

Are Hobbes' Ideas on Statecraft Truly Original?

A comparison between Mozi and
Hobbes

Executive Summary

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The following paper presents a comparative theoretical exploration of two prominent thinkers, the English Thomas Hobbes and the Chinese Mozi. The comparison is motivated by a premise in political theory they both share: namely that the state arises as a means to order the moral anarchy of a disorderly society by means of appointing a powerful ruler in the form of the Sovereign (Hobbes) or Son of Heaven (Mozi). This prompts a compelling question: considering that the *Mozi* was written vastly earlier than Hobbes' work was and that both share the same premise and solution, could it be that Hobbes is not as original as usually thought?

In order to determine to what degree Hobbes is an original thinker we have divided our paper in the following sections: historical context, metaphysics, comparison of ethical tensions, the social contract and conclusion.

In the historical context we first encounter a description of England's social milieu prior to the English Civil War and then we explore the different factions within the conflict, followed by a survey of the social changes that took place during Mozi's life in the Warring States period.

We begin by pointing out that before the outbreak of hostilities and into the first years of the civil war, there was a limited consensus within English society that allowed for disagreements within the *status quo* (Harris, 2015). Thus, whereas at first the war was a genuine conflict between Parliamentarians and Royalists, after 1645 it would be better understood as a war for control within the Parliamentary bloc (Petegorsky, 1942). Hill will add more detail by elucidating how the enclosure movement would bring the English Revolution before the Civil War, putting an end to a feudal mobility based upon land and replacing it by a new one based on the privatization of land (Hill, 1948). Regarding China in the Warring States period, it is worth noting that the common people barely had any voice; we have very limited information of them (Lewis, 1989). This period was fraught with social changes and military innovations (Cho-yun, 1965) that would coalesce into the Qin Dynasty in 221 BCE. All in all, we conclude that both thinkers were living in turbulent times that were fraught with social unrest, political turmoil and economic instability. Could their ideas resemble each other more than we thought?

Squaring up Hobbes' metaphysics with the Mohists', we quickly encounter a problem: can we even talk of ancient Chinese metaphysics to begin with? While Hobbes' metaphysics can be described as being of a monist materialistic sort (Frost, 2008), the

Mohists appear entirely unconcerned with reality's constitution as well as any form of reductionism (Fraser, 2015). How are we to compare them? By means of my thought experiment I present the idea that if the Mohists were to develop a metaphysical theory in the Western fashion, they'd be monistic materialists as well. However, this does not equate the idea that the Mohists somehow preceded Hobbes.

When we take a look at the ethics of both thinkers, another problem arises: both present a "tension" that must be resolved. While Hobbes is concerned with the right and thus, is an ethical deontologist, the Mohists are ethical consequentialists. Nevertheless, both present an argumentative justification for their ruler that is on the one hand a consequentialist argument, and on the other hand a voluntarist one. Thus, we show that while Hobbes' tension cannot be resolved (Ackerman, 1976), that of the Mohists has an unorthodox solution, at least to the Western view (Lu, 2006).

Our last section covers a brief description of the social contract and whether the Mohists can be regarded as having a social contract tradition of their own. Our answer is that, considering that the social contract is of an individualist nature and that the Mohists are communitarians -on top of the fact that there is no direct reference to anything that would be similar or equivalent to such practice- we cannot consider them as contractarians (Fraser, 2008). However, an interesting analysis sheds light on the "equivalence" between the state of nature and the sage kings (Carlson, 2009). Thus, we conclude that although these two share an almost identical function, they are different.

All in all, we conclude that despite living in similarly convulsive times, Hobbes and the Mohists remain differentiated; in other words, Hobbes is an original thinker. This is the case because his metaphysics of monistic materialism remain unique, because he is a deontologist and not a consequentialist as the Mohists and because he revives a social contract tradition that is unheard of in China.