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Decentralized Perfectionism: A Critique of Contractarianism and Bureaucracy Through the Inspiration of Nietzsche

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Decentralized Perfectionism:

A Critique of Contractarianism and Bureaucracy Through the Inspiration of Nietzsche

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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For my exemplars, here and elsewhere.

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Introduction

To tie many authors together as well as add something useful to the political discourse, my goal here in this first section is to provide a background for this work. The focus of this project is the maintenance and enforcement of social and political values and how this process leads to the stagnation of value-driven creativity. The starting point for this project is to lay out two fundamental claims on which the rest of this critique will be built. The first is that values on the individual level are demonstrated through activity i.e. values are demonstrated through the way that we voluntarily spend our time. This idea appears in different forms across much of philosophical history and is key to understanding much of the critique which will appear later on. This claim places emphasis on the individual and defines oneself as a distinct entity through activity; essentially drawing the line around ourselves to distinguish who we are as a “self” that is distinct from the rest. Importantly, this is a process that is undertaken for the individual by themselves though is not isolating. Communities form naturally around a sense of shared values which enables our interaction as individuals with others.

The second claim and a division which will guide this work as a whole is the realization of a fundamental difference between a political philosophy whose core is *security* and *reproduction* and a political philosophy dedicated to perpetual *transformation* and *overcoming*. The division of these two types of philosophy grounds this work in a critique which focuses on the limitations created by the former and at the detriment of the latter, an observation that will continually reemerge throughout this project. This separation also defines the structure of this project, as well as the immediate focus, which will be where a desire for security manifests itself

in the history of political philosophy while the second half will be an illustration of what a transformative set of values might be.

The core of this project as political and social valuation naturally leads to an oft-repeated, though differently articulated critique, that values have become externally defined and calcified; in other words, individuals have lost control and responsibility of their own values. This process has been described by several authors, perhaps the most notable within the philosophical canon being Friedrich Nietzsche and more recently in the anthropological work of David Graeber. There is a fundamental similarity between writers who seem quite distinct from each other along these lines, each finding that there is something important about the willing activity of individuals and the construction of philosophical or political prescriptions around this fundamental principle. Important to understanding this similarity is the emphasis placed on plurality as this principle realizes that individualized valuation is a process that breeds difference. Rather than shying away from the possible dangers found in highly pluralistic social settings, a principle of individual valuation leans into this environment and seeks a political realm founded on complete individuals engaging in value-driven *conflict*. All of these ideas here will be expanded upon through an analysis of several different thinkers across the philosophical and political spectrum, Friedrich Nietzsche, David Graeber, and G.A. Cohen, as well as others.

In the modern age, it is clear that the process of value creation has been exploited by external forces. The reasoning and logic behind this will be discussed at great lengths though for now, it is important to preliminarily realize what sources have contributed to the loss of individual control over political valuation. First, and perhaps most important, there is the idea of a “contract” as a necessary tool to create social and political bonds. This is of course the core of contractarianism, a philosophy based upon the creation of mechanisms through which pre and

post-social conflict can be managed. In a sense, contractarianism is the opposite of a principle of individual valuation as it claims that the values of the contract are desired as they settle conflict or because they would be mutually agreed upon under a set of hypothetical conditions.

Regardless of what the values are, this philosophy is dedicated to the project of creating a system through which valuation is to be mediated and, as will be discussed later, enforces this process through management.

Second and due to the fallout of the contractarian framework, we are now experiencing an age of immense bureaucratization and depersonalization of our political realm. As will be discussed, bureaucracy is a fundamental tool through which the contractarian framework is realized and is largely predicated upon a group supposedly armed with “elite” knowledge of the necessary social values (or the prescriptions which stem from these values) managing the political and social environment. Bureaucracy as a system of supposed competence and expertise is designed specifically to limit the influence that individuals are able to have on their environment as it sets barriers to entry through accreditation and approval, therefore, limiting the ability for meaningful activity outside of the confines of the bureaucratic structure. In a sense, bureaucracy is the contractarian framework in practice as it is designed to enforce strict limitations as to what is appropriate and then back up its definitions through all manners of enforcement

What has been made clear is that this system of bureaucracy founded on the contractarian framework has either gone almost entirely unnoticed or been the subject of misguided and unfocused critique. This response, at least in my estimation, largely defines the American political spectrum today where those on the Left have become the de facto defenders of a system of value-driven authority while those on the Right have partially realized the presence of this

problem only to shy away from it and propose deregulation and the expansion of market norms. As we shall see through the work of several authors on the development of bureaucracy, this divide has served the expansion of the system itself; now existing in the most intimate and personal recesses of individual life. My purpose here is to articulate a critique of contractarianism and its development within bureaucracy through a commitment to individual valuation. Once this has been accomplished, I will give a sketch of what social and political conditions are necessary to realize a principle of individual valuation and where it finds support in the philosophical canon.

Chapter 1: Structured Critique of Contractarianism

To move forward with the critique of externalized valuation it is necessary to realize the effect contractarian philosophy has had on our political world. Many basic assumptions upon which our political system rests are found deep within the internal structure of the contractarian model, the need for punishment to encourage cooperative interest, a pre-social world that reveals our natural state, and the need for management of social conflict are the most obvious. For my purposes here, I wish to first draw out the structure of contractarianism as a political model and evaluate the core of its structure. This will be done to show that contractarianism's basic function is to manage pre and post-social conflict, a task achieved through "coercive force" and the creation of impersonal deterrence mechanisms. These mechanisms of deterrence are used to achieve the social outcomes prescribed by the contract and the vision dreamt of by the contractarian -- that of a world capable of fitting within their model. The implications that this model has on our modern political world, particularly this need to manage social conflict and the rise of the modern bureaucratic state, will be explored following this look into the model of the contract.

To evaluate contractarianism, it is first necessary to understand the internal logic of the contract and its social and political use. The contractarian model is largely founded upon some type of portrayal of our "natural state" or "human nature" to then create social and political prescriptions about what is necessary to deliver us from our primordial being. Methodologically, the initial representation of our natural state is used to justify different types of limitations once we enter social arrangements; such limitations largely depend on each thinker's conception of the state of nature. For the purposes of this project, I will focus on two contractarian thinkers, the

17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes and the 20th-century American philosopher John Rawls, to give a sense of the historical progression of contractarianism within its development as well as the core problems of the contractarian model.

Though there is a great deal of variation between the anthropological and historical framing of the state of nature (some thinkers even opting to treat it as a thought experiment rather than a historical claim), this basic progression of a portrayal of our natural state that leads into a series of social and political prescriptions is the core of the contractarian model. Within the contractarian portrayal of the state of nature, there is a deep plurality between individuals over their conceptions of value. For instance, Rawls in his major work *A Theory of Justice* frames his entire project around the need to provide a bedrock of social values that are able to overcome this plurality and articulate a conception of justice based on what individuals would hypothetically agree to. In this sense, the framing of the Rawlsian contract is based on the assumption that our natural state, though pluralistic, is infantile and once we want to be serious about creating social bonds, a culture, an economy, etc. we must give up large swaths of difference in order to fit within the contract. The contract then, from the outset, is a method of reducing our natural plurality as the contractarian sees difference to run antithetical to their conception of progress and value.

Fundamentally, this means that contractarianism is a philosophy predicated upon the perceived need for managing pluralism and the conflict or violence created therein. For Hobbes, this aspect of contractarianism is explicit as the contract is essentially a tool used to ensure the completion of social agreements and dissuade individuals from breaking compacts for personal gain. The fundamental task of the contract then is to create mechanisms through which this type of conflict can be deterred which then permits individuals to enter into long-standing social

relationships. The creation of these mechanisms will be referred to as impersonal deterrence as they are meant to apply universally to any activity or conception of value that falls outside of the parameters defined by the contract. In this sense, this entity created by the contractarians in order to settle disputes rises above the level of inter-personal or group conflict that occurs naturally in order to claim authority over the pluralistic individual conceptions of value.

To begin with the analysis of the contractarian model, I will begin with an examination of Hobbes's conception of "coercive force" as a necessary political tool and then move forward into Rawls's modernization of the contract. All of this is meant to develop a critique of contractarianism through its elevation of "necessary" values as well as its management of conflict in order to demonstrate that it is a philosophy that limits pluralistic value expression, political progress, and the examination of viable social and political alternatives.

As a contractarian, Thomas Hobbes exemplifies many of the core assumptions of the contractarian model and will therefore be a figure of great importance for this critique. Hobbes emerges as one of the key Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th-century and contributes a great deal to the development of political philosophy. His most well-known work *Leviathan* was published during the end of the English Civil War in 1651 and is one of the first examples of social contract theory as an Enlightenment philosophy, one which seeks to create sovereign authority outside of the monarchy and institutionalized religion. As stated earlier about contractarians generally, many of Hobbes's political prescriptions come out of his particularly violent conception of the state of nature--a state which he believed to be unfolding before him during the war which he was observing. Hobbes's state of nature is easily one of the most well-known and perhaps infamous passages in all of political philosophy, portraying a world without sovereign authority that enables individuals to consider each other as means to achieve

their own particular ends. This emerges in his discussion of a deep natural equality that exists without hierarchical power, one which permits individuals to act towards their own interests and different conceptions of value. Hobbes argues that if individual conceptions of value exist simultaneously and each individual is permitted to act towards the ends that they see fit, then natural hostility will emerge which inevitably leads to violence. He writes:

And therefore, if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only, endeavour to destroy or subdue one another (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chap. xiii).

This description of value-based disagreements is an essential part of Hobbes's conception of human nature, a state that equally permits the ability of individuals to perform what they see as necessary to achieve their own values--such activity having the explicit danger to spiral uncontrollably and descend into violence. Important to the purposes of this critique is the way that this passage immediately reduces the possibility for plurality within the framing of the state of nature. If differences in values lead to violent conflict and if violence is antithetical to the process of creating long-standing social bonds, then it would follow that one of the most immediate moves that the contractarian must make is to assert that the values that individuals hold as well as the activity that they engage in to realize these values must be *permitted* by the authority of the contract; in other words, values and their realization must fit within the set of conditions deemed necessary by the contract. Hobbes's notion of the state of nature as a necessarily conflictual and violent environment leads him to perhaps the most famous passage in the *Leviathan*, that life within this state is devoid of any meaningful development and therefore "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chap. xiii). This description gives a

somewhat complete portrayal of Hobbes's conception of human nature, an equal, violent world riddled with insurmountable conflict.

Hobbes continues by describing a need to guarantee the completion of agreements that are made between two individuals. Within the state of nature, self-interest is able to run its course, and, depending on the values being held, individuals might find it beneficial to break agreements rather than complete them. Within this section (and perhaps the *Leviathan* as a whole) there is a deep-set anxiety characteristic of someone seeking solutions to the immense violence they perceive in the world. This lends itself to the need to essentially beat-out self-interest to ensure that there is an ever-present system of violence to keep individuals in check. Hobbes writes:

Therefore, before the names of just and unjust can have place, there must be some coercive power to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants, by the terror of some punishment greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant, and to make good that propriety which by mutual contract men acquire, in recompense of the universal right they abandon; and such power there is none before the erection of the commonwealth (Hobbes, *Leviathan Chap. xv*).

Hobbes's battle with value-driven self-interest is apparent here, requiring coercive power to transcend interpersonal disagreements. What is crucial to recognize is the link between Hobbes's notions of justice and injustice as the failure to meet the conditions of a contract and the completion of such a contract being secured with coercive power or violence. This synthesis of contract-based values (i.e. justice and injustice) and violence is one of the clearest examples of the values of a contract acting as an authority and being elevated to a position above any individualized conception of value. Noted above, this is what was meant by contractarians seeing

the values expressed within their contract as “necessary” since it would seem that the development of long-standing social relationships and political development depend upon the contract’s authority to elevate itself beyond interpersonal conflict.

Hobbes provides the basis for necessary values and authority for the contractarian model claiming that without an authoritative figure, it is impossible to move beyond the natural conflict to which individuals are predisposed. Characteristic of Hobbes generally, I imagine him to be providing the teeth for justifying systems of management, particularly systems which pride themselves on reducing social conflict. As I stated earlier, conflict is essentially the enemy of contractarianism as the philosophy is predicated on the transcendence of our natural state into an organized society. To begin our social development, therefore, requires a sacrifice of the pluralistic disagreements found within human nature. Hobbes is the epitome of this movement and, as will be shown in the rest of the project, the modern world has not moved beyond this craving for authority--an authority capable of solving the problems of value-driven conflict.

Contractarianism after Hobbes grappled a great deal with the structure of the model. As shown above, much of the prescriptive side of contractarian philosophy depends on the estimation of the state of nature provided by the author, opening the door for an in-depth anthropological and historical critique of the philosophy along the lines of its descriptive inaccuracies. Much of this is exemplified in some of the modern writing on contractarianism, seeing that the core assumptions of the philosophy create an unjustified need for stability in the wake of our phantasmal “violent” nature. Organizing the response to the outcomes of the Hobbesian framework will be a part of the later section on bureaucratic procedure sustained through coercive power, a kind of synthesis between the creation of a managerial state and the perceived need for coercive power to enable societal function. For now, it is important to realize

that many of the Hobbesian problems have been resolved through the simple passage of time. The violent state that Hobbes relies upon has, in some ways, become a distant memory to us in the modern world where violent uprising and direct war have become considerably rarer owing to the establishment of interwoven global networks of social and economic reliance. While the structure of the model persists within modern contractarianism, our proximity to a state of nature has not. In the historical progression of contractarianism, this necessitated an update to the framework--one that distances the philosophy from a need to make direct statements about the "state of nature."

This need was satisfied by the 20th-century American political philosopher John Rawls, one of the defining thinkers of his time and the figure who essentially resurrected contractarianism as a method of doing political philosophy. His major work *A Theory of Justice* paved the way for modern liberal ideology and is used to ground a great deal of progressive political action, state-supported welfare, redistribution, and greater equality under capitalism are some of the clearest examples. Within the framework of this project, Rawls will serve multiple purposes. The first and most straightforward is that of his work as a clear example of modern contractarianism in practice. This is meant to demonstrate some of the differences between Hobbesian contractarianism and Rawls's model but mainly to draw out some of the striking similarities, especially as Rawls imagined himself in a competition with Hobbes. As will be shown, many of Hobbes's demands for authority and coercion exist within the Rawlsian framework, though are now more obscure. Second is to provide a look into the ways that modern liberalism (of which Rawls is a clear representative) is in part a demand for comprehensive, bureaucratic management of social conflict. Finally, Rawls is an important figure for this project since there are clear parts of his philosophy that should be maintained for anyone interested in

progressivism and leftist thought. This means that there are portions of Rawls's work that I am interested in sustaining, either systematically or because of a similarity in the ends that we both see as valuable. This aspect of his philosophy will occupy some of the final chapters of this project in which I will attempt to articulate an alternative set of values to adopt in order to avoid the problems of contractarian and bureaucratic conflict management while maintaining a commitment to progressivism and the furthering of the Left's political mission. For now, it seems best to understand Rawls's framework in *A Theory of Justice* starting first with the "original position."

Rawls's use of the "original position" functions in essentially the same way as the historical account of the state of nature in the contractarian model. Here, Rawls rids himself of a great deal of anthropological baggage by treating the "original position" as a thought experiment rather than a real, observable claim about human behavior. This gives him a great deal of freedom to create a basis for the prescriptive side of his project, which he takes full advantage of in the section in which he first establishes the principles of the "original position."

Fundamentally, this thought experiment asks how individuals would imagine the state and privileges afforded to certain groups if such individuals had no prior knowledge of who they would end up being after the construction of society (Rawls 17). Rawls imagines that if this were the case, then individuals would naturally advocate for equality in terms of "primary goods," things like rights, liberty, and material needs. Importantly, this is not equality out of some feelings of universal goodwill. Rather, Rawls comes to the conclusion that equality is desirable out of individualized selfishness within the "original position," for without prior knowledge of who one would end up being, and in order to guarantee our own well-being and security, we would naturally want to equalize goods among everyone.

Rawls's use of the "original position" is the foundation for his famous claim that "justice is fairness." He writes:

Justice as fairness begins, as I have said, with one of the most general of all choices which persons might make together, namely with choice of the first principles of a conception of justice ... I shall maintain ... that the persons in the initial situation would choose two ... different principles: the first requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities, for example inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society. (Rawls 13)

From Rawls's description of the "original position," several important conclusions can be drawn.

First and (perhaps most obvious) is that the "original position" is largely predicated on a self-securing desire for equality. Without any knowledge of the structure or the values sustained by the state, Rawls sees that there would be a natural desire for guaranteed equality in order to guarantee individual security after the entrance into society. This makes a good deal of sense for a contractarian as the creation of a contract is often thought of as an exchange of the rights within the state of nature for the greater advantages of living under the coercive power of the contract. Though Rawls's "original position" is not directly a historical claim about this exchange occurring, there is a similar kind of logic as one of the conditions of the "original position" is a deep self-interest, one which (as Rawls identifies later) makes individuals unwilling to part with their own values in favor of someone else's. Equality, then, is a mechanism for moving beyond the individual's indifference to their other in the "original position;" a very similar conception of the "state of nature" to the Hobbesian picture.

Second, and in further relation to the impersonal coercion of Hobbes writing, it is important to realize that the “original position” is itself a kind of deterrence mechanism. The way that Rawls sees differences play out within his hypothetical condition is very similar to the insurmountable differences of Hobbes where value-driven conflict would permanently prevent mutual recognition between two individuals; therefore necessitating a contract in order to back up social relationships and agreements with violence¹. Though violence is not as explicit here, it seems that Rawls uses equality as the basis of the contract in a similar way to Hobbes. For Hobbes, the creation of the contract not only brings about the deterrence mechanism, it also creates conceptions of “justice” and “injustice,” through which conflict can be settled. Equality for Rawls is quite similar, a value which lies at the bottom of the contract that then allows for punitive measures based on adherence to such values. In this sense, the use of the “original position” becomes a way of universalizing the values of Rawls’s contract, making all human behavior fall under its purview.

Lastly, I mean to draw attention to Rawls’s mention of “compensating benefits” for the least advantaged members as a way of justifying inequality after the construction of society. This is one of the first instances of Rawls’s reference to the “difference principle,” which is, perhaps, one of the most controversial parts of the work. At this point, it seems to permit violations of the conditions of the “original position” (and therefore the contract as a whole) if certain conditions are met. The reality of these conditions as well as their implications for Rawls’s project as a whole will be the focus of a later section on the use of values in contractarianism and its link to bureaucratic management.

These first two conclusions drawn from the “original position” point back to one of the original claims made about contractarianism, that it is a philosophy predicated on the need to manage value-driven conflict. This is certainly obvious in Hobbes though, at least at this point,

¹ Mutual recognition as seeing the Other as a distinct individual and not as a tool to further self-interest.

somewhat more obscure within Rawls's view. The "original position" as a thought experiment might dissuade us from a direct interpretation of its conclusions, giving support to a more benign reading that it is less about direct conflict and more about ensuring the position of the least-advantaged individuals. This thinking is in line with much of the liberal reception of Rawls's work as a contractarian, centering around his emphasis on inequality and redistribution; two of the tenets of 20th-century liberalism. As much as Rawls is an inspiration for fighting inequality through the mechanisms of the state, there is another side of his philosophy much more in line with Hobbes and the insurmountable differences that exist within nature. This comes out mainly in some of the later sections of *A Theory of Justice* on "The Circumstances of Justice," in which Rawls describes the conditions under which 'human cooperation' is secured. In this section, Rawls sees that individuals acting towards their pluralistic conceptions of value is fundamentally detrimental to an innate ability to cooperate as this type of conflict reduces another individual to a tool used to further one's goals. He writes:

Finally, I shall assume that the parties in the original position are mutually disinterested: they are not willing to have their interests sacrificed to the others. The intention is to model men's conduct and motivation cases where questions of justice arise. The spiritual ideals of saints and heroes can be as irreconcilably opposed as any other interests.

Conflicts in pursuit of these ideals are the most tragic of all (Rawls 112).

From this passage, there is a reading where one can easily conclude that Rawls sees a kind of transaction between individual and cooperative interest. The contract, in this view, represents the record and maintenance of this transaction where one relinquishes their own interest in pursuing their individual ends for the sake of security and the creation of elaborate social institutions that are then able to exist once cooperation becomes the norm. Within a chapter titled "The Circumstances of

Justice” it is clear that might Rawls see this as being a necessary step towards the implementation of the conclusions of the “original position,” in other words, ‘justice as fairness’ requires the dissolution of individual value-based interest.

While this a plausible reading of Rawls (a perhaps libertarian reading) there is a much more favorable interpretation that still bears problematic results. Though there is a seemingly negative relationship between self-interest and cooperative-interest here, Rawls’s project as a whole does not fit within this model as there are countless areas where Rawls affirms his commitment to individuality under the scope of the contract.² Even if Rawls is granted this part of his project, there is still a critique grounded in the way that he (and contractarians generally) enforce and secure their conception of cooperative-interest. Cooperative interest, within the contract, comes to be representative of the “necessary” values and conditions which permit the creation of society and are then enforced through the authority of the state. Instead of being a cooperative interest of two individuals or groups of individuals each with their own interests, it becomes a kind of *general* interest which is no longer dependent upon individual or group support and instead is sustained through the orientation of institutions. The development of this side of Rawls is deeply related to the outcomes of the “difference principle” which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Finally, in thinking of Rawls within the context of Hobbesian contractarianism, it is important to note that there is a significant change to the enforcement mechanisms that determine the behavior of individuals living underneath the contract. For Hobbes, this is clearly the impersonal mechanisms of state violence which exist at the periphery of all post-contract human interaction and behavior. Rawls, by comparison, is more nuanced in his approach and advocates for a deep

² I see the desire for equality within the “original position” to be a perfect example of this as it is not found out of a feeling of good-will for the Other but rather out of individual self-interest.

“internalization” of the principles of justice (i.e. the values of the contract) to lead individuals to follow the conclusions of the “original position.” He writes:

Now a well-ordered society is also regulated by its public conception of justice. This fact implies that its members have a strong and normally effective desire to act as the principles of justice require. Since a well-ordered society endures over time, its conception of justice is presumably stable: that is, when institutions are just, ...those taking part in these arrangements acquire the corresponding sense of justice and desire to do their part in maintaining them (Rawls 398).

It seems at this point that the activity of individuals is a requirement to consider the implementation of the principles of justice a success, an issue which will fall at the core of the discussion of the “difference principle” and some of the relevant secondary literature on the topic. In terms of beginning to think of the modern implementation of the contract, it seems important that the role of institutions and the institutional arrangement of the contract does, in some ways, determine the internalization of the principles of justice on the individual level. In some sense, the Rawlsian model avoids the need for direct violence through this claim since all behavior is now done under the purview of what is encouraged on the institutional level, an approach that will be key to understanding the eventual link between the contractarian model and bureaucracy.

Within the framework of this project, the inclusion of Rawls is meant to highlight a vitally important characteristic. Within the structure of the contract, Rawls demonstrates that one can draw similar conclusions about what is necessary for the functioning of society (i.e. relinquishing individual interest for the sake of limiting interpersonal and political conflict) without relying upon the violent state of nature developed by Hobbes. Instead, the creation of a social contract can be entirely motivated by simple beliefs about the nature of human plurality and the irresolvable

conflicts therein. Rawls, therefore, does not need the Hobbesian portrayal of the state of nature or the psychological portrait of human self-interest. Instead, this conception of the social contract relies upon a belief of self-interested equality and the need to limit disagreement insofar as a society is interested in the creation of institutions. Rawls as a modern thinker is a key motivator in contractarianism's progression beyond a reliance upon an anthropological account, therefore limiting the critique of contractarianism severely. For someone, such as myself, interested in a critique of the modern conception of contractarianism, Rawls provides the *best* portrayal of the social contract and (in a similar way to how he conceived the work of Hobbes) is the one to beat.

Chapter 2: The Origin of Value within the Contract, Institutions, and the “Difference Principle”

To begin developing a critique of the Rawlsian contract, it is important to realize some of the remaining links between his conception of the contract and the general contractarian model. Rawls offers a substantive alternative to the logical progression of general contractarian theory through his reliance on the “original position,” overcoming many of the logistical shortcomings of the philosophy’s previous instances. What remains, however, is the operation of the contract on the level of social value. Returning briefly to Hobbes, the model created in *Leviathan* is fundamentally concerned with securing the completion of social agreements to allow for long-standing social bonds. This leads Hobbes to the simple conclusion described in the previous chapter, that social values (such as the terms justice and injustice in this example) are strictly defined by the conditions of the contract; done to prevent self-interest from overriding the guarantee of completing agreements. This, as described earlier, necessitates “coercive power,” keeping the threat of institutional violence permanently at the periphery of individual activity. The values within the contract are then elevated to the institutional level as they are the only set seen as being “necessary” for the existence of social relationships and therefore needing the institution to secure their reproduction.

For Rawls, there is a fundamental similarity between his approach in regard to social value and the Hobbesian model. Rawls maintains throughout the work that the achievement of the conditions of the contract (i.e. the conditions of justice) requires individual participation; not just the orientation of the institutions. On this point, I see very little reason to believe that this is the case for the Rawlsian contract; in fact, the conditions of the contract here seem to have very little to do with

the values of the individual. Instead, in a way similar to Hobbes, the conditions of the contract are sustained almost entirely through institutions or, as other critiques put it, through the ‘basic structure’ of the society referencing the direct coercive, legalistic structures rather than social interactions that fall outside of the conditions of the contract. If the ‘basic structure’ of society is the main determinant of the conditions of the contact, then principles must be erected in order to ensure that structure of the institution is maintained regardless of the activity of individuals; social value, therefore, must be insulated from such individual activity. For Rawls, this is achieved through the “difference principle” and, as referenced in the previous chapter, represents perhaps the most controversial aspect of the whole work; certainly garnering Rawls the greatest amount of critique across the political spectrum. Understanding the logic of the “difference principle” and the outcomes generated through the implementation of it as a social value will be the focus of this chapter, done through some of the existing critiques of Rawls and the expansion of some of the existing literature to include the beginnings of an anti-bureaucratic argument founded in a critique of modern contractarianism.

To begin understanding the “difference principle” within Rawls’s model, it is first necessary to understand how “institutions” are thought of within the structure of his contract. Rawls maintains throughout the work that the two principles of justice that he defines apply both to the activity of individuals and to the structure of institutions. Determining the quality of a society is therefore dependent on the individuals within it adhering to just principles while also existing under just institutions³. This is demonstrated in Rawls’s preliminary writing on the “institutional” approach where he describes that social institutions exist in the same way as the “rules of a game,” though separates himself from other thinkers by describing a more abstract level beyond the institution

³ The basis for this claim points back to the importance of internalization within the previous chapter as if individual activity was irrelevant for determining the quality of society or the implementation of the values of the contract, internalization would no longer be necessary.

referred to as the “basic structure” of society i.e. the collection and qualification of all the social institutions. Rawls describes a kind of particular versus whole distinction in order to show that the existence of a just institution is possible with a few unjust rules within it. Similarly, society’s “basic structure” could be considered just even with some of the institutions within it being unjust. Though Rawls maintains that there is some type of dependency between these different interwoven social systems, it is clear that their orientation and structure largely determine their quality. Before moving to the direct writing on the “difference principle” I mean to highlight this fact of Rawls’s model where, even in some of the first pages of the work, there is already a substantial gap between the way he imagines the achievement of the conditions of the contract and the regular functioning of society; an idea which will directly carry into the critique of Rawls approach to non-institutional systems of power.

The “difference-principle” for Rawls is a way of securing economic inequality within the “original position”. From the conclusions of the original position, the first principle of justice that Rawls draws out of the thought experiment is the equal distribution of rights and liberties based in the individual interest of security after the construction of society. The exception to complete egalitarianism is found in the second principle, stating that economic inequalities can exist only if they benefit the least well-off individual. Rawls demonstrates the application of this principle in a chapter titled “Democratic Equality and The Difference Principle.” Here, Rawls works through different individual activities, one more profit-seeking than the other, and establishes that the existence of the inequalities created by this difference in behavior is justified if it benefits the individual receiving the unequal share. He writes:

Let us suppose that the various income groups correlate with representative individuals by reference to whose expectations we can judge the distribution. Now those

starting out as members of the entrepreneurial class in property-owning democracy, say, have a better prospect than those who begin in the class of unskilled laborers... What, then, can possibly justify this kind of initial inequality in life prospects? According to the difference principle, it is justifiable only if the difference in expectation is to the advantage of the representative man who is worse off, in this case the representative unskilled worker. The inequality in expectation is permissible only if lowering it would make the working class even more worse off (Rawls 68).

In the context of this project and a focus on the activity of individuals, the main question that arises from this reading of the “difference principle” is if knowledge of the principles of justice is required for the “better off” individual. It seems, at least at this point, that it would not be required as profit-seeking behavior would not be in line with an observation of the first principle, in other words, those striving to create substantive economic inequalities between themselves and their peers would not be respecting the equality of the “original position.” However, if the logic of the previous section on the particular versus the whole distinction were applied here, then it is conceivable for Rawls that individuals who do not observe the values of the contract could exist within a society which does. In some sense, there is a deep contradiction centered around this link between the behavior of individuals and the society and institutions that they create. At a certain point, it seems that Rawls must deemphasize the behavior of individuals after the construction of society in order to maintain the achievement of justice on the institutional level even though the conditions of justice are found within the wants and needs of individuals within the “original position.” Fundamentally, this question strikes at the core of this critique where, in order to escape this problem, Rawls and the modern contractarian must move their project away from the individual and create elaborate and complex institutions to achieve the conditions of their project.

This aspect of Rawls's writing is the focus of Canadian political philosopher G.A. Cohen's 1997 article titled "Where the Action is: On the Site of Distributive Justice." Cohen takes great issue with Rawls's belief that his conception of justice is an account of individual and institutional behavior, finding that when taking the "difference principle" seriously as a model for distribution, it is impossible to realize that it could exist on both levels of society. For illustrating the link between the contractarian framework and the procedure of bureaucracy, Cohen's article serves to further demonstrate the gap between individual activity and the quality of the 'basic structure' of Rawls's hypothetical society. At the end of the piece, Cohen shows that it is essentially impossible for Rawls to affirm the place of individual activity within his framework, instead, the principles of justice are only sustained on the institutional level.

Cohen begins by drawing out from the Rawlsian model that the application of the "difference principle" is meant to be both on the individual and institutional level and, through this simultaneous application, requires both a just structure but also an "*ethos*" of justice to guarantee that the activity of individuals is in line with the values and structure of institutions. Cohen writes:

Now ... What it means to accept and implement the difference principle implies that the justice of a society is not exclusively a function of its legislative structure, of its legally imperative rules, but also of the choices people make within those rules. The standard ... Rawlsian application of the difference principle can be modeled as follows. There is a market economy all agents in which seek to maximize their own gains, and there is a Rawlsian state that selects a tax function on income that maximizes the income return to the worst off people ... A society that is just within the terms of the difference principle, so we may conclude, requires not simply just coercive *rules*, but also an *ethos* of justice that informs

individual choices...the required ethos promotes a distribution more than what the rules of the economic game by themselves can secure (Cohen 10).

Cohen here demonstrates the conditions through which the “difference principle” must be implemented. Not only is it a necessity for the institutions (here referenced as the “rules of the economic game”) to promote the redistribution of economic resources created by aggressive profit-seeking behavior, an *ethos* of justice is also necessary to ensure that the individuals acting outside of the first principle of justice understand the necessity of the redistribution. In a sense, the taxation of individuals is only half of the project, the other being the creation of a non-institutional guiding set of values that are able to influence individual behavior outside of coercive power. Though not direct in Cohen’s writing, I take this mention of an *ethos* of justice to be referencing the emphasis that Rawls places on the internalization of the conditions of the contract, again, a method of influencing behavior without violent coercion.

After drawing out this aspect of Rawls’s writing, Cohen then delves into a Rawlsian response to the focus on this aspect of the model. This interlocutor posits that the focus on the behavior of individuals is inappropriate as the principles of justice are meant only to apply to the “basic structure” of society or, as mentioned earlier, the general orientation of social institutions. Cohen labels this as the “basic structure objection,” an approach that fundamentally deemphasizes the importance of action in the Rawlsian model in exchange for a greater focus on what might be seen as the more impactful areas of coercion within an individual’s life. This approach, at least on the surface, saves the contract from a great deal of scrutiny as the “difference principle” finds much easier application on the purely institutional level, functioning as a redistributive apparatus of the state.

For Cohen, there is a serious obscurity in what is meant to be included within the “basic structure,” finding that there is no direct line that can be drawn to separate legalistic and non-legalistic structures. Drawing upon some of the feminist critiques of Rawls’s model, Cohen gives the example of the patriarchal family structure, a structure which is immensely coercive though not in any formal legalistic sense while also being much closer to the level of individual activity rather. This provides a great dilemma for Rawls for if the principles of justice apply to this non-legalistic structure, then the “basic structure objection” crumbles under its own weight. If the objection remains firm and states that the principles of justice do not apply, then Rawls’s model misses an immense amount of social coercion purely because of the seemingly arbitrary delineation of what is considered to be within the “basic structure (Cohen 22).”

It is clear from Cohen’s view that the Rawlsian conception of justice misses an immense amount of social coercion from this problem. A focus on only the formally coercive elements of society is unable to grasp all of the interpersonal coercion which is almost certainly more often and immediately experienced in comparison to what is relegated to the confines of the “basic structure.” This is effectively where Cohen leaves Rawls’s project as the contradictions and failure to account for these other immense areas of coercion leave him deeply disillusioned with this conception of Rawlsian justice as a whole. He writes:

Here, then, is a circumstance, outside the basic structure, as that would be coercively defined, which profoundly affects people’s life-chances, *through the choices people make in response to the stated expectations, which are, in turn, sustained by those choices*. Yet Rawls must say, on pain of giving up the basic structure objection, that (legally uncoerced) family structure and behavior have no implications for justice in the sense of “justice” in which the basic

structure has implications for justice, since they are not a consequence of the formal coercive order (Cohen 22).

Cohen here summarizes a substantial critique of Rawls's institutional approach. At its core, the application of the "difference principle" only to the level of institutions almost entirely misses the interpersonal and individual experience of living under such coercion as there is no reason to expect that the inequalities found there would be addressed by the redistributive apparatus. It seems clear that the awareness of the relationship between the "profit-seeking" individuals and their observation of the principles of justice leads to this lopsided focus on the orientation and quality of institutions. Without needing individuals to constantly affirm that the inequalities they are creating are meant to benefit the "least-off" people in society, the contractarian is free to directly translate the conclusions of their contract into the structure of the state. In this sense, the contractarian focus for determining the quality of a society is necessarily on the institutional level as individual behavior is too unwieldy, too unmanageable to predictably fit within the confines of the contract.

Cohen's critique of Rawls provides the beginnings of a clear need to create a set of social and political values that ground the focus of the society on the individual level. Elevating the concerns of the contract and the orientation of institutions misses the most important and intimate areas of coercion, coercion which is immediately experienced and occurs more often. Within the final chapter of this project, I will attempt to give a sense of what these values might be, values that secure the necessity of individual focus, and a commitment to realizing a deep plurality of values. This critique of Rawls illustrates why this is necessary as the contractarian framework is dependent on the institutional approach to allow exceptions on the level of individual activity with the expectation that the institution will step in to correct this injustice. The set of values to be later articulated posit, at their core, that the quality of a society is necessarily determined by individual activity and no system

of management or methodology of redistribution is able to detract from the asymmetries created in a society that claims to have a certain value maintained on the level of the institution yet a polity acting towards its destruction.

For now, I mean to bring this critique of contractarianism into the modern age through an analysis of the contractarian model's link to the justification for the modern bureaucratic state. To begin, it is first necessary to draw out what is expected by the state through the application of the "difference principle." At a point in Cohen's excavation of the outcomes of the second principle of justice, there is a moment where he references that the belief in this principle can allow a redistributive state to correct for individual activity and essentially coerce the more successful individuals into giving up their unequal share of economic distribution through taxation. The outcome here, from a more consequentialist perspective, is essentially the achievement of the conditions of justice in the Rawlsian model as the inequalities that are created by the "better-off" individuals are corrected through the use of state power. In Cohen's article, he references that this is a held view of many of Rawls's contemporaries finding that it is the task of the government to create the "*ethos*" of justice through which the rules established within the contract are then able to be followed. Cohen writes:

The following threefold conjunction, which is an inescapable consequence of Rawls's position ... is strikingly incongruous: (1) the difference principle is an egalitarian principle of distributive justice; (2) it imposes on government a duty to promote an egalitarian ethos; (3) it is not for the sake of enhancing distributive justice in society that it is required to promote that ethos (Cohen 13).

Cohen's response to this problem has already been discussed. For my purposes here and, in particular, to initialize the link between the contractarian model and the modern system of

bureaucracy, I mean to draw focus to what the outcomes of seeing the state as the apparatus to manage the achievement of certain social values might be. First, it is a further extension of one of the core conclusions of the “difference principle,” that individual activity is essentially irrelevant to achieving justice on the institutional level. Continuing with the example of the application of the “difference principle,” as soon as the state becomes the apparatus through which the conditions of the contract are achieved, i.e. tasked with determining the appropriate levels of inequality insofar as they benefit the “least-off” individual, then a whole system of economic and social “experts” are brought under its purview. These new representatives of state power are then the ones charged with the measurement and quantification of social inequality to create greater precision in the application of state power to redistribute unequal economic outcomes. This progression suggests that when the state becomes the direct apparatus through which the conditions of the contract are meant to be achieved, the separation between individual activity and the quality of institutions is solidified and a new class of experts is created to ensure the achievement of the values entrusted to it.

This progression demonstrates the beginning of the link between the contractarian model and modern bureaucracy and points back to the need for security expressed by the nature of the social contract discussed in the first chapter. Fundamentally, once the conditions of the contract lead to deemphasizing the importance of individual behavior to achieve the values prescribed by it, then a state dedicated to its security and continual reproduction is created. Furthering these connections will be the focus of the next chapter as well as the outcomes of a contractual bureaucracy dedicated to managing various types of social and political conflict, enforced through coercive power or violence. A variety of different authors will be strung together to demonstrate this relationship, one which will show that contractarianism and our current system of bureaucratic management are designed to reduce the possibility of seriously considering alternative social arrangements, institutions, and

values. Fundamentally, it is a method of managing different levels of excess and deficiency without questioning the values which lie underneath, an approach that keeps social arrangements (or the conditions of the contract) secure without reference to a serious alternative; management rather than overcoming.

Chapter 3: The Contract and Bureaucracy

Before delving into the structure of bureaucracy and its link to contractarianism, I mean to first acknowledge the context in which all critiques of bureaucracy take place. It is undoubtedly the case that the most outspoken critics of bureaucracy fall solidly on the Right of the political spectrum. Bureaucracy, for the Right, is opposed by the forces of the market which the regulative and managerial capacity of the bureaucratic state oppose. This perspective leads to an intense desire for deregulation and to increase the influence of market norms in society, arguments most often expressed by the libertarian Right. The outspokenness of those who hold beliefs such as these leads the mainstream Left into a position where they needlessly defend the increasing expansion of bureaucracy and bureaucratic procedure. Particularly in the American context, the general abandonment of the working class and the Democratic Party's realignment with the interest of the professional class has only furthered this problem. After all, there is little reason to expect the Democratic Party to shift its focus away from the expansion of the government if its base of support is largely composed of those who either immediately see its benefits or work directly within the structures that it creates. Though the influence and prevalence of anti-bureaucratic sentiment on the Right partially forces the Left into adopting pro-expansion positions, I see that there is a deep willingness for the Left to become the defenders of bureaucratic and by extension state power. On the Right, there is little reason to take their critique of bureaucracy seriously. Fundamentally, the belief that opposition to the power of the bureaucratic state could take the form of supporting the increase in the power of the market ignores both the bureaucratic nature of the market and its management as well as the similar (if not greater) levels of coercion that exist in an environment

dictated by its logic. This creates a false binary between the state and the market where bureaucracy exists solely in the former and its opposition can only be found in the latter.

Instead, I mean to take up a position that opposes both the mainstream Left and Right by positing that bureaucracy is not simply a system of rules imposed by the government and empowered through a network of bureaucrats. Rather, it is an extension of the contractarian desire for security, the management of social conflict, and the belief that values are sustained through institutional orientation i.e. the conclusion of the “difference principle.” Fundamentally, I mean to uncover the bureaucratic model of management; a system which, in a similar method to contractarianism, is sustained through coercive force and tasked with the completion of certain social values and prescriptions. This is not to say that there is a historical progression from contractarian philosophy into the development and expansion of modern-day bureaucracy. Rather, it is a recognition that the conditions of bureaucracy are deeply tied to the conditions of the contract and that in critiquing the contractarian model along the lines of its coercion and privileging of its values, one is necessarily led to the modern bureaucratic state. To demonstrate this, I intend to tie together several different thinkers and their conceptions of bureaucracy to first establish the link between contractarianism and modern bureaucracy and then to show the social and political outcomes of this system.

To begin, it is first necessary to gain a general understanding of bureaucracy as a system outside of simple governmental procedure in order to realize both its links to contractarianism as well as its consequences to the individual process of valuation. First, my understanding of bureaucracy extends out of the conclusion of the “difference principle” in the previous chapter and how such a belief positions the role of the state in individual and social life. As the logic of the “difference principle” suggests, there is a deep inconsistency between the activity of individuals and

the quality of institutions, and, once a divorce has been established in which the former is no longer necessary to make claims about the latter, a new system of managing social arrangements is able to be established. The extension of this separation necessitates the creation of a new managerial class tasked with the institutional implementation of any given social values and, afterward, their continual security and upkeep.

For a point of contact with some of the authors which will appear later in this chapter, the new work *The Dawn of Everything* by anthropologists David Graeber and David Wengrow points directly to this principle. The work, a critique of contractarianism itself, posits that political modernity has lost its historical sense of “transition” and that we living in the modern age have essentially become stuck under the current system of political, social, and economic arrangement. In a section on the failure of the Left to move beyond a focus on equality, Graber and Wengrow point out that the management of institutional arrangements and levels out inequality fundamentally stagnate the ability to entirely reconsider the nature of our current arrangement and move beyond it. They write:

The term ‘inequality’ is a way of framing social problems appropriate to an age of technocratic reformers, who assume from the outset that no real vision of social transformation is even on the table. Debating inequality allows one to tinker with the numbers, argue about Gini coefficients and thresholds of dysfunction, readjust tax regimes or social welfare mechanisms, even shock the public with figures showing just how bad things have become ... but it also allows one to all this without addressing any of the facts that people actually object to about such ‘unequal’ social arrangements; for instance, that some manage to turn their wealth into power over others ... (Graber and Wengrow, 7).

It is clear that management (here described as “technocratic reformers”) fundamentally limits the possibility of alternatives that lie outside of the current system. Immediately, there is a direct link back to the idea of “necessity” under the contract in which the existence and maintenance of certain social prescriptions and values were thought to enable all post-contract social life. Here, it seems as the nature of bureaucracy as a system tasked with the continual defense of a certain set of values or a given social, political, or economic arrangement deals only with what is within its structure and is fundamentally incapable of moving beyond itself; in other words, it manages only current arrangements without any reference to an alternative. This characteristic of bureaucracy is one of the most important contact points between it and contractarianism and leads to the fundamental conclusion that bureaucracy is a system whose core value is *security*. In deep similarity to the contractarian model, security placed at the core of bureaucracy moves it beyond an interpretation of government rules and regulations and much closer to a mode of existence and a method through which social values and desires are expressed. Bureaucracy as security will be the starting point of its relationship with contractarianism and the first step in making sense of its procedure and outcomes.

Security for bureaucracy is maintained through two key methods: the use of coercive violence utilized by the state and the use of “expertise” to determine what is in line with the values of the bureaucracy and what falls outside of it. Violence under the system of bureaucracy will be the focus of this next section and will further the link between it and the contractarian model through the reexamination and modern application of Hobbes's notion of coercive force. This is all done to show that violence under bureaucracy is done specifically to limit behavior that falls outside of its purview and the ever-increasing presence and scale of the police in our society demonstrates this fact.

To return to some of the material in the first chapter, Hobbes's notion of coercive force is essentially a call for the state to have a complete monopoly on all sources of legitimate violence. This, in Hobbes's view, enables the guarantee of completing contracts which then enables the creation of long-standing social agreements. This violence then exists at the boundaries of all human interaction after the entrance into society partially because of the proximity of the state of nature in Hobbes's view but also because of the need to continually keep self-interest in check and strictly under the authority of the contract (and by extension the state). As discussed before, this is Hobbes' method of impersonal deterrence which promises a characteristically unbiased type of enforcement that then enables the creation of society. In my view, the modern construction of bureaucracy follows in lockstep with the Hobbesian model. To demonstrate this, it seems best to draw upon some of the most recent and relevant writing on bureaucratic violence. The work *The Utopia of Rules* by David Graeber offers one of the best insights into the nature of bureaucratic violence and, in a similar way to the contractarian model, demonstrates the necessity of violence for the bureaucracy. My claim at the beginning of the chapter that the Left deeply struggles with a genuine critique of bureaucracy is greatly inspired by Graeber's writing. *The Utopia of Rules* begins in a similar way and is structured through three essays which, as Graeber claims, circle around a critique of bureaucracy from the perspective of someone on the libertarian left. Graeber's first essay titled "Dead Zones of the Imagination: An Essay on Structural Stupidity" will be the immediate focus of this section and be the first look into bureaucratic violence.

One of the fundamental claims that Graeber develops in the essay is that violence at the hands of the state places insurmountable limitations on individual behavior by removing the possibility for mutual recognition. He claims that many academics, particularly those on the Left,

give too much credit to a metaphorical interpretation of violence and essentially strive to see meaning that simply is not there. Instead, Graeber claims that structural violence is quite simple and really is designed to get those who fall victim to it to essentially shut up.⁴ This leads to the complete destruction of an interpretive relationship in an interpersonal and societal sense as if one party is permitted to indiscriminately use either the threat or actualization of violence on the other, there is no possibility for any interaction of mutual understanding. Instead the victim suffers an unequal distribution of “interpretive labor” which forces them into a perpetual cycle of attempting to understand the aggressor’s motives. Graeber writes:

Most human relations ... are extremely complicated, dense with history and meaning. Maintaining them requires a constant and often subtle work of imagination, of endlessly trying to see the world from others’ points of view ... Threatening others with physical harm allows the possibility of cutting through all this. It makes possible relations of a far more simple and schematic kind (Graeber 68).

Graeber then goes on to qualify that this relationship requires an inequality in power where, if the capacity to inflict violence were equalized, both parties would be interested in understanding their opponent. Instead, within an unequal distribution, the lower party is continually evading the violence of the higher; forced into endless interpretive labor to predict what the next move of the violent party will be. The outcome of this type of violence is an oppressive simplification of any social interaction as the unequal distribution necessarily favors the interpretation of the violent party as any pushback from the victim will only further the likelihood of future violence. For Graeber, this simplification lies at the heart of “bureaucratic procedure” which invariably creates

⁴ Structural violence for Graeber is remarkably similar to coercive force in Hobbes. In the same essay he writes that structural violence are “structures that could only be created and maintained by the threat of violence, even if in their ordinary, day-to-day workings, no actual physical violence need take place (Graeber 59).” In a sense, this is identical to the society that Hobbes imagines after the construction of the contract, one that is enabled through the presence of violence sustained by the state.

these simplifications to fit the complexities of social, political, and economic life into its structure.

Graeber's conception of violence is developed throughout the essay and directly applied in his writing on the police a bureaucratic institution. The police as agents of the state and the enforcers of its monopoly on legitimate forms of violence play a key role in Graeber's understanding of bureaucracy. Essentially, the police function to both act as bureaucrats themselves while also enforcing the legitimacy of the simplification that the bureaucracy as a whole creates.⁵ He demonstrates this by showing that the most often times the police are likely to become agitated and bring either the threat or actualization of violence is when their authority as the interpreter of a given social interaction is questioned. In quoting Jim Cooper, a former LAPD officer and later sociologist interviewed in in the April 16th, 1991 publication of the *Village Voice*, Graeber writes that the

one thing most guaranteed to provoke a violent reaction from police is a challenge to their right to, as he [Cooper] puts it, 'define the situation' ... It's 'talking back' above all that inspires beat-downs, and that means challenging whatever administrative rubric... has been applied by the officer's discretionary judgment (Graeber 80).

This is a clear extension of the nature of violence previously discussed where, if the party unable to utilize legitimate violence pushes back against the interpretation of the party permitted to, then there is a substantial increase in the probability of greater violence being inflicted. The police then are the bureaucrats most directly tasked with the utilization of violence. While not explicit in Graeber's view, I see that this demarcation of legitimate interpretations is a part of the desire

⁵ Graeber identifies that the pop cultural portrayal of the police is largely to obfuscate what the actual daily activity of the police is. Instead of being heroic figures who stop a wide array of violent crime, the police instead spend the vast majority of their time either enforcing regulations (rules of the road, property disputes, etc.) or filling out various types of paperwork about this less-exciting enforcement. This leads to Graeber's famous claim that "Police are bureaucrats with weapons (Graeber 73)."

for security within bureaucracy. The police as a bureaucratic institution offer an interesting demonstration of this fact where the need for security is explicitly physical and, through this understanding of violence, immediately destroys the possibility of alternative interpretations. Fundamentally, this is a direct limitation of plurality similar to what was shown in the analysis of contractarianism as the security of the bureaucratic structure depends on the privileging of only one possible interpretation which is then enforced through systems of violence.

In terms of the Hobbesian conception of violence, it is important to realize the link between coercive force under the contract and the nature of violence in bureaucracy. As said previously, the purpose of the deterrence mechanisms established through coercive force is designed to limit the influence of self-interest as it pertains to the completion of agreements and the security of the contract as a whole. This is, fundamentally, both an elevation of the conditions of the contract over the interpretation of the party subject to coercive force and a clear example of the explicit call for security to be found through the implementation of deterrence. Hobbes's project centered around the primal struggle with self-interest leads him to a position in which all activity that could be considered self-interested must be continually checked through actual violence; violence which in a similar way to Graeber is an attempt to get the subject party to bend to the violent one. Within the system of modern bureaucracy, the police are the immediate point of contact with this outcome of the Hobbesian contract and firmly establish the parameters for what individual activity is considered permissible.

With an understanding of bureaucratic violence established, it now seems best to turn to the other major method of establishing security within bureaucracy. Expertise will be the focus of this section and will draw upon some of the previous material on the “difference principle” as well as general conceptions of bureaucracy. To preface this section, it seems necessary to

recognize that this area of bureaucratic critique is undoubtedly the most difficult to navigate; especially within our current struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic. Fundamentally, this critique of expertise within bureaucracy is not to say that there is no value within institutions that utilize experts to advise and create policy, especially on the federal level. Though this project is in part about the dangers of bureaucratic management, I do not mean to draw upon conspiratorial or primitivist arguments to oppose bureaucracy. I find that many of these arguments are fundamentally undesirable as they fail to account for the many benefits of living under systems of management (stable access to commodities developed through elaborate supply chains, effective rollout of necessary vaccines and other medications during public health crises, and an overall sense of fairness that comes with the impersonal application of bureaucratic decisions are some of the most obvious examples). Instead, I intend to critique bureaucratic expertise along similar lines to the previous section's exploration of violence and, in so doing, establish that expertise is another method of establishing security and the elevation of a single social, political, or economic interpretation over all other individual, pluralistic beliefs.

To begin, it seems best to return to the conclusions of the second chapter and reestablish what the outcomes of devaluing individual activity are. From the Cohen article, it was demonstrated that the quality of institutions within Rawls's contract has almost nothing to do with individual belief in the principles of justice as well as their activity after the entrance into society. Instead, the achievement of justice occurs only on the institutional level and, despite Rawls's own writing, does not require individual participation to determine whether such implementation was a success. This separation between the quality of institutions and individual activity means that a state dedicated to the management of its institutions can come to form, a state that is then justified in limiting plurality if it sees that it threatens the security of its

institutions. Expertise emerges from this need to manage the institutional arrangement of society as well as the limiting of alternative conceptions of value in favor of greater degrees of security. Within the implementation of the “difference principle” this was the group designated to manage the economic conditions after the implementation of the principle, managing the levels of inequality through the redistributive state apparatus. Importantly, the creation of this class fundamentally demarcates the boundary of what is and is not within the given field, in this case, the field of economics. Within the structure of the contract, experts are those who manage the implementation of the contract's conditions both through enforcing the boundaries of what their field is as well as the actual implementation of policy.

This claim is related to Graeber’s writing on bureaucracy as well. Within the same essay, he describes the core activity of bureaucratic experts as “schematization” or “simplification,” described as a reduction of the nuances of social activity into something manageable enough to place within the larger theoretical framework. Graeber writes:

In practice, bureaucratic procedure invariably means ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence and reducing everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae. Whether it’s a matter of forms, rules, statistics, or questionnaires, it is always a matter of simplification (Graeber 75).

Graeber importantly qualifies this statement later on by claiming that this simplification is not necessarily a dangerous activity or something that must be opposed all together; rather, he finds simplification responsible for a great deal of social progress⁶. What is gained through this

⁶ Graeber references the Structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss as one of the many figures who contributed a great deal to academic and social progression through the utilization of simplification. He writes “Certainly insofar as Structuralism claimed to be a single, grandiose theory of the nature of thought, language, and society, providing the key to unlocking all the mysteries of human culture, it was indeed ridiculous and has been justifiably abandoned. But structural analysis wasn’t a theory, it was a technique, and to toss that too out the window ... robs us of one of our most ingenious tools (Graeber 76).”

simplification is the justification for the existence of expertise; the creation of expert knowledge through which a given field is given shape. This then provides a model for what activity within this field should look like without needing to reference the overall structure. In the implementation of the “difference principle,” this was the creation of a group of economists and other types of experts to manage the relevant types of inequality without needing to reference the structure of inequality as a whole. In other words, expertise allows for management within the structure of the contract without having to reimagine the conditions under which the expert claim to authority was created.

What is lost then is again pluralism; and through this loss, progress⁷. Here, the demarcation of this boundary means that there is only one type of expertise as to belong is to *repeat*. This phenomenon is widespread throughout the academic and political landscape (social sciences, in particular, provide perhaps one of the best examples) and is responsible for a deep alienation between the experts themselves and people who receive the fallout of their activity.⁸

⁷ This sense of “progress” will be discussed in the next chapter. Fundamentally, it is a kind of progression which overcomes the previous set of “givens” in an attempt to reimagine the present. As is clear through this description of bureaucracy, this sense of “progress” is necessarily opposed by the need for “security” expressed by both the contractarian and the bureaucrat alike.

⁸ Perhaps the most direct example of this is again within the field of economics. Hendrik Van den Berg, an economist teaching at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, describes the adoption (or lack thereof) of the Harrod-Domar Model, an extension of John Meynard Keynes’s writing within the *General Theory (1936)* within mainstream economic thought in his article titled “Growth theory after Keynes.” He writes “... the model by Harrod and Domar was quietly and quickly rejected by mainstream economists despite its useful extension of Keynes ... It is likely that the fate of new ideas in economics depends critically on the manner in which the new ideas are framed ... New ideas are more likely to be embraced if they fit the familiar paradigm... new ideas that actually shift the paradigm, occur very infrequently (Van den Berg 4).” Van den Berg describes from the perspective of a Keynesian economist why this is the case. From the critique developed here, it would seem that to be an economist as it was defined during this time period is to follow the typical neoclassical paradigm. Ideas that develop outside of this view are therefore not becoming of an “expert” in economics; and therefore forgotten.

Chapter 4: An Introduction to Perfectionism and the Reemergence of Rawls

We have now arrived at a position to understand the original distinction made within the introduction of this project. Fundamentally, the contractarian political philosophy and the systems of bureaucratic management that it inspires are predicated on the belief that the political realm must be *stabilized*. This observation guided virtually all of the writing on the contractarian model and its extension into modern bureaucracy, finding it most directly manifested itself in the professed need for security and the management of social conflict. The outcome of this, as discussed above, was a deep limitation on the ability to consider alternatives outside of what was permitted by either the contract or by the function of expertise, and through this, “progress” as a political reimagining was stifled. The original opposition positioned this professed need for security against an alternative view that welcomes *conflict*; a view that presupposes many things about the nature and usefulness of political conflict generally. Before working through the conditions of this alternative view, a set of values which I have labeled as “decentralized perfectionism,” it first seems necessary to realize what is precisely meant by the use of the word conflict and what is gained through the realization of its benefits for the political sphere.

Conflict for this project is built upon two key claims. The first, more direct claim finds that there is a general overestimation of the violence present within the contractarian conception of the state of nature and that the calculations made concerning the pitfalls of self-interest simply do not carry as much weight in determining the necessary constraints on human behavior. This will be supported by the subsequent discussion of “decentralized perfectionism” but there is further justification found within some of the very recent work on the “state of nature” or, without the contractarian linguistic baggage, pre-modern human interaction. The two works

Stone-Age Economics by Marshall Sahlins and the previously referenced work *The Dawn of Everything* by David Wengrow and David Graeber provide fresh insights into what human activity was like before the advent of the modern state. Sahlins, in particular, stretches his anthropological work back into the beginnings of human history and finds that the view that the pre-social world was filled with competition and scarcity to simply not be true.⁹ Graeber and Wengrow, partially because of their proximity to this project as whole, have another interesting insight into conflict within indigenous political structures, again finding that the relative levels of conflict there by no means justify the types of restrictions advocated by the contractarian view. Instead, these communities institutionalized a type of conflict that led to a political structure founded upon the cyclical transitioning and progression of their social and political relationships to one another¹⁰.

These observations point to the second fundamental claim about conflict: that it is the engine of political progress. For now, the justification for this can be found intuitively through the description of bureaucratic structures. These structures, as discussed previously, are designed to limit both the conception of what is valuable within political, social, and economic structures as well as the methodologies employed to discern such value. In opposition to this, conflict tests

⁹ Though of course not a direct critique of the contractarian “state of nature,” Sahlins’s work offers an alternative view of life without Hobbesian coercive force manifested in the state. On the nature of scarcity, he writes that the defining characteristics of the pre-modern human world was the absolute commitment to sharing and reciprocity. He writes: “As a rule, neither extraction of the raw material nor its working up take strenuous effort. Access to natural resources is typically direct -- ‘free for anyone to take’ -- even as possession of the necessary tools is general and knowledge of the required skills common... Add in the liberal customs of sharing, for which hunters are properly famous, and all the people can usually participate in the going prosperity, such as it is (Sahlins 10).”

¹⁰ This idea emerges in Graeber and Wengrow’s account of ceremonies and festivals within indigenous communities. They write that one of the purposes of these large demonstrations was to signify the changing of the season, either of abundance or scarcity, and therefore a complete transition in the communities political structure. They write: “What’s really important about such festivals is that they kept the old spark of political self-consciousness alive. They allowed people to imagine that other arrangements are feasible, even for society as a whole, since it was always possible to fantasize about carnival bursting at its seams and becoming the new reality (Graeber and Wengrow 117).”

these “givens” through the positioning of a serious alternative, one which destabilizes the very nature of the current structure. Conflict therefore is both the enemy of the contractarian and bureaucrat because of its emphasis on destabilization and the testing of what is seen as “necessary” for the existence of the structure itself. With these foundational claims about conflict established, the description of “decentralized perfectionism” can begin.

Though perfectionism through its historical development has taken many forms and manifests itself in a wide variety of beliefs, the description of a desirable end through which political prescriptions are created and justified forms the basic structure of its use as a political philosophy. This basic structure of the philosophy closely ties it within teleology more broadly precisely because of its emphasis on the achievement of certain “ends” or goals that are established through the ideal. For this project, perfectionism is of particular importance because of its proximity to the writing of Friedrich Nietzsche, a figure who will take a central role in these final chapters. Nietzsche’s writing, particularly some of his earlier work, demonstrates perfectionism in practice as he predicates his project on the description of an ideal state, relationship, or way of being and then advocates for its adoption. Nietzsche as an “exemplar” (a word which will shortly take up great importance) begins the identification of a set of values that move beyond the professed need for security by the contractarian and bureaucratic model. In the interest of further establishing the context for my own thinking of perfectionism, the next section will focus on some of the many perfectionist philosophers which appear in the philosophical canon. After this has been established, Rawls will reemerge through his flat rejection of perfectionism and some further separation will be drawn between the values of “decentralized perfectionism” and the Rawlsian contract. Finally, Nietzsche’s philosophy in the essay *Schopenhauer as Educator* and some of the relevant secondary literature on the subject will give

shape to decentralized perfectionism as a set of values which will then lead to a description of some of the preliminary conditions of achieving such an ideal.

To track the differences between perfectionist thinkers and to provide context to the philosophy as a whole, I first mean to draw out some key distinctions between different types of perfectionism. This will serve both to illustrate the demarcation between “decentralized perfectionism” and perfectionism generally while also making sense of Rawls’s conception of the philosophy before his eventual rejection of it. The first quality of perfectionism that demands focus is the different degrees of “definition” that a thinker gives to the ends of their philosophy i.e. the conditions of the ideal that they are describing. For instance, Aristotle, perhaps the first perfectionist thinker, gives a very clear sense of his ideal. In both *The Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides a certain type of ideal; one with a very clear form. Definiteness, in this case, is the clarity of both the ends prescribed which takes the form of the directness of Aristotle’s philosophy as a whole. For example, the description of the ideal city in *The Politics* is not just a set of conditions or values but a defined set of attributes including the class structure, population size, and even the location; demonstrating that there is a deep clarity to this type of perfectionism. In the case of Aristotle and other iterations of defined perfectionism, there is also a clear coupling of “definiteness” and “exclusion;” often defined by higher barriers into engagement with the development of perfectionist ends. Bodily pleasure, for instance, greatly reduces the number of “virtuous” individuals (i.e. those seeking perfectionist ends) within Aristotle’s project therefore creating a high degree of exclusivity in terms of engagement.¹¹ The element of “exclusion” fundamentally divides the population in terms of their

¹¹ The exclusion within Aristotle’s perfectionism relates heavily to the importance of upbringing in relation to the achievement of virtue. A *proper* upbringing is itself a form of exclusion and the individual relationship to bodily pleasure solidifies such exclusion further. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, this relationship between education and bodily pleasure is illustrated. Aristotle writes: “For pleasure causes us to do base actions, and pain causes us to abstain from fine ones. That is why we need to have had the appropriate upbringing -- right from early youth, as Plato says -- to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things; for this is the correct education (*NE*, II.3, 1104b10, Irwin 23).”

ability to seek the ends prescribed by each thinker and creates a deliberate focus on the class able to realize the ends of the perfectionist.

“Definition” and “exclusion” surround the historical development of perfectionism as traces of these two qualities are found throughout philosophical values which reinforce themselves with hierarchy and power. In the interest of differentiating my interpretation of Nietzsche’s early writing and the conditions of “decentralized perfectionism,” it is necessary to draw out the fallout of this method of realizing philosophical prescriptions, the outcomes of which bare remarkable similarities to the reduction in pluralism and the expression of state power found within the contractarian model. In a similar way to the contract, “exclusive perfectionism” barricades itself from alternatives through its labeling of other ways of being as “lower” or “degenerate” based solely on their likeness to the ends that the exclusive perfectionist prescribes.

Grappling with this kind of “exclusive perfectionism,” a political philosophy born out of distinctions in ways of being, is essentially the history of the philosophy. In the modern world, partially because of the several categorical rejections of the philosophy, perfectionism has mainly been regarded as a dangerous philosophy that can be weaponized to justify inequality and harm. This view was solidified by Rawls within *A Theory of Justice* where through the contractarian framework, he finds perfectionism to justify inequalities and override “claims of liberty.” Understanding this rejection of perfectionism will be the first step in establishing my own “decentralized perfectionism” in the next chapter as Rawls provides a useful framework to understand some of the many problems of exclusivity. That being said, it will be shown that there is still room within the perfectionist philosophy to promote achievement and teleological

Exclusive perfectionism is defined by its barriers to enter into the perfectionist project, demonstrated here directly by this passage.

principles without deferring to hierarchical structures, a view that Rawls fundamentally underestimates. His writing on perfectionism in *A Theory of Justice* will be the focus of the next section and the nature of his rejection as well as the differences between the perfectionist and contractarian worldview will be established.

As I've said previously, perfectionism is a philosophy based upon the achievement of certain social and political goals. These goals exist alongside the position of the perfectionist in their society and shift the focus away from the pre-social world. Two of our established perfectionists, Aristotle and Nietzsche, realize that the society that they were born into and working in was not ideal from their perspective, in many ways it was incomplete. They then developed their own theories of what should or shouldn't be considered socially desirable from the perspective of the ends that they wished to achieve. Contractarianism, as discussed at length, is essentially the opposite as the focus is placed upon understanding a complete description of human nature (or state of nature) through which the construction of society either preserves (as in the case of Rawls's "original position") or removes us from (as in Hobbes's use of coercive force). This means that the areas of focus for perfectionism and contractarianism are quite different. The contractarian focus on pre-social "human nature" means that much of the time spent is focused on developing the hypothetical conditions of the "state of nature" and then drawing out social prescriptions. In this sense, contractarian prescriptions are always based on something external to an individual's current position or the present conditions of society as there is no need to move beyond the completeness of the "state of nature." Perfectionism, in contrast, is based on the assumption that individuals are moving towards something (the teleological ends) and therefore the present situation is the most important. The contractarian need to understand what our "state of nature" is like or what we would all hypothetically agree to under certain

conditions is irrelevant to the perfectionist as understanding our natural state would not inform the development of perfectionist ends. Perfectionism is therefore a philosophy that always focuses on the present social conditions in an effort to move towards the ends, rather than looking backward towards a hypothetical.

This difference largely illustrates the separation between contractarianism and perfectionism generally as the methodologies and areas of focus for each philosophy are radically different. For Rawls, the beginnings of his rejection are found (to little surprise) within the hypothetical conditions of the original position which, as discussed in the first chapter, call for the two principles of justice to be secured under the structure of the contract. These conditions promote the equal distribution of rights and liberties and call for economic distribution to be based on the “difference principle,” an idea that bears tremendous controversy within this project and outside. Fortunately for Rawls, the “difference principle” does not seem to have much to do with his initial rejection of perfectionism. Instead, the first principle of justice is the focus of the section titled “The Principle of Perfection” in which Rawls works to describe how perfectionism violates the equal distribution of liberties. He writes:

the sole principle of a teleological theory [perfectionism] directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture... If for example it is maintained that in themselves the achievements of the Greeks in philosophy, science, and art justified the ancient practice of slavery, ... surely this conception is highly perfectionist. The requirements of perfection override the strong claims of liberty (Rawls 286).

This rejection largely depends upon the transactional relationship that Rawls illustrates between achievement (described here as “human excellence in art, science, and culture) and the conditions of

the first principle. From the perspective of the “original position,” this makes a great deal of sense as there is little reason to suspect that individuals without prior knowledge of their social position would agree to the implementation of hierarchical structures to promote the perfectionist ends. This leads Rawls to this outright rejection seeing that the teleological framework of perfectionism is incompatible with a commitment to the equal distribution of rights and liberties

For my purposes here, Rawls's rejection of exclusive perfectionism is justified on the grounds that it is based on a commitment to egalitarianism. Of particular importance for moving beyond this rejection is Rawls's failure to distinguish between different types of perfectionists and instead groups all of perfectionism under the umbrella of this rejection. While I accept the conditions of this rejection of exclusive perfectionism, there is still much more to say about a perfectionist philosophy without hierarchy and exclusion. That being said, Rawls's rejection of perfectionism is essentially where the philosophy has ended up in the modern world, being viewed as entirely incompatible with commitments to social equality.

For the purposes of developing a perfectionism distinct from its history of inequality and hierarchy, it seems best to understand what parts of perfectionism are fundamentally undesirable. Exclusion and definiteness seem to be the main factors that contribute to the dangerous qualities of perfectionism. Important then to understanding this danger is the centrality of the perfectionist project to exclusive perfectionism. Under exclusive perfectionism, there is essentially only one end (or group of ends) that the perfectionist class defines and then enforces. The whole of society is dedicated to a project that the vast majority have no direct participation in or control over, serving mainly, as in the case of Aristotle, to free the perfectionist class from menial labor. This type of perfectionism is essentially a project of achieving certain ends at the expense of all others, alienating all of society that is unfortunate enough to be excluded from the perfectionist project.

Insofar as exclusive perfectionism enforces its prescriptions through any means, it seems to directly reduce individual differences for the sake of protecting the perfectionist ends. Some of this can be seen in late-Nietzsche's writing on the exclusion and "distance" necessary to protect the perfectionist class from the encroachment of the lower¹². Nietzsche maintains that his advocacy for aristocracy is done in service to maintain the ability of select individuals to maintain their individuality in the face of "the herd," but I believe that this is misguided. Instead, exclusivity here serves mainly to limit the differences at play across the whole of society and to introduce a conservative element into the ends of perfectionism, the goal of this brand of perfectionism being not only to achieve their ends but to also ensure that they are maintained despite their possible shortcomings; in other words, to provide their security.

At least from the perspective of outcomes, the fallout of exclusive perfectionism seems quite similar to what has been previously described as the contractarian and bureaucratic model. The use of exclusivity, in a similar way to the use of expertise, is a fundamental limitation placed upon alternative conceptions of value and erects structures that impose only a single "necessary" interpretation and places it upon the top of the social hierarchy. From the perspective developed throughout the first three chapters as well as a general commitment to egalitarianism, exclusive perfectionism should be rejected for many of the same reasons as contractarianism and bureaucracy. Within the example above, what are the aristocrats besides the "experts" of the perfectionist ends? The elevation of a single interpretation of perfectionist ends and, by extension, the creation of a distinct class whose purpose is to realize such ends follows a similar logic as the need for security

¹² This aspect of Nietzsche's later political philosophy appears in several places though the most direct is within *Beyond Good and Evil*. In the chapter titled "What is Noble?" Nietzsche demonstrates his aristocratic perfectionism and describes the necessity of a "*pathos of distance*" to insulate the aristocracy from the threat posed by the lower (perhaps the "herd"). He writes: "Every elevation of the type 'man' has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society -- and so it will always be" a society which believes in a long scale of order of rank and differences of worth between man and man and needs slavery in some sense or other. Without the pathos of distance such as develops from the incarnate differences of classes... that other, more mysterious pathos could not have developed either ... in short precisely the elevation of the type 'man', the continual 'self-overcoming of man'... (BGE, 257, Nietzsche 192)."

expressed elsewhere. The failure of exclusive perfectionism is the outcome of this quality and leads to a justifiable skepticism of the philosophy as a whole, a view clearly expressed by Rawls.

At this point, armed with an understanding of Rawls's rejection of exclusive perfectionism as well as parts of my own rejection, it seems possible to begin to develop a perfectionism that remains committed to equality and pluralism. While many thinkers, including Rawls, believe that exclusion and definiteness are necessary conditions of perfectionism, I believe that there is plenty of room for a perfectionist philosophy that can exist free of these problems. Defining "decentralized perfectionism" will be the goal of this next chapter and an attempt will be made to describe a perfectionist political philosophy apart from exclusion while being committed to pluralism and equality.

Chapter 5: Nietzsche and the Conditions of Decentralized Perfectionism

For support of “decentralized perfectionism” (which will now appear without quotations), Nietzsche’s essay *Schopenhauer as Educator* as well as James Conant’s essay titled “Nietzsche’s Perfectionism” will begin to show under what conditions perfectionism without exclusion can take place. To preface, I don’t mean to claim that the perfectionism proposed by Nietzsche and interpreted by Conant solves the problems of exclusivity in perfectionism outright. In fact, as will be discussed later on, there is an issue with a different type of exclusivity within *Schopenhauer as Educator* that is quite different from the way that exclusivity has been described thus far. Instead, the excavation of some of the ideas at play in these two essays will serve to understand how perfectionism without definite ends is possible and how it avoids many of the problems which Rawls identifies with perfectionism generally. For my purposes here, I will mainly focus on Conant’s interpretation of Nietzsche as he is engaging in a similar task; aiming to understand what type of perfectionism Nietzsche is working towards in *Schopenhauer as Educator* as well as pushback against the Rawlsian critique.

Conant begins by directly grappling with the environment that Rawls establishes in his rejection of perfectionism, taking issue not only with what Rawls directly articulates in *A Theory of Justice* but also with the general category of thinkers who immediately adopt the Rawlsian perspective on perfectionism. One of the cornerstones on which the anti-perfectionists build their case for Conant is what he calls “the focal passage,” from Nietzsche’s essay.

Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings-this and nothing else is the task... For the question is this, how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance? ... Only by your living for the good of the rarest and

most valuable specimens (Conant 188, quoting Nietzsche directly from *Schopenhauer as Educator*).

Conant's interpretation of this passage is highly technical, mainly dealing with the translation's use of the word "specimens" to describe who the individual should be living for. Conant goes into great detail about the ways "specimens" call upon ideas of hyper-exclusivity where the markers for doing well in a perfectionist society are genetic (or exclusive) rather than being available to everyone. It would seem as though Rawls is quite worried about this kind of perfectionism as a violation of the "original position," and therefore rejects it entirely. Conant moves forward by showing how the use of "specimens" is in no way the original intention of Nietzsche's philosophy and how it was later abandoned by R.J. Hollingdale (the translator of *Schopenhauer as Educator*). In a later translation of the "focal passage," "specimens" is substituted for "exemplars," an opening which Conant fills with his new interpretation of Nietzschean perfectionism.

Understanding this move made by Conant begins with his writing on Nietzsche's understanding of genius. In a very Emersonian fashion, Nietzsche is shown to understand that genius constitutes innovation and development rather than mere imitation of the current paradigm. The specimen/exemplar distinction, therefore, represents this difference between imitation and genius, as Conant describes:

Specimens are representative samples of a particular class or genus. This encourages the elitist reading of Nietzsche, which assumes that he wishes to promote the interests of a certain class of privileged individuals, and that the interest of anyone who is not in the class is of (at best) only secondary interest to him... But it is the whole point of an exemplar (In Nietzsche's sense) that other members of the genus do not share its excellence... An

exemplar... is to be contrasted with members of its *own* genus (whom it surpasses in the relevant respect) (Conant 195).

The inclusion of what constitutes excellence for Nietzsche is vitally important for this interpretation of perfectionism, as “genius” being a form of excellence apart from the exemplar would not lead to the creation of an aristocratic, perfectionist class as can be seen in Nietzsche and Aristotle as there would be no universal set of ends and therefore no class identity.

From the substitution of “exemplar” for “species,” Conant goes on to give a sense of what Nietzschean perfectionism actually consists of. Instead of an elitist, hierarchical ideology, Conant shows that perfectionism in this area of Nietzsche’s writing deals mainly with the relationship between the self at present and the “higher-self” and the way that the exemplar inspires their student to work towards this “higher-self.” Ultimately when one has achieved this “higher-self,” the ultimate sign of appreciation for the exemplar is their rejection, the first act of the self as a perfected individual.

Conant writes:

The relation Nietzsche wishes to encourage between his reader and his text is fundamentally of the same character as the relation he wishes to encourage between us and the great human being [****exemplar?**] ... The implication is that one has not learned anything from the author of this work unless one has in some way denied him (Conant 201, brackets are a part of the original text).

We again see that Conant’s interpretation of Nietzsche is offering a much different type of perfectionism, one that is fundamentally individualistic and non-universal. This perfectionism is therefore deeply pluralistic as each individual has a unique conception of the “higher-self” which is inspired by their unique exemplar, orienting their focus around their current position in relation to the ends that they set for themselves. The final step of this process is then rejection; fitting for

Nietzsche's essay which, even though it has Schopenhauer in the title, only mentions Nietzsche's rejection of his philosophy.

Important to notice are the qualitative differences between this student/exemplar relationship and the exclusive perfectionist and their reader. I've described how the aim of exclusive perfectionism is essentially repetition through the security of their ends. This is largely the case for contractarianism and bureaucracy as security as the core of both models promotes a similar sense of repetition; particularly under bureaucratic expertise as the process of becoming an expert and therefore reaffirming the claim to authority to determine what is *valuable* is itself a process of repetition. In contrast to this, Conant shows that Nietzsche's early case for perfectionism revolves around the perpetual recreation and overcoming of social norms, as the final step of realizing the self is to reject your exemplar. Essentially, there is no room for the conservative element that can be found within exclusive perfectionism as, apart from the individual and the exemplar/student relationship itself, there are no definitive values or structures to conserve. Perfectionism here, through the interpretation of Conant, is a more complete ideology finding that there is not only one perfectionist project but an infinite number all happening simultaneously and dependent upon the existence of others. It finds incompleteness in society in need of perfection but also incompleteness in each individual, distributing control over the perfectionist project equally across the whole of society. In regards to Rawls, the exemplar/student relationship is remarkably different from how he thought of perfectionism. From Conant's description, it is certainly hard, if not impossible, to draw the same conclusions as Rawls does in his rejection, as there is no longer the class-based exclusion and destruction of individual difference.

Schopenhauer as Educator and Conant's essay form the foundation of decentralized perfectionism, a perfectionist philosophy that sets maximal engagement with an individualized project of self-cultivation and perfection as its ends. Decentralized perfectionism functions to establish each person as a distinct individual capable of realizing themselves apart from the coercive elements of the social and political realm. This philosophy is not a lonely project as others and an encouraging society are necessary to realize one's own perfection. Vitally important and in great similarity with Nietzsche, decentralized perfectionism does not seek to establish particular ends themselves but rather to understand what the necessary conditions are for each individual to realize their own unique perfection, then setting those conditions as the end. The process of realizing decentralized perfectionism as a philosophy is therefore not a retreat back into oneself but rather an embrace of others and of the collective project of realizing the perfected self.

Still of concern for this project's own notion of decentralized perfectionism is what remains after Conant's interpretation of Nietzschean perfectionism. He describes, as was alluded to at the beginning of this section, a different kind of exclusion. Instead of being directly imposed by an aristocratic class or other social structures, this kind of exclusion is instead self-imposed. While the exemplar relationship is open to everyone, Conant believes that individuals will still shy away from the magnitude of the task at hand, of cultivating the higher self. He writes:

A careful reading of SE reveals that Nietzsche understands the process of exclusion with which the work is concerned to be one that is self-imposed: If most of us are excluded from the demand that his philosophy places on us, it is not because he excludes us... if

we are relegated to such a status [the status of dying animals, quoted from Richard Rorty] it is because we relegate ourselves (Conant 198).

After reading both *Schopenhauer as Educator* and Conant's essay, the issue of why this is the case goes largely undiscussed. Conant makes two brief references, one of which being internalized "repression" (Conant 207) and the other to Nietzsche's own writing in *Human, All Too Human*, which makes reference to "workaday unfreedom and servitude" stifling the ability of individuals to express their "higher-self." At least in my reading of both pieces, I see that this lack of identification is a part of the focus on interpersonal relationships that is emphasized by Nietzsche; of course, related to his general skepticism of both the communal and social setting. I see the critique of both contractarianism and bureaucracy during the first half of this project as a partial attempt to fill in this perhaps missing part of both Nietzsche and Conant's writing through the realization of the ability to consider alternatives to the existing social, political, and economic structures. In a sense, this critique has centered around this aspect of Nietzsche from the start and it was grounded in the core of decentralized perfectionism and its commitment to pluralism and individual difference. To further draw out what is necessary for the realization of decentralized perfectionism, the final section of this chapter will focus on the conditions necessary to realize the process of individual perfection. Rawls will come back a final time to critique the capacity for a perfectionist commitment to such conditions which will then be responded to from the position of a decentralized perfectionist through which the final differences between the conditions of the Rawlsian contract and the values of perfectionism can be understood.

It has been established that perfectionism generally sees that individuals and society are fundamentally incomplete and therefore in need of perfection. For most thinkers, the process of perfection is dependent on a definite set of conditions that individuals follow to achieve their

ends. The realization of the “will to power” in Nietzsche or a proper relationship to pleasure and pain in Aristotle function in this way, setting the conditions necessary for perfectionist engagement to begin.¹³ The question then is what conditions are necessary for a perfectionist philosophy without definite ends and therefore without exclusion.

As was established, decentralized perfectionism is concerned with the set of necessary social conditions in which everyone can engage in the process of perfection. The guiding principle in understanding what is or is not socially desirable for the decentralized perfectionist is found through the realization that the enemy of the perfected individual is *coercion* in virtually all of its forms. Coercion necessarily requires individuals to sacrifice who they understand themselves to be for the purpose of something external to them and, in a similar way to exclusive perfectionism, forces individuals to spend their life engaged in a project that they have no control over. Examples of these areas of coercion for the decentralized perfectionist include social elements like traditional and religious norms, the expectations surrounding marriage and familial life, gender norms, as well as economic elements like the pressure to join a certain occupation, the coercion innate to capitalism, the pressures of debt and credit. Decentralized perfectionism operates in opposition to these and other major coercive elements, understanding that individuals are able to work towards their own ends only when they are free from major areas of coercion.

To limit the influence of the coercive social and economic elements, the decentralized perfectionist must base their social prescriptions in a commitment to a broad sense of

¹³ For realizing the conditions of exclusive perfectionism generally, I see that the “will to power” as a condition of perfection to Nietzsche functions as his method of creating exclusivity while also being the “end” of his later writing on aristocracy. The “will to power” as an idea in Nietzschean philosophy is notoriously difficult to identify as a single principle though, at least in its political application, it bears resemblance to the role that bodily pleasure plays in Aristotelian perfectionism. Exclusivity for Nietzsche then is the requirement to be acting through the “will to power” to engage in the perfectionist project and therefore be a part of the aristocratic class. For more, see *Beyond Good and Evil* Book IX, particularly sections 258 - 260. There is a much more in depth look into the nature of the “will to power” as a political principle required to fully grasp its development within Nietzsche’s advocacy for aristocracy though, at least from this position, I see that it functions to create class divisions along perfectionist ability.

egalitarianism. Coercion festers in areas of inequality where the less fortunate have no choice but to participate in the very systems and norms forcing them out of realizing their perfection. This is in line with what was recognized by Aristotle in his belief that the aristocratic (or perfectionist) class must be free from the labor required for social upkeep, seeing that this labor was a coercive element that would distract the perfectionists from their project. He uses this claim to further solidify the necessity of hierarchy to achieve defined perfectionist ends, seeing that labor and the achievement of “virtue” are incompatible. The decentralized perfectionist operates in essentially the same way recognizing the core opposition between the requirements of menial labor and the perfectionist project itself. The differences then found in the characteristics of the ends prescribed by the decentralized perfectionist ends are dependent on individual difference, meaning that there is no class on which another can depend to free them from coercion.

Again and on the level of outcomes, there is at least a feeling of similarity between the egalitarianism of Rawls’s first principle of justice and the conditions necessary to realize decentralized perfectionism. At least in broad terms, both the decentralized perfectionist and the contractarian see that equality in material distribution, primary rights, self-government, and social standing are necessary conditions for a “just society” (in Rawlsian language) or “decentralized” perfectionism. The similarities are even furthered when drawing back to the Rawlsian rejection of perfectionism and the problems he identified with exclusive perfectionism, being an essential part of establishing the decentralized perfectionist critique of the history of perfectionism and its exclusive nature. While these ideological similarities hold true in the broad sense, there is a great deal of difference in the nature of equality provided by the contractarian view versus the perfectionist view. In his primary rejection of perfectionism, Rawls establishes that there can be a certain type of equality offered by perfectionists. He writes:

Sometimes it is said that equality of basic rights follows from the equal capacity of individuals for the higher forms of life; but it is not clear why this should be so. Intrinsic worth is a notion falling under the concept of value, and whether equal liberty or some other principle is appropriate depends upon the conception of right. Now the criterion of perfection insists that rights in the basic structure be assigned so as to maximize the total of intrinsic value. Presumably the configuration of rights and opportunities enjoyed by individuals affects the degree to which they bring to fruition their latent powers and excellences. But it does not follow that an equal distribution of basic freedoms is the best solution (Rawls 289).

This passage establishes that Rawls sees a standard of equality that justifies itself through what individuals achieve under equal distribution as invalid, presumably since equality is not a teleological principle but a condition of the contract Rawls is creating. He then concludes by claiming that there is no reason to suspect that equality is the most efficient way to maximize value under the perfectionist framework, in other words, perfectionists have no reason to support equality if they maintain that their philosophy is meant to move society towards perfectionist ends. From this passage, two important conclusions can be drawn. First, the final claim that perfectionists have no basis to support both perfectionist ends and equality demonstrates the limited framework in which Rawls is considering perfectionism. It seems again that his conception of perfectionism, as discussed earlier, is based solely on the exclusive history of the philosophy; in contrast to decentralized perfectionism where equality is a part of the process of achieving its ends.

Second, and of vital importance when considering this passage in the context of the second chapter, the method of equality that Rawls offers is itself founded in the contractarian

method of distribution i.e. the “difference principle.” Though the rejection of perfectionism is based on the first principle of justice, this section on equality necessarily relates to the second which brings with it the baggage discussed by Cohen. Precisely because of this relation, the rejection of the perfectionist standard of equality brings with it the separation of individual activity and the quality of institutions which then summons the group of managers to secure the conditions of the difference principle. In contrast to this, the measure of equality under decentralized perfectionism is defined by the ability to participate in the project by the individual instead of an external system of management. The qualitative difference between these two types of equality, though both have similar outcomes, are the conditions required for either the achievement of “justice” for Rawls or the social relationship of decentralized perfectionism. In the former, it is necessarily external to the individual and reaffirms their position outside of value-driven activity as their singular existence is meaningless from the institutional perspective. Decentralized perfectionism, in deep contrast to this, affirms that the ability to determine the conditions desired for the achievement of their ends resides solely with the individual and is determined through such individual’s interaction with others engaging in their own, pluralistic conception of perfection.

Conclusion

It is clear that there is still much more work to be done in articulating the purpose of decentralized perfectionism as a political philosophy to further demonstrate what it has to offer to someone committed to social, political, and economic progress. To enhance the articulation of this philosophy and to provide a framework for those interested in the values of decentralized perfectionism, I mean to emphasize again the importance of *conflict* for this project. Conflict has, in many ways, been present from the initial articulation of the core of this project and showed itself in nearly every aspect of this argument. I expect that my reader, someone familiarized with the topics discussed here or someone entirely new to the discussion of political philosophy, will have a radically different sense of what is meant by perfection and its use as a general political principle. Fundamentally, this points to the purpose of the philosophy generally as it is meant to sustain conflict within a pluralistic social setting and through this conflict, move forward with the process of overcoming rather than stagnate and become comfortable.

To my mind, this is where Nietzsche as an “exemplar” for this project is most clearly identified. Without a doubt, the values of decentralized perfectionism run contrary to many qualities of *Schopenhauer as Educator* and Nietzsche’s philosophy more broadly where the perfectionist project has become highly exclusive. Though this is certain, I see that the disagreements with my “exemplar” within this work to be a demonstration of the values of decentralized perfectionism and the nature of conflict where my view articulated here is able to coexist with other, equally plausible interpretations. Through the conflict of these opposing views, each individual moves beyond themselves to a new understanding of both the Other and of themselves--a perpetual cycle based on overcoming.

I'm reminded most in these closing pages of the writing of another Nietzschean thinker, Tasmin E. Lorraine, who describes the process of reading Nietzsche as a feminist thinker despite his obvious sexism. Her interpretation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Zarathustra as a character describes this process of continual recreation through the realization that her view is fundamentally opposed to the Other's but there is a mutual benefit in this necessary difference. She writes:

Going through the positions offered me in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I don't have to reject any of them out of hand. Instead, I can affirm them as providing material for my own future, material that I sort through, taking the flavors and aromas I need to conjure up the image dearest to me... My Zarathustra would be a cook who flings the most nauseating as well as the more savory aspects of her culture into her pot to cook them through in keeping with her own tastes, but she would also let herself be dissolved and transformed in the pots of other cooks (Lorraine 10).

For this project, this process of adopting and changing oneself in the light of the Other through the maintenance of the individual's "own tastes" is the process of conflict; conflict between the self and the Other but also between the individual's position at present and their future self. In this sense, the commitment to conflict is what defines decentralized perfectionism and, in a broad sense, defines what it means to be a Nietzschean.

The call for the commitment to conflict in light of the first part of the project is itself a realization of its importance. As has been discussed at length, the contract and bureaucracy are designed to limit the ability for an interpretation outside of what has been secured. A call for greater conflict in this sphere, therefore, is not the obliteration of bureaucracy or contractarianism as a philosophy but rather the positioning of a serious alternative and the

security of its existence. An immediate example and a view that has run throughout my thinking on bureaucracy is the demand for an expansion of “expertise” during the ACT-UP demonstrations of the 1980s and 1990s where, in the face of an unwavering claim to expert authority, these activists called for victims of AIDS to be included in the review process for developing medication as experts themselves--expertise that is undoubtedly valuable and fundamentally unknowable to someone outside of that particular circumstance. The opposition to bureaucratic and contractarian authority on the progressive Left must follow the same lines as this demand as it simultaneously avoids the primitivism and simple libertarianism that has so often plagued anti-bureaucratic arguments, seeking instead to oppose and therefore improve the current structures weighed down by their false need for security.

The core of this project is the fundamental distinction between a political philosophy centered around its security and reproduction and a political philosophy based on its perpetual transformation and overcoming. In realizing this separation, the contractarian philosophy was examined as a fundamental limitation on individual value-driven activity, a reduction in pluralism, and the grounds for an institutional focus that separates the values held by individuals and the quality of their society. This was then linked to the formation of modern bureaucracy as a system predicated on a continued need for management as a tool for securing the continual reproduction of the system, such management being sustained through systems of expertise and violence. The structures of contractarianism and bureaucracy have been shown to be an exercise in simplification, reducing the many complexities of individual social existence into a schematizable system of inputs to fit either within the contract or managed by the bureaucrat.

In response to this, the values of decentralized perfectionism were described in an attempt to articulate a political philosophy that maintains the importance of individual activity and

pluralism. This was largely inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the interpretive work of James Conant which saw immense value in the exemplar/student relationship, a social principle that leads to the perfection of the individual through the solidification of their being as distinct from their teacher. This as the core of decentralized perfectionism was expanded into a political framework through which a broad egalitarianism was justified on the grounds that it was necessary for engagement with the perfectionist project, therefore distinguishing this conception of perfectionism from much of the philosophy's history. The values of decentralized perfectionism are fundamentally Nietzschean but point beyond to a political framework dedicated to the individual as a distinct entity and the creation of community through the process of realizing the perfected-self.

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