Davy Perlman

Professor Vandiver

WRI 144: Rebellion and Recognition

April 5, 2013

Dear Prof. Vandiver,

In this revision, my thesis is largely unchanged. I added my key terms directly into the thesis to make it more clear and concise, but the arguments remained largely the same. My thesis is that Sharon Lloyd, a Hobbesian scholar, overlooks the fact that Hobbes justifies rebellion when the Sovereign breaches the social contract and when men are taken into captivity. The biggest change in this revision is the introduction of motive. While initially my motive was arguing against the common perception that Hobbes advocated absolute sovereignty, in this revision I found scholars who clearly articulated this view. This improved my motive and my paper over all because it gave me a clear sense of what I was arguing against. I also expanded on my discussion of the significance by having a more in depth discussion of its applicability to today’s conflicts. I analyzed the Syrian Civil War in this essay, but many other examples would work.

I also added in key terms to this revision, which I felt made my arguments more concise and my essay as a whole less verbose. I used Sovereign to describe the just authority in a social contract, and Subjects to describe the people that the Sovereign has power over. In the case when the Sovereign breaches the social contract and it is nullified, the Subjects become Exposed Subjects, because they become exposed to the conditions of war. In the case where no social contract has been signed and the authority unjustly comes to power, I called the authority the Master, and the people over whom he has dominion his Captives.

I also revised my argument for why the colonized were Captives of the French. Initially, I argued a two part definition, but in this revision, I simply argued that they were captive because they were bound physically and psychologically. I then added a counterargument that although fear is a just means of acquiring sovereignty, the French did not use fear for the sake of forcing the Algerians into a social contract, because colonialism is based in economic profits, so once profits disappear, so will the French, which is not allowed under the social contract because the guarantee of life must be indefinite.

If given more time to work, I would focus on my structure. Although I made my orienting paragraph more in depth and added a key terms paragraph, I think the structure could be improved if I integrated my modern sources with Hobbes better, because as of now some paragraphs are solely Hobbes and others solely modern sources.

Overall, I felt that this draft was a big improvement from my last, and I am happy with my work. While reading, I will ask reader to scrutinize my stitching and topic sentences to ensure that they make my argument as clear as I can.

Sincerely,

Davy Perlman

**War(re), What is it Good For?: Freeing Slaves from Captivity and Freeing Subjects from an Unjust Social Contract**

In his magnum opus, *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes outlines his idea of the social contract, and in doing so sets the foundation for modern political theory. Written in the midst of the bloody English Civil War, Hobbes claims in *Leviathan* that man must submit to an authority in order to gain security. They must sign a social contract with the authority, granting the authority power and waiving the right to rebel in exchange for insurance of the right to live. Sharon Lloyd, Hobbesian scholar at the University of Southern California, argues that because of Hobbes’s social contract, Hobbes is claiming that “effective government…must have absolute authority,”[[1]](#footnote-1) and therefore rebellion is incompatible with Hobbes’s theory. However, with this interpretation, Hobbes’s social contract theory has no place in a globalized world where sovereignty must be shared with international organizations, and respect for human rights, representation and civil liberties are all lauded aspects of stable governments. But is it really true that one of the key theoreticians on political science is obsolete and his theories are not applicable to the political system that he helped to create?

In order to resolve the question of Hobbes’s applicability to today, we must first examine the reasons for and conditions behind the social contract. After analyzing Hobbes’s rationale for having a social contract, it will become clear that he introduces two exceptions to absolute rule, where rebellion is not only allowed but is in fact the only rational response. The first case, what we will call the case of the Exposed Subject, is where the authority breaches the social contract with his people, and will be exemplified using the United States government’s treatment of the Black Panthers. By analyzing Hobbes’s social contract with respect to his definition of liberty, it will become evident that Captives, or those who do not grant sovereignty to the authority but nevertheless remain under his control, also have a right to rebel. Hobbes’s definition of Captive is applicable to colonized peoples, of which the Algerians in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* are a prime example. We will then address the counterargument that the colonized are in fact Subjects and are not in fact justified in rebellion by showing how Fanon’s description of the purely economic motives for colonialism apply to Hobbesian captivity. Finally, in light of the exceptions to absolute rule that Hobbes creates, we can refine Lloyd’s designation of Hobbes as a defender of absolutism. The uncovering of justifications for rebellion in Hobbes’s theory of the social contract allows for its applicability to modern conflicts of occupation and fights for sovereignty and autonomy. While Lloyd argues that Hobbes advocates absolutismin *Leviathan*, she fails to take into account the cases of the Exposed Subject and the Captive, in effect oversimplifying Hobbes’s social contract theory and unfairly limiting its applicability to today.

In order to clearly and concisely argue Hobbes’s opposition to absolute rule, we must clarify the different categories of authority. In the course of this essay, we will focus on two different types of authority. The first case occurs when people grant authority through a social contract. In this case, the authority will be known as the Sovereign, and the people he has dominion over are his Subjects. If the Sovereign breaches the social contract, his former Subjects then become Exposed Subjects. In the case where no social contract is signed, the authority is no longer sovereign, and must be named accordingly. In this essay, we will refer to this authority as the Master, and the people he has dominion over as his Captives.

Hobbes designed the social contract in the wake of the bloody English Civil War in hopes of establishing order and preventing future bloodshed. In man’s natural state[[2]](#footnote-2), without any form of government or society, Hobbes sees all men as equal, as there is no “greater signe of the equall distribution of any thing, than that every man is contented with his share [intelligence]”[[3]](#footnote-3). And because each man believes that he is more intelligent than his peers, and therefore more deserving of things, so in the natural state, “every man has a Right to every thing,”[[4]](#footnote-4) even other men. This inevitably cannot be true, as resources are scarce but man’s desires are unlimited, and therefore man will turn on one another in order to further his own self interests, resulting in chaos and a state of war. Hobbes defines war as “not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto.” For Hobbes, war is the chaotic state in which man fears future violence, so only when his life is assured is man freed from the state of war. Because chaos is derived from man’s equality, Hobbes’s solution to the chaos of man’s natural state is to artificially create inequality. He thus proposes the social contract, in which every man, “for Peace…and defence of himselfe…lay downe his right to all things,”[[5]](#footnote-5) and transfers his rights to the Sovereign, who then acts in the interests of his Subjects. However, the basis of the social contract is each man’s own preservation, so in exchange for the Subjects’ right to everything, the Sovereign must guarantee his Subjects’ lives, or else they are no better under the Sovereign than in the state of war. The Sovereign, therefore, does not gain absolute power from the social contract, as he is forced to protect his Subjects, and in doing so abide by manmade limitations on his power.

Hobbes proposes the social contract with the sole purpose of guaranteeing security, so if man feels that his security is not ensured, his only rational response is to free himself from such a situation. Therefore, when sovereignty breaks down and the Sovereign is “disabled to provide for their [his Subjects’] safety, the Grant [social contract] is voyd,”[[6]](#footnote-6) and the Subjects become Exposed Subjects, gaining the right to rebel. Likewise, when a Master claims sovereignty over his Captives, the Captives “have no obligation at all; but may break their bonds…and kill, or carry away captive their Master, justly,”[[7]](#footnote-7) because the Master makes no guarantee that the Captive’s life will be secure. Hobbes, in including the Exposed Subject and Captive in his social contract theory, acknowledges that absolute authority is not always an effective means of governing.

African-Americans in the United States in the 1970s better fit the definition of Subject than Captive. Sovereignty, according to Hobbes, can be acquired by force. The basis for a peaceful social contract and forceful social contract are the same, as “men who choose their Soveraign, do it for fear of one another, and not of him whom they Institute: But in this case, they subject themselves, to him they are afraid of”[[8]](#footnote-8). While African-Americans may not have chosen the United States government of the 1970s as their ideal Sovereign, such Sovereignty was obtained through fear of death of bondage. And they truly did become Subjects, not Captives, in what Hobbes calls “Despoticall Dominion”[[9]](#footnote-9). They differed from Captives in that after “being taken, [they] hath corporall liberty[[10]](#footnote-10) allowed…and upon promise not to run away, or to do violence [to his Sovereign]…is trusted by him”[[11]](#footnote-11). African-Americans in the United States *in the 1970s* were not physically bound or prevented from taking action *by the government*, and therefore were granted the liberty promised to them through the social contract that they were forced into.

However, according to the Black Panthers, the United States government failed to uphold the crucial aspect of the social contract, the security of life, so African-Americans were in fact examples of Exposed Subjects and justified in rebellion. As argued earlier, the basis for the social contract is to escape chaos and submit to a Sovereign in exchange for freedom from the state of nature. Without this guarantee, there is no rational for transferring rights, as the chaos of war is equally inadequate at insuring life. SNCC Chairman and convert to the Black Panther Party Stokely Carmichael, in his justification for the Black Panther Party, demonstrates the Sovereign’s shortcomings. He declares that “the black panther [is] a bold, beautiful animal, representing…the black demands today. A man needs a black panther on his side when he…must endure loss of job, eviction, starvation and sometimes death, for political activity”[[12]](#footnote-12). The fear of death that the Black Panthers must protect against is a condition of war, so the Sovereign fails to provide adequate security for his now Exposed Subjects. Carmichael goes on to claim that African-Americans face a double standard, where “white people beat up black people every day…but…you [African-Americans] can’t defend [themselves]”[[13]](#footnote-13). However, according to Hobbes, “If the Soveraign command a man…not to resist those that assault him…hath that Man the Liberty to disobey,” because the right to life is inalienable, and refusing to resist cannot lead to “any Good to himselfe”[[14]](#footnote-14). The Black Panther Party was therefore not only allowed to rebel, but, according to Hobbes, doing so was the only rational response.

The Algerian colonized in psychologist and revolutionist Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* are justified in their rebellion against French rule because they fit the Hobbesian definition of Captive. Like the Exposed Subject, the Captive’s only rational response when under the dominion of an unjust authority is rebellion, as he has no guarantee of life. Captivity, according to Hobbes, occurs when man is “kept in prison, or in bonds” and not allowed “corporall liberty”[[15]](#footnote-15) or the guarantee of life through a social contract. The Hobbesian definition of liberty differs from the conventional definition in that it simply “signifieth…the absence of Opposition, [of] external Impediments of motion”[[16]](#footnote-16). Captivity therefore is the presence of impediments or opposition to action from someone other than his sovereign. At this point, no social contract exists between the Master, the usurper of liberty, and the Captive, whose liberty is unjustly taken, so the Captive’s rebellion is justified.

The French are Masters to the Algerian Captives because, according to Fanon, the Algerians are physically and psychologically inhibited from movement, leading to their captivity. Colonial Algeria is a “compartmentalized world,”[[17]](#footnote-17) divided between the colonists’ sector and the colonized’s sector. The colonists’ sector is full of wealth and prosperity, while the colonized live in a sector of poverty and submission. The two sectors “follow the dictates of mutual exclusion,”[[18]](#footnote-18) so that they cannot both exist at the same time. Therefore, the sector of the colonized has increasingly become “a world of no space”[[19]](#footnote-19). And the colonized cannot leave their assigned sector, as the “border is represented by the barracks and the police stations”[[20]](#footnote-20). The colonized are Captives, bound to their sector of poverty by their French Masters. While it is their right to travel at will, because they have not transferred such rights away, the French Masters unjustly limit the movement of the Algerian Captives. And the Captives dare not test their liberty, for “the government’s agent uses a language of pure violence”[[21]](#footnote-21) to scare its Captives into submission. The agents, the Master’s soldiers and police, bring “violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject,”[[22]](#footnote-22) forcing the Captives into submission through fear of violence. The colonist is able to “strike fear into me [the Captive] or nail me [the Captive] to the spot” simply through his presence, because the association of the colonist with fear is so great. The French colonists unjustly took the Algerians as their Captives, encroaching upon their liberties and keeping them bound as prisoners.

While it may seem that Fanon’s colonized more aptly fit the definition of Subject than Captive, the purely economic goals of the colonist shows that no social contract exists and the Algerians are in fact Captives. As argued earlier, regarding the forced submission of African-Americans under the United States sovereignty, because fear of others is the basis of the social contract, the authority can use fear to coerce men into a social contract. Fear merely creates incentives, as “a man sometimes pays his debt, only for *feare* of Imprisonment”[[23]](#footnote-23). He still has the liberty to do as he pleases, but the fear instilled by the Sovereign makes the potential cost of inaction greater. Similarly, the French use of fear may be seen as a justified means of creating incentives in society. A critic may still believe that they, like the United States and African-Americans, acquired sovereignty over the colonized through coercion, and Fanon’s depiction of colonial Algeria describes the Sovereign-Subject relationship rather than the Master-Slave relationship. However, this argument overlooks the crucial aspect of the social contract, that under the contract, the lives of the Subjects are guaranteed.

The basis for French colonialism is economic profit, so French involvement in Algerian society is contingent on its profitability, making it more consistent with captivity rather than sovereignty. The French see its colonies solely in economic terms, as “a consumer market”[[24]](#footnote-24). This commoditization of the colonial people shows that the French’s interests in Algeria were not political, but solely economic. Therefore, “if the colony has to be constantly garrisoned, if trade slumps…if goods can no longer be exported, this is proof that the military solution [for controlling the colonies] must be ruled out,” as it is “not economically profitable”[[25]](#footnote-25) for the colonists. The French base their presence in Algeria on profit margins; if revenue dips below the cost of occupying, colonialism no longer makes sense, and the French authority will pull out of its colonies. This philosophy is inconsistent with Hobbes’s social contract. Because the basis of the social contract is insurance of life for the Subjects, the contract must be followed “not onely where the words are of the time Present, or Past; but also where they are of the Future”[[26]](#footnote-26). The social contract, once agreed upon, holds infinitely, because only through the indefinite guarantee of life will man be willing to transfer rights to a Sovereign and become his Subject. The French use of fear to control their colonies is therefore inconsistent with Hobbes’s social contract theory, because the use of fear is allowed only so long as it is the means for entering a social contract and permanently freeing man from the state of war.

While it may still be possible to simply argue that sovereignty has broken down and Fanon’s colonized are examples of Exposed Subjects, the uncertainty created by the economic basis of colonialism is consistent with captivity. The Captive is he who is imprisoned, held until his Master “shall consider what to do with him”[[27]](#footnote-27). The Master makes no commitment with the Captive but simply leaves his future uncertain. Likewise, the French make no firm commitment to the people of Algeria, but simply remain their Master until doing so is no longer profitable. Once the French Masters leave, they offer no hint that they will continue to protect the Algerian Captives, and there is therefore no covenant between the two parties. Furthermore, the French leave the Algerians in a state of uncertainty that is more consistent with captivity than breached sovereignty, so the French and colonial Algeria are Master and Captive rather than Sovereign and Subject.

After demonstrating Hobbes’s exceptions to absolute rule, we can refine Lloyd’s interpretation of Hobbes’s social contract theory. While initially she argued that the authority’s power was absolute, and was therefore subject to no human restraints, we can now say that the authority’s power is absolute *if and only if* the lives of his dominions are ensured. While this may not satisfy the progressive, who wishes for equal opportunity and more complete rights, Hobbes creates the basis for the justification of rebellion.

Lloyd’s claim that Hobbes advocated absolute sovereignty is too strict and must be refined to include the exceptions of the Exposed Subject and Captive. Hobbes believes that life, no matter how low quality, is preferred to the condition of war, so a social contract, where rights are waived in exchange for a guarantee of life, is a logical step to further man’s interests. Because of his emphasis on life and order, he allows for rebellion when an authority has unfairly exerted power over others, as in the cases of the Exposed Subject and the Captive. By applying our refined version of Lloyd’s interpretation of Hobbes to the Black Panthers and Fanon’s colonized Algerians, I have shown Hobbes’s social contract theory to be applicable to today. It can therefore be used as further lens in which to view today’s conflicts over increased autonomy and sovereignty, such as Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian Civil War, and the Chinese suppression of Tibet. The Syrian Civil War, for example, is based in social contract theory. Initially, the Syrian people were bound through a social contract as Assad’s Subjects. However, after Assad’s attempts to disband peaceful protestors resulted in the death of his Subjects, they immediately became Exposed Subjects, whose lives were no longer guaranteed. Exposed Subjects have no incentive to stay under their former Sovereign, and are therefore justified in rebelling, so the forces seeking Assad’s ouster are justified in their rebellion. Hobbes, in the view of many, “stands at the limits of absolutist thought”[[28]](#footnote-28). His failure to take human rights and guaranteed freedoms into account gives him a very conservative view of sovereignty, so in order for modern day rebellion to be justified under the conditions specified in his theory, the authority must be doing something inconceivable in our 21st century mind.

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*Merriam Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. “absolute,” accessed April 5, 2013.

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2011 ed., s.v. “Thomas Hobbes,” accessed April 5, 2013.

1. In this essay, Dr. Sharon Lloyd’s assertion is taken from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2011 ed., s.v. “Thomas Hobbes.” Dr. Lloyd is a professor of philosophy and political science at the University of Southern California. In order to fully analyze Dr. Lloyd’s assertion, we must first define what it means to be an absolute authority. According to the Encyclopedia of Political Theory, “absolutism claims the completeness of royal power and the independence of royal power from human limits. ” More broadly, the Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as “being, governed by, or characteristic of a ruler or authority completely free from constitutional or other restraint.” For the purposes of this essay, we will use the Merriam Webster definition, but we will keep in mind that “human limits” are an example of what the Merriam Webster definition categorizes as an “other restraint.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In *Leviathan*, 88, Thomas Hobbes claims man in the state of nature is equivalent to the state of war, and the two will therefore be used synonymously. This and all subsequent citations of Hobbes will be from Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, edited by Richard Tuck (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hobbes’s definition of liberty is “the absence of Opposition, [of] external Impediments of motion”, Hobbes, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This excerpt of Stokely Carmichael is taken from Erika Doss’ “Imaging the Panthers: Representing Black Power and Masculinity, 1960s-1990s,” *Prospect*s 23, (1998): 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This citation of Carmichael is from a speech he gave at UC Berkeley. It is entitled “Black Power,” edited by Kalen Churcher, and is taken from The Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hobbes, 151, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In this essay, this and all subdequents citations of Frantz Fanon will come from Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth,* translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hobbes, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Fanon, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Hobbes, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This view of Hobbes come from Mark Antari’s contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Political Theory,* s.v. “Absolutism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)