

# Modernization and Modernity: Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, and Political Development

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**Abstract:** The study of political development has proceeded absent an understanding of the nature of political development. A review of the literature indicates that political development is equated with liberalism, while a recourse to the history of political thought defines liberalism in terms meaningful to an analysis of development. This synthesis of comparative politics and political philosophy suggests new ways in which political development may be understood and measured.

**Keywords:** liberal dynamic, liberalism, political development, Singapore, Thailand

It has been five decades since political scientists became engrossed in the question of how regimes develop, yet a definition of political development still eludes them. A review of the scholarship demonstrates the belief that a theory of development would emerge from the scholarship. That is, our understanding of political development generally would grow from our understanding of political development in discrete cases.

But this was not a universally accepted premise. There was a substantial divide between those, like Lucien Pye, who argued for the “need for theory”<sup>1</sup> and those like Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr., who believed that a theory of development would emerge from the mass of scholarship on discrete cases of political development.<sup>2</sup> Both sides believed that the scholarship should be informed by an overarching theory of development, but they differed about when that theory should be formed.

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History settled the disagreement, as political development scholarship continued to be published without first coming to grips with the nature of development. Thus, the course of these studies could be described as rudderless. Although Almond and Powell’s model seems to have prevailed, the state of political development scholarship appears to vindicate Pye’s position. Regarding the proposition that a theory of development will itself develop, David Apter wrote in 1965, “If anyone has a picture in his mind of the development of theory by means of experimental techniques and the accumulation of proved and tested knowledge, one short look at the field should indicate to him how wrong this is.”<sup>3</sup>

A review of the literature suggests four main areas of emphasis, or four ways in which we might best understand development. The earliest works, like those by Karl Deutsch,<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Almond, and Sidney Verba,<sup>5</sup> equated political development with democratization, and suggested that a growing enjoyment of political rights and liberties coincided with political development. This scholarship was followed by the more sanguine work of those like Samuel Huntington<sup>6</sup> and Aristide Zolberg,<sup>7</sup> who argued that there were precursors to development—most notably political stability and order. The enjoyment of civil liberties had to wait until political stability was achieved. Following on the heels of this debate, Marxist critics argued that development was impossible, or at least difficult, given the exploitative relationship between the developed and developing worlds.<sup>8</sup> Finally, current scholarship appears to focus most heavily on area studies, content to create “islands of theory” or “mid-range” theories of development.<sup>9</sup>

The literature review indicates that there are really two suggestions—followed by two criticisms—regarding the essence of political development. That is, the first two schools of thought typified by Almond and Huntington make assumptions about political development, while the latter two criticize or question our ability to make those

assumptions. Dependency theory questions the very possibility of development, whereas area studies question our ability to understand development. The two original schools, however, suggest that development is related to civil liberties and political stability, respectively. But both of these assumptions relate to the idea of political modernity. Therefore, I suggest that political development, at least as its scholars understand it, is equated with modernity, as the history of political philosophy understands it.

### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE NATURE OF LIBERALISM

If a consensus on political development is to be reached, the differences between the first two themes of the literature must be reconciled. Almond and his colleagues believed that political development aimed at a modern regime—one that encourages broad political participation—meets the demands of its citizens and respects their civil rights.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Huntington, Pye, and others noted that development was fraught with the potential for disorder, as political elites fought to preserve their power and the newly empowered populace flexed its political muscles.<sup>11</sup> Scholars of political philosophy understand this tension between the possession and exercise of civil rights on the one hand, and the necessity of maintaining civil order on the other, as the tension inherent in modern liberalism.

Unfortunately, liberalism appears to be as misunderstood a term as political development. Statesmen and thinkers as diverse as Herbert Hoover, Walter Lippmann, Franklin Roosevelt, and Friedrich Hayek are often referred to as liberals; it is no wonder that confusion exists regarding the meaning of word.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, scholars of liberalism often confuse the issue by attempting to describe “modern,” “classical,” or even “contemporary” liberalism. The American usage of the term “liberal” to describe the opposition to a “conservative” political agenda also serves to muddy the waters.

By liberalism here I mean the political theory and practice of government that exists to maximize the liberty of the citizen. It might be objected that liberalism as I have defined it is in a sense tautologous; liberalism is liberty. However, the fact that the two words share a common ancestry suggests liberalism must be connected to liberty. The means by which governments maximize liberty is unstated, and this is the reason why tensions and disagreements exist regarding types of modern liberalism.

Leo Strauss distinguished ancient and modern liberalism by writing that ancient liberalism was predicated on the idea that free men behaved in a certain fashion; they were *spoudious*, or serious. That is, free men were not childish, but moderate or self-restrained. Slavish men, on the other hand, were those who were unable to control their passions. Thus, the ancient liberal regime was one that encouraged its citizens to be moderate and virtuous, because freedom consisted in the self-restraint, or moderation, of the desires.<sup>13</sup>

One cannot relate political development to this ancient notion of liberalism, however, because the idea of political development was largely foreign to the ancients. They

believed that the natural order of regimes was decay, not growth.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, however, devoted most of the *Politics* to the question of how existing regimes could be improved, and one could argue that this discussion constitutes a point of agreement between Aristotle and modern political development scholars. But Aristotle was seeking ways to retard the natural decay of regimes, not ways to expedite their natural growth.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, modern political philosophers and political scientists begin with the notion that the original human condition was less than perfect, if not entirely depraved. Thomas Hobbes, in one of the most famous phrases of political philosophy, described life in the primitive, prepolitical condition as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”<sup>16</sup> If this is the case, then humankind has nowhere to go but forward and upward.

This orientation contributes to the modern belief in infinite progress, so the role of the modern political scientist is to improve the regime constantly. Therefore, political development and ancient political philosophy move in opposite directions.

Contrary to the ancients’ moral interpretation of liberty, modern political philosophy argues that the purpose of liberty is the satisfaction, not the restraint, of desires. In his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes employs a rather Newtonian/Hedonistic method of analysis when he argues that life itself is merely motion, and motion in pursuit of desires. Happiness is the satisfaction of these desires.<sup>17</sup> As such, modern liberalism is predicated on the proposition that governments exist to maximize the liberty of their citizens to “pursue happiness,” in the words of Jefferson, or to satisfy their desires, as Hobbes would have it.

But the question of how to maximize our liberty to pursue our desires may be answered in several ways. If liberty is to be promoted by removing the threats to liberty, then it appears that the greatest threat to individual liberty might be posed by the government or by other citizens.

Most modern liberals would argue that the government poses the greatest threat to a citizen’s liberty. They would point to the disparity in power between the government and the individual, and suggest that the power of the government ought to be limited, while the liberty of the citizen ought to be positively protected. Thus we end up with a form of government not unlike that practiced in much of the West—that is, limited democracy in which the citizens enjoy civil rights.

But it is equally plausible that the greatest threat to one’s liberty comes not from the government, but from one’s fellow citizens. I do not suggest that we live in fear of being enslaved by our neighbors, but merely that the purpose of our liberty is to acquire the means of satisfying our desires, and our neighbors might well deprive us of the opportunity of exercising those means. They may take our property, or worse yet, our lives. Governments then are instituted to protect our property and lives against other citizens and other governments so that we might safely enjoy our liberty.<sup>18</sup> These governments need the strength and ability to deal effectively with these threats, so we would expect a regime that possesses broad police powers and enjoys discretion in the exercise of those powers.

In practice, these are ideal types. Even the most committed defender of limited government—someone who would claim that the government which governs least governs best—would not call for anarchy. Further, the staunchest defender of public order would not suggest that the government ought to exercise its police powers arbitrarily. Such an exercise of the punitive power of government affords no protection for any citizen, regardless of how law-abiding he or she may be.

Thomas Hobbes provides the philosophical justification for strong liberalism most concisely in *Leviathan*.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the champion of limited liberalism is also the champion of capitalist economics—Adam Smith. Both men begin from the assumption that governments exist to maximize citizens' liberty. But drawing different conclusions regarding human nature, and thereby identifying different threats to liberty, they arrive at radically different prescriptions for effective liberal regimes.

### THOMAS HOBBS AND LIBERAL AUTHORITARIANISM

Common prejudices and preconceptions make it difficult to defend the proposition that a regime can be both authoritarian and liberal. The victory of the "limited liberalism" model has been so complete that we find it difficult to conceive of any other political arrangement that can preserve our liberty. We also find it difficult to imagine a greater threat to our liberty than the government. But while those prejudices are not unfounded, it is also the case that a strong state can preserve individual liberty.

Thomas Hobbes is the philosophic architect of this strong liberalism, and so an investigation of his moral and political philosophy is in order. But one cannot understand Hobbes's politics without first understanding his conception of human nature, articulated in his tale of man in the "state of nature." Humankind is naturally driven by passion and interest, and has no incentive for altruism. Life in such a state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," and is a state of "war of all against all."<sup>20</sup> Given limited resources and no recognized authority to distribute those resources and protect our property, we resort to violence to secure our lives.<sup>21</sup>

But this condition is miserable, so we quickly quit the state of nature for the state of society. We do so by entering into a social contract, where every man contracts with every other, promising to obey the commands of the sovereign that they will erect.<sup>22</sup> Of particular importance is the fact that the sovereign is not bound by this contract, and as such, man's powers are both absolute and arbitrary.<sup>23</sup>

Because the sovereign is not a party to the social contract, he never leaves the state of nature and retains absolute power. However, there is the suggestion in Hobbes, though it is a point of contention among Hobbes scholars, that the sovereign can be expected to act prudently and with restraint. Although Hobbes argues that the sovereign possesses arbitrary power, he suggests that the sovereign is unlikely to use his power arbitrarily. Further, "we have as yet said nothing of the *duties* of rulers, and how they ought

to behave themselves towards their subjects. We must then distinguish between the *right* and the *exercise* of supreme authority."<sup>24</sup> These duties arise from the requirement that sovereigns protect "the safety of the people,"<sup>25</sup> the end for which natural liberties were waived so that a commonwealth that protected civil liberties could be established. By "safety of the people" Hobbes does not mean mere physical preservation but "that they be enriched, as much as may consist with public security" and "that they enjoy a harmless liberty."<sup>26</sup>

Considering that the power of the sovereign is equal to the sum of the power of the subjects, it is in the sovereign's interest to increase the power of his subjects: "Now as the safety of the people dictates a law by which princes know their *duty*, so doth it also teach them an art how to procure themselves a benefit; for the power of the citizens is the power of the city, that is to say, his that bears the chief rule in any state."<sup>27</sup> Although he might accomplish the increase of power by conquest, it is just as likely that the sovereign will increase the power of those subjects already under his rule. Remembering that there are many sources of power, including wisdom, wealth, and fortifications, the sovereign, while merely seeking to increase personal power, can accomplish this by improving the lives and conditions of his subjects. In short, the interests of the sovereign are directly tied to the interests of the commonwealth and its subjects, and the prudent sovereign would do nothing to weaken himself.<sup>28</sup>

So, while it is true that the social contract in no way obligates the sovereign, and his rule is both absolute and arbitrary, there are incentives to improve the lives of subjects. However, the sovereign is under no compulsion, except perhaps from God, to care for the citizens.

Where then is civil liberty in the Hobbesian regime? In the state of nature, all people possessed perfect, complete liberty. They were even at liberty to take the lives of others, and this, of course, was unacceptable. For the sake of peace, humans enter into society, trading their natural rights for civil rights. They agree to be bound by the will of the sovereign, to obey his laws. And where the law commands, the subject has no liberty. But Hobbes points out that the sovereign cannot command everything, and where the law is silent, the people have liberty. And now, in contrast to the state of nature, they can enjoy their civil liberties in peace. The imposition of order limits natural liberties but permits the enjoyment of those civil liberties that remain.

It is easy to be blinded by the magnitude of the Hobbesian sovereign's power. Notes one commentator, "[T]hus, it is not just Hobbes's authoritarianism, but his very insistence on the absolute sovereignty of the artificial person constituting the state that separates him from liberalism in the usual sense of the word."<sup>29</sup> But while Hobbes's sovereign enjoys theoretically unlimited rights, the subjects enjoy quite a large degree of liberty. Compared with the unlimited natural liberty they enjoy in the natural state, humans in civil society possess limited civil liberties. However, it is important to note that the possession of these liberties is secure.

Finally—though the sovereign can limit the liberty of citizens on a whim—because the interests of the sovereign

are tied to the interests of the subjects, it is unlikely that he will act in a fashion that makes the people miserable. Instead, the prudent sovereign will encourage industry in the commonwealth, promoting enterprise by safeguarding the means of enjoying the fruits of enterprise. And while the sovereign can legislate even the most mundane aspects of the subjects' lives, it is unlikely that he would do so, and even if he were to issue such regulations, sanctions would follow from the violation of the law. Very simply, Hobbes's authoritarian system of government is liberal because it encourages obedience, which produces peace, which for Hobbes is the necessary precondition for the enjoyment of liberty. It is the end of political life.

### HOBBSIAN LIBERALISM: SINGAPORE

Although it is useful to articulate the theory that a government dedicated to maintaining order could also be dedicated to preserving liberty, it is better to witness the theory in practice. Singapore is a remarkably Hobbesian regime, widely recognized as a nation successful in its efforts at development. It is also a curiosity in that it is censured for its authoritarianism at the same time as its virtues are recognized. The city-state is clean, efficient, orderly, and prosperous, yet it is still the target of criticism not only from opposition politicians such as Francis Seow and Chee, but also from scholars such as Garry Rodan and Daniel Bell. The recognition of these virtues, coupled with the vociferous denunciation of Singapore's excesses, is understandable only in the light of Hobbesian liberalism. Singapore's liberal elements engender respect and admiration, though it is a form of liberalism that makes most modern liberals uncomfortable.

The reach of the People's Action Party (PAP) government in Singapore is legendary, if not infamous.<sup>30</sup> But from a Hobbesian perspective the regime is not excessive in its exercise of power, nor could it justly be accused of excess. A casual, cursory look at some of the policies of the PAP demonstrates the Hobbesian nature of the regime. For example, regarding the free exercise of religion, Article 15 of the Constitution of Singapore declares that "every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and to propagate it," while Article 16 states that "every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children and provide therein instruction in its own religion, and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, Singapore has sought to accommodate all of the nation's religious and ethnic communities.

Nevertheless, the island nation also permits, and even requires, certain practices that violate the policy of nonpreference. First, Article 152 of the Constitution makes specific reference to the special position of Malays and guarantees that the government will "constantly care" for them, and will "protect, safeguard, support, foster, and promote" them due to their status as "indigenous peoples."<sup>32</sup> In addition, the next article provides for a council to advise the government on matters concerning the Muslim religion.

The PAP has been careful to regulate the social activities of churches in the interests of social harmony. It has used the Public Entertainments Act, a holdover from British colonial rule, which requires that public performances be licensed. The police have the authority to deny a permit to any group they believe will disturb the peace.<sup>33</sup> The PAP also passed the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, granting the government authority to restrict the activities of organizations that threaten to disturb religious harmony.<sup>34</sup> In addition, it strictly prohibits any attempt to convert the Malay Muslims to Christianity. As a result, religious groups in Singapore have found that their public activities have been severely limited.

Singapore's ambiguous policy regarding religious practices is a reflection of the modern alternatives to dealing with the political problems associated with religion. On the one hand, Locke argued that religion should be depoliticized by the declaration of a truce; all religions that tolerated other religions were themselves to be tolerated. In many respects, Singapore's policies regarding religion seem to follow this model. Hobbes, on the other hand, suggests that religion can be depoliticized by making the church subservient to the state. Singapore's policies of toleration combined with preferential treatment appear to reflect this disagreement between Hobbes and Locke, but it should be noted that Singapore, Hobbes, and Locke all agree that religious conviction must not be allowed to interfere with the operation of the state.<sup>35</sup>

However, other Singaporean public policy seems to border on the absurd. When spitting in public became a criminal offense, the popular English-language *Straits Times* launched an advertising campaign informing citizens of the public health dangers associated with the practice (including the spread of chicken pox) and warned that future violators would be fined. In recognition of the importance of its tourist industry, and in an effort to make Singapore a clean, attractive city, the government made it illegal to leave a public toilet or urinal without flushing first. Offenders were apprehended by inspectors from the Ministry of Environment, and they faced fines reaching one thousand dollars, as well as public humiliation, because the names and photographs of offenders appeared in the *Straits Times*. Elevators in the government-built condominiums are equipped with ammonia detectors. If someone urinates in the elevator, the doors will lock and an alarm will sound in the Housing Development Board office so that the police can be summoned. Signs in the elevators discourage violation, claiming that urine "causes the lift parts to corrode and makes the elevator smelly."<sup>36</sup> Violators face stiff fines up to twelve hundred dollars and public embarrassment. Visitors to the Singapore Botanical Gardens will find signs reminding them that it is against the law to shoot the birds with slingshots.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the PAP's most ridiculed regulation is the prohibition against the import, sale, or possession of chewing gum. The government appears to have banned the product not simply because its improper disposal is unsightly and costly to clean. In addition, some Singaporeans were sticking their chewing gum on the doors of Singapore's subway

cars, preventing them from closing. So, in the interest of efficient transportation, chewing gum was outlawed.<sup>38</sup>

Although Singapore has employed legislation to regulate the most petty and mundane aspects of the lives of its citizens, it is easy to avoid running afoul of the authorities. Simply by refraining from the prohibited activity, residents can avoid punishment. And the restrictions, while broad in scope, are not unreasonable. Regarding the campaign to promote the flushing of public toilets, the *Straits Times* announced that Singapore's purpose was "to punish those of its population who have not been properly housetrained."<sup>39</sup> The product of this omnipresent regulation and enforcement is a remarkably low rate of crime. In Singapore, an entirely urban nation, there were forty-six violent crimes and 874 property crimes per one hundred thousand residents in 1994. By comparison, there were 713 violent crimes and 4,654 property crimes per one hundred thousand residents in the United States that year.<sup>40</sup>

But beyond legislation that "keeps the peace" and promotes public health, the PAP has enacted legislation that gives broad powers to detain persons whom the party considers threats to the nation. The Internal Security Act (ISA) permits the government to detain persons without charge for an indefinite period of time. The act has been infrequently used, though it was notably invoked in Operation Cold Store—a security operation that broke the backs of the labor unions in 1963. More recently, it was used to detain Catholic missionaries because the PAP considered their liberation theology Marxist.<sup>41</sup> However, the ISA was most recently employed to detain members of Jemaah Islamiah who were suspected of plotting terrorist attacks against Singapore.<sup>42</sup> In the wake of the terrorist attacks against the United States, even oppositionist Singaporeans praised the government's use of the ISA.

But the government of Singapore does not restrict its review to the public pronouncements of religious groups, or those suspected of terrorist activities. Other organizations, from opposition political parties to foreign media, are carefully monitored, and disparaging remarks are matters referred to the courts. The government of Singapore conditions practically all forms of communication.<sup>43</sup>

Regarding the broadcast media, Singapore has outlawed satellite television dishes, with the exception of certain businesses and industries for which immediate access to international information is indispensable. All other television broadcasting is made available by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, a semigovernmental statutory board. The SBC produces much of its own programming, and the PAP has used this medium as a means to support many of its initiatives, including family planning, antilittering, and the "Speak Mandarin" campaign. Typically, shows are delivered via Singapore Cable Vision, a conglomerate that is majority controlled by the state. To date, international cable television providers attempting to enter the Singapore market and broadcast through Singapore Cable Vision have engaged in self-censorship, fully aware of the government's position regarding media content.<sup>44</sup>

Print is perhaps even more tightly monitored. The private domestic news services have been dissolved, and as

of 1988, six of the seven daily newspapers remaining were controlled by the government. The only independent daily newspaper was published in Tamil. The primary local source for news is the *Straits Times*, which is managed by Singapore Press Holdings. This company is under the direct and indirect influence of the PAP.<sup>45</sup>

The government amended the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1986 to give the government the power to restrict the circulation of journals that are considered as having "engaged in domestic politics."<sup>46</sup> The process of restricting circulation, known locally as "gazetting," has been employed on a number of occasions, most notably against the *Far East Economic Review* and the *Asian Wall Street Journal*. Immediately after the 1986 amendment, the Minister of Communication cut the circulation of *Time* magazine from eighteen thousand to nine thousand, and later reduced its circulation to only two thousand. Typically, and as was the case with *Time*, publications will be charged with interference when they refuse the government's demand for an unedited reply to an article that it finds disparaging. The result of this gazetting has been a chilling effect. The PAP has largely avoided foreign criticism of its actions because no journalists were jailed and no publications stopped. In addition, most foreign journals have come to accommodate the PAP, giving little coverage of Singapore to compete in the Singaporean market.<sup>47</sup> And although those who favor limited liberalism decry these policies, Hobbes points out that it is the sovereign that determines acceptable opinion.

Ultimately, if Singapore is a Hobbesian regime, and if Hobbes can be understood as the architect of a particular type of liberalism, then one can make the argument that Singapore, while authoritarian, is recognizably liberal. That is, there is more to Lee Kuan Yew's claim that Singapore is a liberal state than mere rhetoric. It is, however, liberal in a fashion that American eyes are unused to seeing. It legislates freely, regulating many aspects of its citizens' lives, and preserves order so that the remaining civil liberties might be more freely enjoyed.

## ADAM SMITH AND THE LIBERALISM OF LIMITED GOVERNMENT

Whereas Hobbes argues that the greatest threat to individual liberty is other individuals, Adam Smith suggests that, as a function of human nature, we can count on most people to behave decently most of the time. If this is true, then the greatest threat to liberty is not our fellow citizens, but an oppressive government.

Just as Hobbes's political philosophy can only be understood in the light of his understanding of human nature, Smith's moral and political philosophy can only be understood in the context of Smithian human nature. Smith is, above all else, a philosopher of systems, and he is firmly convinced that man's nature is responsible for political institutions and practices.

In a sense, Smith is like Hobbes when he believes humans' natural state is selfishness. But Smith finds inducements to social action in this prepolitical nature. In short, our passions and interests encourage sociability rather than Hobbesian

associability and war. Smith argues that our attempts to satisfy desires, to live happy lives, and to enjoy the approbation of our neighbors all support society: “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.”<sup>48</sup>

Curiously, Smith denigrates the role and function of reason even more than Hobbes. Hobbes suggests that men employ their reason “as scouts and spies, to find the way to the things desired,”<sup>49</sup> whereas Smith argues that we will discover the means to achieve our desired ends by relying on our passions.<sup>50</sup> In short, Smith suggests that the life led listening to our passions is not only natural—it is preferable and more advantageous. Our passions guide us, as if by an invisible hand, to the best life.

What then is the role of government, if our natural passions give us the most direct guidance to sociability? Smith argues that our sociability is most securely achieved by reinforcing our natural passions, first with custom and then with legislation.<sup>51</sup> Further, there are particular passions, especially hatred and vengeance, that require government. Vengeance, Smith notes, is the passion that demands justice, and so government is necessary to properly satisfy our legitimate demands for vengeance.<sup>52</sup>

What then would life look like in a Smithian regime? Quite clearly it would be in stark contrast to life in a Hobbesian commonwealth. In Smith’s vision, governments would exist, but their impact on the individual would be slight and most often indirect. While Hobbes envisions a sovereign issuing absolute and arbitrary rules and whose command is law, Smith imagines a government that governs on the edges, that prods and encourages, but for the most part allows people to live their lives free from intervention. Governments will be engaged in national defense, public works, and the administration of justice, as noted above, but as long as people are properly guided by their social passions, we can expect them to have little use for government otherwise.

### SMITHIAN LIBERALISM: THAILAND

Whereas it is relatively easy to demonstrate that Singapore is a strong state whose broad powers regulate private areas of its citizens’ lives, it is more difficult to demonstrate that a government does *not* intrude on the lives of its citizens. But that is precisely what is required to demonstrate that a regime is Smithian. Such a loose association between citizen and government does appear to be the norm in Thailand. The relationship between the Thai people and the Thai state is a tenuous one, as the Thai are self-reliant and have little care for the government.

First, the political history of Thailand encourages this gulf between the government and the governed. For seven of its eight centuries, Thailand was an absolute monarchy. At best, the king cared for his people as a father cares for his children: “As for the Thai method of government, it respects the king as if he were the father of all the people. The method of government takes the form of government of the family as its ideal.”<sup>53</sup> The great monarch of the Sukothai

dynasty was King Rama Kamhang, who prided himself on the paternalistic nature of his administration and the people’s reverence that resulted from his care.<sup>54</sup> Although this dynasty lasted for less than a century and ended more than six centuries ago, it would be a mistake to assume that the paternalistic relationship between ruler and ruled has faded from the Thai culture.<sup>55</sup> When the absolute monarchy fell in 1932, the bureaucracy that supplanted it encouraged this compliant attitude to continue.

That bureaucracy—one that has dominated Thai politics—has, with few exceptions, operated largely without encouraging citizen participation. This is not surprising, considering Thailand’s historical lack of active citizenship, but the modern bureaucracy has done nothing to encourage its development. For the most part, the bureaucracy has ruled in its own interest. David Wilson writes that “[t]he tendency of the bureaucracy to break up into competing groups *because it is under no pressure from articulate expressions of interest from constituencies outside government*, results in a dispersal of power to make policy.”<sup>56</sup>

Although the size of the Thai bureaucracy suggests its importance in Thai politics,<sup>57</sup> it should not be interpreted as a measure of the influence of the bureaucracy on the lives of the Thai people. Historically, the bureaucracy has been consumed with the desire to maintain the privileges and positions of the bureaucratic elites—not with the desire to affect the lives of the people. This self-absorption appears to be weakening, particularly as the Thai polity becomes more directed by popularly chosen leadership, though it is still largely the case that the bureaucracy is of little concern to the average Thai citizen, especially so with respect to the rural Thai.<sup>58</sup>

The lives of the villagers, then, are apolitical, at least in a formal sense. The Thai form strong bonds of friendship, though they differentiate between the strength of these friendships, recognizing their closest friends as “die” friends and others as “eating” friends. Die friendships are the rarest and strongest, whereas eating friendships are more common.<sup>59</sup> Beyond these communal bonds of friendship, villagers will share in the labor of planting and harvesting rice. Neighboring villagers will assist farmers, bartering their labor either for equal assistance when they plant or harvest their own fields, or, if they neither own nor rent fields, for a share of the rice harvested.<sup>60</sup> “No record is kept of how many workers or how many hours of work a family contributes. Here as elsewhere in Thai rural social organization the arrangement is loose and informal.”<sup>61</sup> Thai village life shows little need for formal structures and procedures. Villagers instead can rely on the goodwill of their neighbors. As Kemp notes, “Rural society has always operated much more diffusely on the basis of chains and networks of links between individuals. Influence and control has thus rested very much on the ability of an individual to construct a personal following of others.”<sup>62</sup>

These relationships are also remarkably Smithian by nature. Smith notes that the ties of family and community are strong ones and they encourage individuals to forgo the pursuit of selfish interests for the sake of the common good. Regarding the ties of friendship, Smith notes that “that [attachment] which is founded altogether upon the esteem and approbation of his good conduct and behaviour, confirmed by much expe-

rience and long acquaintance, is, by far, the most respectable. Such friendships, arising . . . from a natural sympathy from an involuntary feeling that the persons to whom we attach ourselves are the natural and proper objects of esteem and approbation; can exist only among men of virtue.”<sup>63</sup> The Thai “die” friendships appear to satisfy this description, whereas the “eating” friendships appear to arise “from a sympathy which has been assumed and rendered habitual for the sake of conveniency and accommodation.”<sup>64</sup> As for the informal compacts for mutual assistance, Smith writes, “Neighbours can be very convenient, and they can be very troublesome, to one another. If they are [a] good sort of people, they are mutually disposed to agree. We expect their good agreement; and to be a bad neighbor is to be a very bad character. There are certain small good offices, accordingly, which are universally allowed to be due to a neighbour in preference to any other person who has no such connection.”<sup>65</sup>

These calculating relationships continue outside of the village. Thailand is renowned for its social structure of “patron-client” relationships. These fluid relationships are an agreement, most often informal, of service of a client and support of a patron. When the patron can no longer offer support, the client breaks the tie and selects another patron. And the patron does so without injustice.

The rationale behind these bonds of convenience is a curious combination of the Buddhist notion of merit. But as opposed to a Western understanding of merit as a static quality, the Thai understand merit as fluid and changing. Beings with greater merit are more capable. Since with merit comes greater effectiveness in enterprises, as well as lesser pain and suffering, the Thai strive to accumulate merit. This is accomplished through an attitude of detachment, which is manifested by selfless activity.

To demonstrate the lack of concern for material goods, those possessing superior merit and the resources that follow from superior merit lavishly distribute those resources to those who are less fortunate. These clients, in turn, distribute their resources to their clients, and as a result, largesse “trickles down” from the most to the least meritorious. The well-placed patrons assemble large, stable groups of clients, while the less meritorious struggle to acquire resources and clients of their own. L.M. Hanks writes that “[f]rom top to bottom groups dwindle in size and stability. The organization is like the leaves, twigs, branches and boughs of a great oak. One may trace a linear path from the heart of the tree outward to any leaf; each leaf, twig, and branch, standing at a unique distance from the heart, receives varying amounts of nourishment.”<sup>66</sup> Such action is markedly Smithian; benevolence is the social passion in Smith’s hierarchy of sentiments.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Smith writes, “Actions of a beneficent tendency, which proceed from proper motives, seem alone to require reward; because such alone are the approved objects of gratitude, or excite the sympathetic gratitude of the spectator.”<sup>68</sup>

### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE “LIBERAL DYNAMIC”

If it is the case that political development scholarship places a premium on limited government and the positive

protection of civil liberties—on political order and stability—and if these preferences represent the two poles of classical liberal political thought, then it can be said that political development is equated with liberalism.<sup>69</sup> But if this is the case, then is development one thing, or two? That is, if it is liberalism, is it Hobbesian or Smithian?

I suggest that modern developed regimes are a compromise between these two ideal types and that developing regimes are learning to strike this balance moderately. Modern liberalism has within it a tension; the government must be strong enough to maintain order, but it must not be permitted to exercise its power tyrannically. In his dissent in *Terminiello v. Chicago*, a case involving a disturbance of the peace, Justice Robert Jackson remarked, “This Court has gone far toward accepting the doctrine that civil liberty means the removal of all restraints from these crowds and that all local attempts to maintain order are impairments of the liberty of the citizen. The choice is not between order and liberty. It is between liberty with order and anarchy without either.”<sup>70</sup> The making of that choice, where along the continuum between tyranny and anarchy the most efficacious protection of liberty is to be found, is the role of modern liberal regimes.

Recourse to American political history demonstrates my thesis. If, for example, we look at the history of Fourth Amendment jurisprudence, particularly search and seizure cases, we find that the government has changed from embracing broad search powers, to placing more restrictions on the police, and then vice versa. In a similar fashion, we have seen cases involving free speech, especially regarding the Communist Party, go from broad government powers decisions to strong protections for individual speech. American political history could be described as movements from preference for law enforcement to preference for individual rights and back again. Recent attempts to deal with the problems of international terrorism though the Patriot Act testify to the nature of this dynamic, which appears to be driven by relative deprivation. I describe these pendulum swings between security and rights as the liberal dynamic.

But in America, these pendulum swings are regular, orderly, and legal. In the developing world, these swings are radical, severe, and extralegal. We need only consider the examples of Nicaragua, Cuba, or Indonesia to see how rapid and violent these changes can be. Thus, I argue that developing regimes are those that are translating these extreme pendulum swings into ones that are more controlled and predictable. As a result, and because all liberal regimes seem to experience these pendulum swings, the arc of these swings is a measure of a nation’s level of development.

Thailand may be going through such a pendulum swing, as there is evidence, such as the public outcry over electoral corruption, that the people are taking a more active interest and role in their government. In a 1992 discussion of the events of the violent coup known as “Black May,” Anand Punyarachun, a former Prime Minister and one of the most well-respected public officials, said, “One factor that has emerged in the past few months is that more and more people are convinced that the political process just can’t be left to the traditional groups. There must be more

participation and involvement by the people. Whether that realisation will be translated into something more tangible, we'll just have to wait and see."<sup>71</sup> These sentiments were recently echoed by the *Bangkok Post*, which interpreted the events of a senatorial election in a similar fashion: "With the introduction of muscle flexing by an independent election agency, with the significant popular response to the mandatory voting requirement, with the active challenge of the senate election results in a number of provinces, one senses a new sense of broader public interest and participation in the democratic process."<sup>72</sup>

Singapore seems to have resisted the liberal dynamic lately, though there are a number of signs of disaffection or relative deprivation which suggest that Singapore too must make concessions to the attractions of the Smithian model of liberalism. Even the PAP government and its elder statesman have recognized that Singaporeans will come to demand greater civic participation. In his 1995 National Day address, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew repeated an oft-articulated formula for success: liberty with order. "Singapore is an open society. Singapore has to be open to compete internationally. But to succeed in that competition, it has to be open without being a disordered society."<sup>73</sup> That same day the prime minister, Goh Chok Tong, echoed his mentor's sentiments. Remarking on the social and cultural damage done by the Western "irresponsible press, excessive individual liberties, and wrong welfare policies," Mr. Goh praised Japan as a model for Singapore: "Japan is an Asian society with strong communitarian values. Its opposition parties are not destructive. The Japanese press is free and responsible. It protects and advances the national interest."<sup>74</sup> But while the political leaders continue to stress the values of community, they do admit that Singapore may well adopt more open, liberal policies in the indeterminate future. In a 1991 interview with the *Economist*, Lee Kuan Yew compared Singapore to an industry, which is not an inappropriate analogy. Lee recognized that as the "workforce" became better educated and more skilled, the "management" style would have to change to incorporate more participation from the workers: "If you want this educated workforce to make its full contribution, you can not carry on with the old patriarchal system of management. This participation of the workforce inevitably spills over into government, into society. This is reinforced by the media, plus travel and so on. There's no going back to the old days."<sup>75</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Lucien Pye, *Aspects of Development*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1966), chap. 2.
2. Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Little Brown, 1966), 6–9.
3. David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 422.
4. Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," *American Political Science Review* 40, no. 3 (1961).
5. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).
6. Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).
7. Aristide Zolberg, *Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).
8. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) and "The States in the Institutional Vortex of the Capitalist World-Economy," *International Social Science Journal* 32, no. 4 (1980); Fernando Cardoso, "Dependency and Development in Latin America," *New Left Review*, July–August 1972, 83–95; Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967); Celso Furtado, *Development and Underdevelopment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).
9. Howard Wiarda, "Toward the Future: Old and New Directions in Comparative Politics," in *New Directions in Comparative Politics*, ed. H. Wiarda (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 242–45.
10. This statement is a general description of Almond's work. See, for example, Almond and Powell, *Comparative Politics* or Almond and Verba, *Civic Culture*.
11. This is a general description of Huntington's work. See, for example, Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* or Huntington and Nelson, *No Easy Choice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976).
12. H.K. Girvetz, *The Evolution of Liberalism* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).
13. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).
14. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 473d–e; Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Baker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1285b35–1286b4.
15. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1301a20–1316b25.
16. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), chap. 13.
17. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 6.
18. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1937).
19. Arguably, Niccolo Machiavelli was the first modern political philosopher, and if Hobbes is the father of modernity, then Machiavelli is the grandfather. Further, John Locke in many ways refined, and softened, Hobbes's rather blunt discourse. My focus is on Hobbes because of his forthrightness, but he should not be considered the only supporter of "strong liberalism."
20. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 13.
21. *Ibid.*, chap. 12.
22. *Ibid.*, chap. 17.
23. *Ibid.*, chap. 18.
24. Hobbes, *English Works* (London: J. Bohn, 1839), italics in the original. See also Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
25. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 30.
26. Hobbes, *English Works*, 169.
27. *Ibid.*, 167.
28. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 19.
29. Andrzej Rapaczynski, *Nature and Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 27.
30. Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Gordon Means, "Soft Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 4 (1996): 103–17.
31. The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore. [http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non\\_version/cgi-bin/cgi\\_retrieve.pl?&actno=Reved-CONST&date=latest&method=part](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?&actno=Reved-CONST&date=latest&method=part) (accessed February 7, 2008).
32. *Ibid.*
33. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 30.
34. Garry Rodan, "The Internet and Political Control in Singapore," *Political Science Quarterly* 113, no. 1 (1998): 63–89; and Soon Juan Chee, *Dare to Change* (Singapore: Singapore Democratic Party, 1994), 125. Hobbes, when writing about the sovereign's authority to regulate associations, noted, "And as Factions for Kindred, so also Factions for Government of Religion, as of Papists, Protestants, etc. . . . are unjust, as being contrary to the peace and safety of the people, and a taking of the Sword out of the hand of the Sovereign." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 22. See also Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chaps. 23–33.
35. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983) and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, esp. chaps. 12, 26, and 29, as well as all of parts 3 and 4.
36. Stan Sesser, "A Nation of Contradictions," *New Yorker*, January 13, 1992, 52.
37. Stan Sesser, "A Nation of Contradictions," 37.
38. Oppositionists have claimed that the practice constituted "political speech;" and similarly, that those who urinated in the elevators were expressing their opinion about the PAP government. As such, these oppositionists point to the criminalization of chewing gum and urinating

in elevators as yet more restrictions on political speech. See the interview with Francis Seow in the University of Nebraska—Lincoln's student newspaper, *The Scarlet*, December 1, 1995: <http://www.unl.edu/scarlet/v5n33/v5n33qa.html> (accessed February 7, 2008).

39. Sesser, "A Nation of Contradictions."
40. Seok Lee Yeo, "Crime Trends in Singapore," in *Statistics Singapore Newsletter* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, 1997).
41. Seok Lee Yeo, "Electoral Politics in Singapore," in *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia*, ed. Aurel Croissant (Singapore: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2002).
42. Therese Lee, "Malaysia and the Internal Security Act," *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (July 2002): 56–72.
43. Soon Juan Chee, *Dare to Change* (Singapore: Singapore Democratic Party, 1994).
44. Rodan, "The Internet," 72.
45. William Hachten, "Media Development without Press Freedom," *Journalism Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1989), 823–24; and LePoer, *Singapore: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), 214–15.
46. LePoer, *Singapore: A Country Study*, 214.
47. Hachten, "Media Development," 825–26; and Rodan, "The Internet," 68–69.
48. Adam Smith, *Collected Works* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund Press (1982), 9. All page references to Smith are to the 1982 Liberty Fund reprint of the 1976 Glasgow edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.
49. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 8.
50. Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 77–78.
51. *Ibid.*, 247.
52. *Ibid.*, 35.
53. David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962). See also Thinapan Nakata, "Political Culture: Problems of Development of Democracy," in *Government and Politics of Thailand*, ed. S. Xuto (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987).
54. Clark Neher, *Modern Thai Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1979).
55. Thinapan, "Political Culture," 168.
56. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand*, 163. Emphasis added.
57. Fred Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 1966); and Riggs, "The Bureaucratic

Polity as a Working System," in *Modern Thai Politics*, ed. Clark Neher (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1979).

58. Ronald Krannich, "The Politics of Street-Level Bureaucracy in Thailand," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* 22, no. 2 (1978), 113–30.
59. John deYoung, *Village Life in Modern Thailand* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955).
60. James Scott, *Exploitation in Rural Class Relations* (New York: The Asia Society – SEADAG, 1975).
61. deYoung, *Village Life in Modern Thailand*, 79; See also Neher, *Modern Thai Politics*.
62. Kemp, "The Dialectics of Village and State in Modern Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 22, no. 2 (1991), 321.
63. Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 224–25.
64. *Ibid.*, 224.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Hanks, L.M. "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order," in *Modern Thai Politics*, ed. Clark Neher (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1979).
67. Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 38–39.
68. *Ibid.*, 78.
69. I understand that there are alternatives, not only within modernity, but also to modernity. That is, just as fascism and communism are alternatives to liberalism, totalitarianism and theocracy are alternatives to modernity. I do not suggest that the preference for civil liberty over spiritual salvation is the hallmark of the best regime. However, political development is equated with liberalism.
70. *Terminiello v. City of Chicago* (337 U.S. 1, 37).
71. Anand Panyarachun, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 13, 1992.
72. Spindler "Moving on to the General Elections," *Bangkok Post* (2000) <http://www.bangkokpost.net/senate/comment9.html> (accessed February 7, 2008).
73. Lee Kuan Yew, address delivered at Tanjong Pagar GRC National Day Dinner, August 12, 1995.
74. Goh Chok Tong, address delivered at National Day rally, August 12, 1995.
75. Lee Kuan Yew, "A Map Up Here, in the Mind," the *Economist*, June 29, 1991.

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