentham, 2016). The theory of individualism has been historically championed through the stirrings of its Western pioneers, as it stands in

stark contrast to those dictates of European monarchies and feudal lords. The heroic self-determination and relentless enterprising of people who have shaped our history spans the growth of America – from its initial Revolution, to the age of industrialization, and eventually the modern technological boom.

However, through the work of philosophers like Locke, Hobbes' view of the propensity of men towards self-preservation and violence is rejected. Hobbes' view is inordinately pessimistic, failing to account for external motivations and psychological barriers that prevent people from imposing harm and promoting group welfare. Locke's depictions of a human's local affections, including familial ties (e.g. providing for one's children), can influence an individual to "pursue selflessness over selfishness," as he would not see himself as a separate entity from his loved ones (Locke, 1988). Additionally, certain psychological traits prevent people from belligerently engaging in direct competition for personal gain. For instance, soldiers who engage in combat and become diagnosed in post-traumatic stress disorder disprove Hobbes' theory. Studies show the rate of PTSD in veterans to be as high as 20-30%, proving that men, in fact, may have a natural disinclination towards hurting others (Reisman, 2016).

Governing bodies and a comprehensive collectivist mentality have been essential to the functioning of humanity since its origins; the neurobiology of human behavior is inherently social. Genetic determinants of social recognition are present in bacteria (Young, 2008). We are, indeed, not *homo economicus* (consistently rational and narrowly self-interested beings who are concerned with our own wealth and well-being) – with this line of criticism forming the entire field of behavioral economics in 1976 (Becker, 2008). Psychological research suggests that humans are prone to act for the good of the greater group. Cooperation is ingrained in the human psyche; in a 2015 study, researchers found that most people would rather harm themselves than others for money, despite the choices being secret (Young, 2008). The concern for the welfare of others is regarded as a key aspect of moral decision making and a core component of the human condition.

III. AGAINST TOTALITARIANISM

Despite championing government over individualism, I also do not defend nor commend totalitarianism, a political system in which all authority resides in the hands of the state (widely considered to be the most extreme form of government) (Isaac, 2016). Totalitarianism is in line with Hobbes' social contract theory; he concludes that because of their untamable natural state, humans are therefore "bound by covenant" to concede to the unlimited demands of an absolute sovereign (Hobbes, 2012). However, there are flaws that can be dissected in Hobbes' argument; he states that above all, men have the right to self-defense and self-preservation, and "if the sovereign commands a man to kill, wound, or maim himself," then "that man has the liberty to disobey" (Hobbes, 2012). He can, under this doctrine, pursue tactics against the sovereign if threatened. But such a freedom detracts from the sovereign's means of protecting the commonwealth. If people's individual scrutiny can override the actions of the ruler – including commands and punishments, then there is no need for an absolute ruler in the first place. In this kind of government, under the conflicting rights of Hobbes' citizens and rulers, it is ambiguous who is licensed with more power. Thus, by picking apart the paradoxical nature of Leviathan, I can prove that societies do not need a totalitarian government to operate, as those that have one have the potential to fundamentally self-destruct. It could also be argued further that self-destruction in dictatorships impact at greater levels than in democracies. When the two sides are more clearly polarized into "ruler" and "subjects" strata, revolutionaries can tip the scale more directly, versus a political system composed of a diverse spectrum of power levels and checks and balances.

To that end, totalitarianism also contains elements that are too provincial to sustain in the age of globalization. As omnipotent leaders remain in their combative states of nature, this dictatorial structure would not uphold in an international context, where trade and economic prosperity are bound by cooperative negotiation. North Korea, ruled by the same family since 1948, brands itself with authoritarian policies, as poverty, disease and illiteracy persist (Han, 2005). During Mao Zedong's reign over the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 1976, programs including The Great Leap Forward led to tens of millions of deaths, creating the largest famine in human history (Brugger, 2018). Hitler and Stalin's controls over Germany and Russia, which ended in utter tragedy and turmoil, proved that extinguishing individual identity in government was ineffectual (Traynor, 1999). The tyrannic method produces few, if any, forms of productive governments. Governance, albeit

important, should not manifest into a state that has no limits to its authority. Those that are built upon the suppression of individualism and human rights are doomed to fail.

IV. IN DEFENSE OF A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL AUTHORITY

My espousal for government's authority comes from my disagreement with Hobbes' individualistic state of nature, as well as my belief in the government's ability to provide good when the suppression of human life, liberty and happiness comes into question. Thus, a totalitarian government, upholding that very suppression, is not apt. Since the natural state of man is not one of sheer violence and self-interest, a totalitarian form of government is unnecessary to achieve its ultimate function of securing peace for humanity. Rather, government action is justified when it champions a proponentry of freedom for individuals, but also an adherence to democratic values to benefit a common good. Locke's delineation of a social contract contains this sentiment, stating that individuals have a duty to support and obey an order structure. Men are predisposed to leave their state of nature and transfer power to enforce law to the government – and since governments exist by consent of the people, they can also be overthrown and replaced if they fail to protect rights and promote the public good.

Government operations, such as managing economic conditions via taxing and waging war, are justified when they produce desirable ends that consider the total amount of happiness in a governed body, even if it proves less advantageous for the individual. John Stuart Mill's theory of utility is based on the greatest happiness principle, which holds that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill, 2015). From both Mill's and Locke's perspectives, if the majority of people are not satisfied with the current government, then they have the right and the numbers to rebel, producing the stable level of general happiness. Mill bases morality off the commonwealth, believing that sacrificing individual desires is advisable if it leads to more happiness generally. His sub-theory of rule utilitarianism substantiates this belief, where citizens conform to regulations that have shown to bring about the greatest amount of good and public support overall (Mill, 2015). Locke analogously states that any number of men who have "consented to make one community or government" will become a single "body politic in which the majority have a right to act on behalf of the rest and to bind them by its decisions" (Locke, 1988). "Political legitimacy" is the right to rule, granted by citizens to political authorities or regimes "grounded in common good or shared moral evaluations" (Gilley, 2009). What makes democratic political authority legitimate in the eyes of constituents is the fact that the power is vested in the people, "exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation" (Webster, 1949).

Additionally, Mill's qualitative gratification argument adds to the justification for a democratic government. Mill believes that some values of acts are greater than others, as people distinguish between "higher and lower pleasures" (Feagin, 1983). Mental pleasures, for instance, are a higher form than bodily pleasures. Both Locke and Mill believe that the state of nature, rooted in foundational pleasures, lacks comparative aspects of superiority that a just civil society provides. When people have amassed large amounts of property, they recognize the importance of functioning under a central higher authority to help themselves protect it. People give up their natural freedoms, including "equality, liberty and executive power," but each of them does so "with the intention of better preserving himself, his liberty and property," which is seemingly counterintuitive (Locke, 1988). Mill similarly argues that once people amass a large range of experiences, they will start to employ higher faculties; in fact, the most virtuous man has the best chance of obtaining happiness, when he sacrifices his own happiness for a greater end – also seemingly counterintuitive. But under both Locke's and Mill's conditions, man gravitates towards a stable society as opposed to a free-for-all and a one-for-all, and the need for political authorities is justified to keep everyone in check. In the long run, there comes a point where society is too advanced to function effectively without a government, and in particular, a democratic political authority.

V. CONCLUSION

Government intervention is crucial when facing a plethora of issues that are far too complex and multidimensional to tackle on individual levels. Though regulations and responsibilities vary greatly through time and place, governments must continually implement them. The debate regarding the proper role of government is still alive today, but striking a balance between protecting individualism and maximizing majority welfare is key. Since governments are created by their citizens, the ultimate onus is on us to ensure that those decisions are repeatedly legitimized and reflect our collective conscience.

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