

“Classical Liberal Theories of Class and the State”

Tuesday June 15, 2010

Dr. David M. Hart (dmhart@mac.com)

<http://homepage.mac.com/dmhart/>

<http://oll.libertyfund.org>

Some Key Quotations on State and Class.

1. David Hume (1711-1776): the origin of government is in war and begins a struggle between Authority and Liberty (1777)

Government commences more casually and more imperfectly. It is probable, that the first ascendant of one man over multitudes begun during a state of war; where the superiority of courage and of genius discovers itself most visibly, where unanimity and concert are most requisite, and where the pernicious effects of disorder are most sensibly felt. The long continuance of that state, an incident common among savage tribes, enured the people to submission; and if the chieftain possessed as much equity as prudence and valour, he became, even during peace, the arbiter of all differences, and could gradually, by a mixture of force and consent, establish his authority. The benefit sensibly felt from his influence, made it be cherished by the people, at least by the peaceable and well disposed among them; and if his son enjoyed the same good qualities, government advanced the sooner to maturity and perfection; but was still in a feeble state, till the farther progress of improvement procured the magistrate a revenue, and enabled him to bestow rewards on the several instruments of his administration, and to inflict punishments on the refractory and disobedient. Before that period, each exertion of his influence must have been particular, and founded on the peculiar circumstances of the case. After it, submission was no longer a matter of choice in the bulk of the community, but was rigorously exacted by the authority of the supreme magistrate.

In all governments, there is a perpetual intestine struggle, open or secret, between Authority and Liberty; and neither of them can ever absolutely prevail in the contest. A great sacrifice of liberty must necessarily be made in every government; yet even the authority, which confines liberty, can never, and perhaps ought never, in any constitution, to become quite entire and uncontrollable....

[Source: David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, edited and with a Foreword, Notes, and Glossary by Eugene F. Miller, with an appendix of variant readings from the 1889 edition by T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, revised edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1987). Chapter: ESSAY V: OF THE ORIGIN OF GOVERNMENT. < <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/704/137486> >.

2. Thomas Paine (1737-1809): government began as a banditti of ruffians who parcelled out the world (1792)

Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government. It has its origin in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man. It existed prior to government, and would exist if the formality of government was abolished. The mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all the parts of civilised community upon each other, create that great chain of connection which holds it together. The landholder, the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the tradesman, and every occupation, prospers by the aid which each receives from the other, and from the whole. Common interest regulates their concerns, and forms their law; and the laws which common usage ordains, have a greater influence than the laws of government. In fine society performs for itself almost everything which is ascribed to government.

Government is no farther necessary than to supply the few cases to which society and civilisation are not conveniently competent; and instances are not wanting to show, that everything which government can usefully add thereto, has been performed by the common consent of society, without government. So far is it from being true, as has been pretended, that the abolition of any formal government is the dissolution of society, that it acts by a contrary impulse, and brings the latter the closer together. All that part of its organisation which it had committed to its government, devolves again upon itself, and acts through its medium. When men, as well from natural instinct as from reciprocal benefits, have habituated themselves to social and civilised life, there is always enough of its principles in practice to carry them through any changes they may find necessary or convenient to make in their government. In short, man is so naturally a creature of society that it is almost impossible to put him out of it.

[Source: *The Writings of Thomas Paine, Collected and Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894). Vol. 2. Rights of Man Part II: Chapter I.: Of society and civilisation. < <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/344/17368> >.

It is impossible that such governments as have hitherto existed in the world, could have commenced by any other means than a total violation of every principle sacred and moral. The obscurity in which the origin of all the present old governments is buried, implies the iniquity and disgrace with which they began. The origin of the present government of America and France will ever be remembered, because it is honourable to record it; but with respect to the rest, even Flattery has consigned them to the tomb of time, without an inscription.

It could have been no difficult thing in the early and solitary ages of the world, while the chief employment of men was that of attending flocks and herds, for a banditti of ruffians to overrun a country, and lay it under contributions. Their power being thus established, the chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch; and hence the origin of Monarchy and Kings...

Those bands of robbers having parcelled out the world, and divided it into dominions, began, as is naturally the case, to quarrel with each other. What at first was obtained by violence was considered by others as lawful to be taken, and a second plunderer succeeded the first. They alternately invaded the dominions which each had assigned to himself, and the brutality with which they treated each other explains the original character of monarchy. It was ruffian torturing ruffian. The conqueror considered the conquered, not as his prisoner, but his property. He led him in triumph rattling in chains, and doomed him, at pleasure, to slavery or death. As time obliterated the history of their beginning, their successors assumed new appearances, to cut off the entail of their disgrace, but their principles and objects remained the same. What at first was plunder, assumed the softer name of revenue; and the power originally usurped, they affected to inherit.

From such beginning of governments, what could be expected but a continued system of war and extortion? It has established itself into a trade. The vice is not peculiar to one more than to another, but is the common principle of all. There does not exist within such governments sufficient stamina whereon to engraft reformation; and the shortest and most effectual remedy is to begin anew on the ground of the nation.

[Source: *The Writings of Thomas Paine, Collected and Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894). Vol. 2. Rights of Man Part II: Chapter II.: Of the origin of the present old governments. < <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/344/17370> >.

3. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832): the sinister interest of the ruling one and the sub-ruling-few (1820s)

Under a government which has for its main object the sacrifice of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, to the sinister interest of the ruling one and the sub-ruling few, corruption and delusion to the greatest extent possible, are necessary to that object: waste, in so far as conducive to the increase of the corruption and delusion fund, a subordinate or co-ordinate object: war, were it only as a means and pretence for such waste, another object never out of view: that object, together with those others, invariably pursued, in so far as the contributions capable of being extracted from contributors, involuntary or voluntary, in the shape of taxes, or in the shape of loans, i. e. annuities paid by government by means of further taxes, can be obtained:—under such a government, by every penny paid into the Treasury, the means of diminishing the happiness of the greatest number receive increase;—by every penny which is prevented from taking that pernicious course, the diminution of that general happiness is so far prevented.

[Source: Jeremy Bentham, "Principles of Judicial Proceedure" (written in the 1820s), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, published under the Superintendence of his Executor, John Bowring* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843). 11 vols. CHAPTER XXIV.: SPECIAL JURIES. <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1921/113753/2341232>>]

4. James Mill (1773-1836): the sinister interests of the ruling few (1825)

Sancho Panza had a scheme for deriving advantage from the government of an island. He would sell the people for slaves, and put the money in his pocket. "The Few," in some countries, find in colonies, a thing which is very dear to them; they find, the one part of them, the precious matter with which to influence; the other, the precious matter with which to be influenced;—the one, the precious matter with which to make political dependents; the other, the precious matter with which they are made political dependents;—the one, the precious matter by which they augment their power; the other, the precious matter by which they augment their riches. Both portions of the "ruling Few," therefore, find their account in the possession of colonies. There is not one of the colonies but what augments the number of places. There are governorships and judgeships, and a long train of et ceteras; and above all, there is not one of them but what requires an additional number of troops, and an additional portion of navy. In every additional portion of army and navy, beside the glory of the thing, there are generalships, and colonelships, and captainships, and lieutenantships, and in the equipping and supplying of additional portions of army and navy, there are always gains, which may be thrown in the way of a friend. All this is enough to account for a very considerable quantity of affection maintained towards colonies.

[Source: James Mill, "Colony", *Supplement to the Encyclopedia Britannica* (London: J. Innes, 1825). Conclusion.—Tendency of Colonial Possessions to produce or prolong bad Government.<<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1765/92897/2081471>>]

5. John Wade (1788-1875): the uncontrolled and irresponsible ascendance of the aristocratic system (1832)

Having obtained the power (after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660), the Aristocracy have exercised it as uncontrolled power usually is exercised, namely, solely for their own advantage: they have rid themselves of what duties were anciently annexed to their order, and monopolized nearly all the honours and emoluments of society...

If we only examine the list of taxes, as we shortly intend to do, we shall find that the aristocracy have, comparatively, exempted themselves from impost, while the burden falls exclusively on the people. The duties imposed by the corn-laws are a tax paid directly for the support of the order; while, with the exception of the land-tax, a trifling impost, all other duties, the assessed taxes, excise, customs, stamps,

post-office duties, fall with disproportionate weight on the middling and working classes, and scarcely touch the massive incomes of the nobility.

This is one of the great evils resulting from the political supremacy of the peerage. Instead of bearing the burden of taxation, which, in fact, is the original tenure on which they acquired the territorial possessions, they have laid it on the people. Nothing can be more unjust and oppressive. The comforts of one class ought never to be encroached upon, while another class remains in the enjoyment of redundant luxuries. It is the legitimate object of good government to prevent the extremes of wealth and indigence, and diffuse equally, through all classes, the bounties of nature. But the aristocratic system is the reverse of this principle. It weighs chiefly on want and penury; it tramples on those already depressed; and rushes, almost to annihilation, the most useful classes by its unceasing exactions.

[Source: *The Extraordinary Black Book: An Exposition of Abuses in Church and State, Courts of Law, Representation, Municipal and Corporate Bodies; with a precis of the House of Common, past, present and to come.* A New Edition. Ed. John Wade (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), pp. 257-58.]

6. Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850): the State is the Great Fiction (1848)

It is this unfortunate primitive tendency within all men to divide into two our complex human lot, shifting Pain onto others and keeping Satisfaction for themselves. It remains to be seen in what new form this sorry tendency will manifest itself.

Oppressors no longer act directly on the oppressed using their own forces. No, our conscience has become too scrupulous for that. There are still tyrants and victims certainly, but between them has placed itself the intermediary that is the State, that is to say, the law itself. What is more calculated to silence our scruples and, perhaps more appealing, to overcome our resistance? For this reason, we all make calls upon the State on one ground or pretext or another. We tell it "I do not consider that there is a satisfactory relation between the goods I enjoy and my work. I would like to take a little from the property of others to establish the balance I desire. But this is dangerous. Can you not make my task easier? Could you not provide me with a good position? Or else hinder the production of my competitors? Or else make me an interest free loan of the capital you have taken from its owners? Or raise my children at public expense? Or award me subsidies by way of subornation? Or ensure my well-being when I reach the age of fifty? By these means I will achieve my aim with a perfectly clear conscience, since the law itself will have acted on my behalf and I will achieve all the advantages of spoliation without ever having incurred either its risks or opprobrium!

As it is certain, on the one hand, that we all address more or less similar requests to the State and, on the other, it is plain that the State cannot procure satisfaction for some without adding to the work of the others, while waiting for a new definition of the State, I think I am authorized to give my own here. Who knows whether it will not carry off the prize? Here it is:

THE STATE is the great fiction by which EVERYONE endeavors to live at the expense of EVERYONE ELSE.

For today, as in the past, each person more or less wants to profit from the work of others. We do not dare display this sentiment; we even hide it from ourselves, and then what do we do? We design an intermediary, we address ourselves to THE STATE, and each class in turn comes forward to say to it "You who can take things straightforwardly and honestly, take something from the general public and we will share it." Alas! The State has a very ready tendency to follow this diabolical advice as it is made up of ministers and civil servants, in short, men, who like all men are filled with the desire and are always quick to seize the opportunity to see their wealth and influence increase. The State is therefore quick to understand the profit it can make from the role that the general public has entrusted to it. It will be the arbiter and master of every destiny. It will take a great deal; therefore a great deal will remain to it. It will

increase the number of its agents and widen the circle of its attributions. It will end by achieving crushing proportions.

But what we should clearly note is the astonishing blindness of the general public in all this. When happy soldiers reduced the conquered to slavery they were barbaric, but they were not absurd. Their aim, like ours, was to live at someone else's expense, but they did not fail to do so like us. What ought we to think of a people who do not appear to have any idea that reciprocal pillage is no less pillage because it is reciprocal, that it is no less criminal because it is executed legally and in an orderly fashion, that it adds nothing to public well-being and that, on the contrary, it reduces well-being by everything that this spendthrift of an intermediary that we call the STATE costs us?...

In fact, the State is not and cannot be one-handed. It has two hands, one to receive and the other to give; in other words, the rough hand and the gentle hand. The activity of the second is of necessity subordinate to the activity of the first. Strictly speaking, The State is able to take and not give back. This has been seen and is explained by the porous and absorbent nature of its hands, which always retain part and sometimes all of what they touch. But what has never been seen, will never be seen and cannot even be conceived is that the State will give to the general public more than it has taken from them. It is therefore a sublime folly for us to adopt toward it the humble attitude of beggars. It is radically impossible for it to confer a particular advantage on some of the individuals who make up the community without inflicting greater damage on the community as a whole.

[Source: Frédéric Bastiat, "L'État" (The State) (June 1848). New Liberty Fund translation. Also in Frédéric Bastiat, *Selected Essays on Political Economy*, trans. Seymour Cain, ed. George B. de Huszar, introduction by F.A. Hayek (Irvington-on-Hudson: Foundation for Economic Education, 1995). Chapter: 5: The State. <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/956/35453>>

7. John C. Calhoun (1782-1850): the tax-consumers vs. the tax-payers (1849)

The necessary result, then, of the unequal fiscal action of the government is, to divide the community into two great classes; one consisting of those who, in reality, pay the taxes, and, of course, bear exclusively the burthen of supporting the government; and the other, of those who are the recipients of their proceeds, through disbursements, and who are, in fact, supported by the government; or, in fewer words, to divide it into tax-payers and tax-consumers.

But the effect of this is to place them in antagonistic relations, in reference to the fiscal action of the government, and the entire course of policy therewith connected. For, the greater the taxes and disbursements, the greater the gain of the one and the loss of the other—and vice versa; and consequently, the more the policy of the government is calculated to increase taxes and disbursements, the more it will be favored by the one and opposed by the other.

[Source: John C. Calhoun, *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992). *A DISQUISITION ON GOVERNMENT* (1849) <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/683/107113/1934493>>]

8. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903): the militant vs. the industrial types of society (1870s)

Most significant of all, however, are the changes in England itself, first retrogressive and then progressive, that occurred during the war-period which extended from 1775 to 1815, and during the subsequent period of peace. At the end of the last century and the beginning of this, reversion towards ownership of the individual by the society had gone a long way. "To statesmen, the State, as a unit, was all in all, and it is really difficult to find any evidence that the people were thought of at all, except in the relation of obedience." "The Government regarded the people with little other view than as a taxable and soldier-yielding mass." While the militant part of the community had greatly developed, the industrial part had approached towards the condition of a permanent commissariat. By conscription and by press-gangs, was carried to a relatively vast extent that sacrifice of the citizen in life and liberty which war entails; and the claims to property were treasured on by merciless taxation, weighing down the middle classes so grievously that they had greatly to lower their rate of living, while the people at large were so distressed (partly no doubt by bad harvests) that "hundreds ate nettles and other weeds." With these major aggressions upon the individual by the State, went numerous minor aggressions. Irresponsible agents of the executive were empowered to suppress public meetings and seize their leaders: death being the punishment for those who did not disperse when ordered. Libraries and news-rooms could not be opened without licence; and it was penal to lend books without permission. There were "strenuous attempts made to silence the press;" and booksellers dared not publish works by obnoxious authors. "Spies were paid, witnesses were suborned, juries were packed, and the habeas corpus Act being constantly suspended, the Crown had the power of imprisoning without inquiry and without limitation." While the Government taxed and coerced and restrained the citizen to this extent, its protection of him was inefficient. It is true that the penal code was made more extensive and more severe. The definition of treason was enlarged, and numerous offences were made capital which were not capital before; so that there was "a vast and absurd variety of offences for which men and women were sentenced to death by the score." there was "a devilish levity in dealing with human life." But at the same time there was not an increase, but rather a decrease, of security. As says Mr. Pike in his *History of Crime in England*, "it became apparent that the greater the strain of the conflict the greater is the danger of a reaction towards violence and lawlessness." Turn now to the opposite picture. After recovery from the prostration which prolonged wars had left, and after the dying away of those social perturbations caused by impoverishment, there began a revival of traits proper to the industrial type. Coercion of the citizen by the State decreased in various ways. Voluntary enlistment replaced compulsory military service; and there disappeared some minor restraints over personal freedom, as instance the repeal of laws which forbade artisans to travel where they pleased, and which interdicted trades-unions. With these manifestations of greater respect for personal freedom, may be joined those shown in the amelioration of the penal code: the public whipping of females being first abolished; then the long list of capital offences being reduced until there finally remained but one; and, eventually, the pillory and imprisonment for debt being abolished. Such penalties on religious independence as remained disappeared; first by removal of those directed against Protestant Dissenters, and then of those which weighed on Catholics, and then of some which told specially against Quakers and Jews. By the Parliamentary Reform Bill and the Municipal Reform Bill, vast numbers were removed from the subject classes to the governing classes. Interferences with the business-transactions of citizens were diminished by allowing free trade in bullion, by permitting joint-stock banks, by abolishing multitudinous restrictions on the importation of commodities—leaving eventually but few which pay duty. Moreover while these and kindred changes, such as the removal of restraining burdens on the press, decreased the impediments to free actions of citizens, the protective action of the State was increased. By a greatly-improved police system, by county courts, and so forth, personal safety and claims to property were better secured.

[Source: Herbert Spencer, *Political Institutions, being Part V of the Principles of Sociology* (The Concluding Portion of Vol. II) (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882). [CHAPTER XVIII.: the industrial type of society](http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1336/54833). <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1336/54833>>]

9. Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923): the circulation of the elites (1901)

Except during short intervals of time, peoples are always governed by an elite. I use the word elite (It. aristocrazia) in its etymological sense, meaning the strongest, the most energetic, and most capable - for good as well as evil. However, due to an important physiological law, elites do not last. Hence - the history of man is the history of the continuous replacement of certain elites: as one ascends, another declines. Such is the real phenomenon, though to us it may often appear under another form.

The new elite which seeks to supercede the old one, or merely to share its power and honors, does not admit to such an intention frankly and openly. Instead it assumes the leadership of all the oppressed, declares that it will pursue not its own good but the good of the many; and it goes to battle, not for the rights of a restricted class, but for the rights of almost the entire citizenry. Of course, once victory is won, it subjugates the erstwhile allies, or, at best, offers them some formal concessions. Such is the history of the struggles fought by the plebs and the patres in Rome; such is the history of the victory which the bourgeoisie won over the nobility of feudal origin, a victory well noted by modern socialists. [p. 36].

[Source: Vilfredo Pareto, "Un applicazione di teorie sociologiche," *Revista Italiana di sociologia*, 1901, p. 402-456; translated as *The Rise and Fall of the Elites: An Application of Theoretical Sociology*, Introduction by Hans L. Zetterberg (Totowa, N. J: Bedminster Press, 1968.)]

10. Franz Oppenheimer (1864-1943): the political means vs. the economic means of acquiring wealth (1922)

There are two fundamentally opposed means whereby man, requiring sustenance, is impelled to obtain the necessary means for satisfying his desires. These are work and robbery, one's own labor and the forcible appropriation of the labor of others. Robbery! Forcible appropriation! These words convey to us ideas of crime and the penitentiary, since we are the contemporaries of a developed civilization, specifically based on the inviolability of property. And this tang is not lost when we are convinced that land and sea robbery is the primitive relation of life, just as the warriors' trade—which also for a long time is only organized mass robbery—constitutes the most respected of occupations. Both because of this, and also on account of the need of having, in the further development of this study, terse, clear, sharply opposing terms for these very important contrasts, I propose in the following discussion to call one's own labor and the equivalent exchange of one's own labor for the labor of others, the "economic means" for the satisfaction of needs, while the unrequited appropriation of the labor of others will be called the "political means."

[Source: Franz Oppenheimer, *The State: Its History and Development viewed Sociologically*, authorized translation by John M. Gitterman (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1922) <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1662/3696>>]

