

A STUDY IN THE SOURCES OF B. TRAVEN'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND
POLITICAL ECONOMY IN *THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE*

By

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ABSTRACT:

This study presents a revisionist reading of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* by “B. Traven,” the pseudonymous 1927 German novel published in English in 1935. Contrary to the scholarly perspective uniformly evident in previous criticism, in which *Sierra Madre* is presented as evincing the unknown author’s implicit Marxist/collectivist political and economic ideology, the dissertation posits that the book endorses the American versions of Libertarian democracy and free-market capitalism. The dissertation argues that the actions of, and dialogue between, the central characters—especially as embedded in the novel’s elaborately-developed internal narratives— parallel and suggest the author’s familiarity with key tenets of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651), the second of John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), and Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Chapter One explores how past and contemporary Traven scholars have invariably approached the entire body of Traven’s fiction—including *Sierra Madre*—with political preconceptions that identify the major elements of those works as condemnations of such negative human impulses as greed, unbridled selfishness, and lust for money, gold, and material goods. Using extant Traven scholarship, the study demonstrates how free-market capitalism is often reflexively condemned in these same pejorative terms, despite its origin in Enlightenment principles such as social and religious freedom and individual liberty— the tradition of Classical Liberalism—derived largely from these three epochal texts. Drawing on both older scholarship and the recent work of Thomas Pangle and Timothy Burns as well as that of Jeffrey Collins, Chapter Two discusses how historians of ideas have drawn lines of influence from Hobbes through Locke to Smith and considers the documented dissemination of the ideas of these three philosophers in Germany during the (likely) years of Traven’s youth. Following the overview provided in Chapter Three of the principles that most distinguish the systems proposed by each of these three philosophers, Chapter Four examines passages from America’s founding documents and examples from early American case law and legal commentary suggesting that the precepts advanced therein similarly appear to have been derived from Hobbes and Locke, cognizant of Smith, and woven into the country’s framework in ways that fundamentally shaped American representative government and *laissez faire* economic policy. Chapter Five documents both verbal and substantive parallels in *Sierra Madre* consistent with Hobbes’, Locke’s, and Smith’s related views of civil governance and economics. Chapter Six examines in detail two of *Sierra Madre*’s embedded metanarratives, and the connecting episode that appears in between them, as allegorical embodiments of key principles drawn from Hobbes, Locke, and Smith.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times the economic system now known as free-market capitalism has been the target of much moral censure; but, in its purest form, it is a system based on Enlightenment principles such as social and religious freedom, individual choice, and consent of the governed, and its foundation was laid by several epochal texts written in the tradition of the British Enlightenment and what was once designated Classical Liberalism. Most important among these are the works of the political philosophers Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) and the political economist Adam Smith (1723-1790). Specifically, these texts include Hobbes' *Leviathan, Or the Matter, Form and Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (1651), Locke's *Second Treatise: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government* published as part of his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), and Smith's *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). The clear line of influence between them provides the intellectual and critical foundation for my project, with Locke crucially refining Hobbes' vision of a functional social order by introducing restrictions upon the rights of the sovereign and Smith elaborating the economic consequences of Locke's theory of the value of labor and its role in the "great art of government" (as Locke refers to it in Chapter V of his *Second Treatise*).

A major source of contention that operates both in theory (within contemporary debates in the disciplines of political philosophy and economics), as well as in practice (as we go about the business of our daily lives), derives from the philosophical and economic disagreement about the nature of the free market. To that end, I address our

current understanding of the system known as capitalism – or rather, the *mis*understanding of it – and its connotation within that paradigm that views it, among other things, as being inherently antagonistic toward, and oppressive to, society’s laboring class. This view, of course, has been popularized by the prominence of Marxist discourse across many fields of study, including various critical traditions within literary studies.

Additionally, my project focuses on other contested topics within the realm of political philosophy and economics. For example, there has been much conflation in terms of how we understand and conceptualize, on the one hand, “systems of *political philosophy*” and, on the other hand, “systems of *economics*.” These are in fact distinct subjects with separate though related principles and traditions of scholarly study but which, nevertheless, are today often considered as indistinguishable and conflated under a single label, whether that be “capitalism,” “socialism,” “communism,” “republic,” “democracy,” or some other catch-all category. This too, of course, is primarily a result of Marxism’s influence, since Marxism is at heart a form of economic thought calibrated to serve as the basis for a political philosophy.

While it is true that certain economic systems tend to exist alongside certain systems of political philosophy (e.g., capitalist societies with privatized means of production are often considered democracies, while collectivist societies that tend to adopt centralized, governmental ownership or regulation of major industries are considered socialist), neither is dependent upon nor the inevitable result of the other. These competing ideologies have led to vastly different interpretations of works of art, including those of the literary variety. For example, while some may view George

Orwell's *1984* as a warning against a possible dystopian future, others have suggested that such a society might have some redeeming qualities.

B. Traven's pseudonymous novel, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1935; 1927)¹ is one such work that I believe has been widely misunderstood by general readers and scholars alike, particularly as a result of various critical interpretations concerning the author's perceived economic and political views. Most scholars writing in response to Traven's fictional tale have concluded that the principal ideas and lessons presented in the work primarily depict negative human impulses such as "greed," unbridled "selfishness," and "lust" for money, gold, and other objects of a material nature. One cannot help but notice that capitalism is commonly described in much the same fashion.

However, by returning to and highlighting the ideas that make free-market capitalism and decentralized government fundamentally egalitarian, I attempt to demonstrate that the dialogue, the omniscient narrator's reflections, the various embedded narratives, and the plot in *Sierra Madre* all suggest Traven's familiarity with the line of influence that runs through Hobbes, Locke, and Smith mentioned earlier. I will suggest, moreover, that the novel appears to endorse the system that gradually evolved from these writers' ideas as, in fact, a far more competent model for delivering liberty and economic prosperity to individuals and to "the people" of every class – including those of the laboring class.

Using a methodology traditional of history of ideas scholarship, I seek to trace the

¹ Like most of Traven's works of literary fiction, this novel was originally written and published in German (as *Der Schatz der Sierra Madre*, by Büchergilde Gutenberg, in 1927); eight years later, it was translated into English by Traven's U.S. publisher, Knopf, with Traven's supervision and approval as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; this is sometimes referred to as the American edition.

progression of certain ideas originally introduced by Hobbes, rhetorically reconfigured and presented anew by Locke (in his effort to make Hobbes' views more palatable to a patriotic, Christian English reading audience of the late seventeenth century), and culminating in the applied principles set forth in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

Contrary to the current dominant critical perspective among literary scholars of Traven's fiction, I suggest that those same ideas also influence and help shape the salient characteristics of the political philosophy at the heart of Traven's *Sierra Madre*.² I further suggest (and provide evidence to demonstrate) that the above ideas closely resemble those which underlie and distinguish the distinctively "American" forms of free-market capitalism and democracy. I specifically identify areas in which the American tradition departs markedly from the systems and traditions in place in the eighteenth century in Britain, France, and other European nations: most importantly, in the areas of property and property rights.

Having deliberately omitted such institutionalized customs as primogeniture, entails, and enclosure laws (all of which were mainstays in Britain, with male primogeniture also widespread on the Continent), the American "experiment," as Alexis de Tocqueville characterized it, began by being dedicated to the notion that the property rights of the individual are of central importance to realizing individual liberty, freedom, and sovereignty. The development of the American system of free-market economics foregrounded that premise.

² In Chapter 4, I will address the issue of whether and how an educated German of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Traven presumably was, could have been acquainted with the work and ideas of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, all of whom were certainly familiar to German social, political, and economic thinkers from the late eighteenth century onward.

While most scholars have suggested that Traven's novel presents a Marxist, or at least collectivist, political message that is decidedly anti-capitalist in nature, I offer a counter-interpretation positioning that *Sierra Madre* – while a work of fiction – provides something of a textbook on the principles of social contract theory, property rights (as critical to realizing individual liberty), free-market capitalism, and a general warning about how the state can stand in the way of personal freedom, self-preservation, and the economic security and prosperity of the individual.

Moreover, beyond merely calling attention to the propensity of government to impede economic progress, the novel displays a general distrust of and dissatisfaction with government; and its dialogue, action, and numerous embedded narratives are replete with instances in which these frustrations, and the primary sources, causes, and reasons behind them, are implicitly and sometimes explicitly discussed. Each time this happens, Traven provides details about the central tenets and defining principles of the political philosophy at the heart of his *Sierra Madre* that I argue is most consistent with the platform of contemporary political and economic Libertarianism.

Indeed, we see the following Libertarian principles reflected throughout the novel: (1) a recognition of the individual, and not the state, as being of primary importance; (2) the belief that individuals have rights against certain types of interference on the part of other people and entities, including government; (3) the idea that liberty is best understood as non-interference; (4) that this non-interference is the only legitimate demand we can legally, politically, and morally make ourselves and expect others to make; (5) that property rights are centrally important to the protection of individual liberty; (6) that governments ought to be bound to the same moral principles as are

individuals; and (7) that, because governments should observe the same moral standards as individuals, most current and past governments have acted immorally insofar as they have used coercion for the purposes of plunder, redistribution, and control of their people, thereby reaching beyond their properly small role and limited scope (Zwolinski).

In Chapter 1, I provide an overview and my assessment of the Traven scholarship that exists to date. As an alternative to the dominant Marxist anti-American reading, I present my own interpretation of Traven's *Sierra Madre* novel that is distinctly pro-American and pro-capitalist. Then, in Chapter 2, I discuss how various historians of ideas have traditionally, and more recently, connected the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith in order to establish that there is a legitimate basis for claiming that such a connection exists (thereby justifying my designating this "The Hobbes-Locke-Smith Connection"). I also provide evidence to show how an educated German of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Traven presumably was, would likely have been acquainted with the ideas put forth in the respective works of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith – all of which were familiar to German social, political, and economic thinkers and within German intellectual circles by the late eighteenth century, making the influence of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith on Traven's early twentieth-century *Sierra Madre* completely possible.

In Chapter 3, I offer more detailed explanations and descriptions of those ideas that connect the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith. I then posit, in Chapter 4, that those same principles can also be seen in America's founding documents (most importantly the Declaration of Independence and various examples from early American case law and legal commentary) in order to suggest that those principles have been of

critical importance to the American experiment since its founding, woven into the country's framework in ways which have long distinguished *American* democracy and *American* capitalism, despite contemporary Marxist connotations that aim to cast those ideas in a very different, distinctly negative light.

In Chapter 5, I turn my attention to Traven's *Sierra Madre* itself, pointing to the elements and passages in the text that offer the most compelling evidence to support my claim that the political and economic ideology motivating the novel derives its central tenets from those same Enlightenment principles that are central to the systems and theories put forth by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith. Lastly, I dedicate Chapter 6 to interpreting and offering my analysis of two of the novel's parable-like metanarratives and the connecting episode that appears in between them, as these three sections of Traven's *Sierra Madre* contain vital clues that further illuminate the nature and sources of the political philosophy and political economy endorsed in the novel.

CHAPTER ONE: ASSESSING THE CURRENT STATE OF TRAVEN SCHOLARSHIP

In this chapter, I look at several examples of Traven scholarship and discuss the most popular theories put forth therein in order to suggest that previous commentators have reached very similar conclusions to one another in terms of their interpretations of the nature of the political philosophy and political economy endorsed in *Sierra Madre*.

While each of the individual pieces of scholarship that I discuss below has some relevance to my study of *Sierra Madre*, most are not focused on that particular work (and some fail to treat it at all). That said, the secondary works that I engage with directly provide important insight germane to my project, since the fictional texts at the center of those studies – namely, Traven’s 1926 novels *The Death Ship* and *The Cotton Pickers* as well as his 1928 lengthy short story “The Night Visitor” – share a number of themes in common with *Sierra Madre*.¹

For example, one of the themes that Traven explores time and again is that of *expatriation* – specifically, Americans living and working in foreign lands. In many Traven texts, that foreign land is Mexico, while the setting of others includes several

¹ Traven’s German and English versions of *Sierra Madre* are not identical. Most of his works were written first in German before being translated into English for publication in America and elsewhere. For this reason, one of the few things that *can* safely be assumed about Traven is that his first language was German. All other “facts” and alleged biographical details about Traven remain unsubstantiated and are, therefore, unreliable. Many scholars, however, have based at least part of their analyses on such unsubstantiated biographical information, including one particular hypothesis regarding the true identity of the author, namely, that B. Traven was actually Ret Marut, a documented German political activist with strong socialist/communist leanings who participated in the German Bolshevik uprising in the early twentieth century. The fact that many of the other proposed identities of the real Traven also have documented connections to radical collectivist political movements is, I argue, a major source of the limitations evinced in much of the scholarship responding to his fiction to date. I believe that accepting such unsubstantiated accounts of who the real Traven might have been has led scholars to respond to his work by concluding that it too must demonstrate signs of the same radical, collectivist politics (similar to Marut’s, for example). Again, I argue that doing so is a mistake and has led to widespread scholarly misinterpretations of Traven’s work.

countries in Europe. This theme has been examined by a number of scholars (mostly as it appears in *The Death Ship* as well as in terms of its significance in *The Cotton Pickers* and “The Night Visitor”) who have often associated it with the notion of citizenship – and all that such a notion implies, as well as the various mechanisms (most notably, the passport) which have made citizenship and nationality such a critical part of a person’s identity.

Because of general misconceptions concerning Traven’s fiction arising from his putatively collectivist political views, many scholars have reached similar conclusions. The current mainstream view is that Traven’s fiction is Marxist and anti-capitalist in nature. These scholars often appear to base their critical analyses of Traven’s fiction (at least in part) on one of the various claims proposed over the years purporting to reveal the true identity of “B. Traven.” None of these has been conclusively substantiated and, in my estimation, must ultimately be viewed as unreliable.

One critical essay that puts forth a view that has gained much support among Traven scholars is Kenneth Payne’s “‘The Night Visitor’: B. Traven’s Tale of the Mexican Bush Reconsidered” (1991). In the lengthy short story “The Night Visitor,” Traven’s American protagonist is Gerard Gales – a character that Traven repeatedly uses, having him appear in two other works as well (*The Death Ship* and *The Cotton Pickers*).²

In this article, Payne identifies a number of familiar-sounding negative impulses and argues that they distinguish the American characters in “The Night Visitor” and are generally representative of the American psyche in that work as well. Those impulses

² The character Gerard Gales does not appear in *Sierra Madre*, but the insights gleaned from Payne’s assessment of this character have been helpful to my own research; Payne’s piece is representative of one of the most popular and mainstream scholarly views put forth to date in response to Traven’s fiction.

include greed; unbridled self-interest; a predisposition for becoming consumed by the temptation and allure of gold, jewels, wealth, riches, and even fame; and a propensity for committing acts of exploitation and engaging in violence as means to accomplishing (what are essentially) colonialist and imperialistic ends. Payne suggests that these are the causes for the story's ominous ending and the generally unhappy circumstances that befall Traven's protagonist (Gales) and the other American featured in that work, the eccentric isolationist Doc Cranwell. At the beginning of "The Night Visitor," Doc's isolationism, founded upon a detached, almost cold, self-centered individualism, appears to be the sort which Gales is after and desires to emulate, but which he later appears to reject.

Although Payne's analysis is focused primarily on "The Night Visitor," it also mentions *Sierra Madre* by way of establishing another important theme that Payne believes runs through both texts as well as Traven's *The Cotton Pickers*.

"The Night Visitor" is an off-shoot of a theme which is sketched but never fully investigated in the two earlier Mexican novels, *The Cotton Pickers* [1928] and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* [1935] . . . both of which set white men and their values against the primordial bush and its Indian inhabitants. At the close of *The Treasure*, Traven has two of his surviving prospectors elect to remain with the Indians rather than return to the "civilization" of Tampico. But, as far as the two whites are concerned, their decision is prompted more by a desire to be sure of board and lodging for a while than by any genuine appreciation of the Indians' ways or values. Old Howard speaks so amusedly of his role in the village as healer and medicine man that it is difficult to see his decision to stay with the Indians as truly "a disengagement from Western civilization" [as other scholars have suggested]. (Payne 57)

Also, according to Payne:

["The Night Visitor"] is a form of psychic drama, involving Gerard Gales and his strange meetings with the Aztec king entombed in a burial-mound near the bungalow of Doc Cranwell, Gales' neighbor. Doc is an enigmatic figure. He

has exiled himself from his homeland north of the border and has “buried himself” in the jungle for reasons which Gales cannot fathom. It is clear that there is a good deal more to Doc than meets the eye. We learn at once that he is radically out of sympathy with the values of contemporary American society. (Payne 47-48)

While most Americans, including Gales, are most interested in things that can make them money or earn them renown, Doc (Payne suggests) has different motivations. For example, based on Doc’s dismissive response to Gales’ comment suggesting that Doc might have been made wealthy and/or famous had he actually published any of the eighteen books that Doc claims to have written, Payne concludes the following:

Obviously, Doc has no time for the standard goals of modern Western life. He is a connoisseur of a more metaphysical mode of satisfaction typified in the Godlike power he has experienced when destroying his “perfect” manuscripts. “Be like God,” he urges Gales, “who destroys with His left hand what He created with His right” ([Traven, “The Night Visitor,”] 20). Doc’s destructiveness (or self-destructiveness) is an integral part of an unconventional worldview in which he clearly believes passionately. (Payne 48)

Payne’s article quotes the following passage from Traven’s short story:

“Sometimes,” . . . [Doc] says, “I think that the trouble with people today is that we don’t destroy enough of the things and systems which we believe perfect . . . and by destroying them make room for absolutely new and different things and systems infinitely more perfect than the ones we destroyed. . . . I think how different our art, our writings, our techniques, our architectures, our achievements would be if, let’s say, at year sixteen-hundred-fifty, every thing which man had made so far would have been destroyed, destroyed so thoroughly that no human would have been able to remember what a cart wheel had looked like, and whether the Venus de Milo had been a painting or a poem or a ship’s keel, and whether democracies and monarchies had meant something to eat or were church bells.” (Payne 48, quoting “The Night Visitor” 20)

From this, Payne concludes that “in Doc’s view ‘tradition and history’ are the major obstacles to human happiness” (58). For it is Doc, Payne reminds us, who argues that “If these [things, ideas, inventions, etc.] were periodically discarded . . . [then]

mankind could ‘start fresh with no worn-out-ideas, platitudes, and opinions, to hamper the birth of an entirely new world’” (48).

Traven sets his protagonist between the Doc character and the spirit of a long-dead Aztec prince. When that ghost first confronts Gales, it is to ask for Gales’ assistance in ridding him of the wild boars that have been desecrating his tomb. Gales’ response is meant to imply (according to Payne) that American individualism is essentially selfish and no way to live: “That’s none of my business. . . . If you don’t like them butcher them and have done with them. Or sell them. What do I care? Only, for heaven’s sake, leave me in peace” (“The Night Visitor,” 26). Payne then agrees with another scholar, Jeraldine R. Kraver, who observes that the prince’s spirit “does not find a friend in Gales” (122). Payne concludes,

Traven’s verdict in “The Night Visitor” seems a pessimistic one, for it describes the inability of the American protagonist to surrender the rational tools of his scientific civilization in favor of the more harmonious psychic experience of the Indian, his elemental modes of seeing and knowing, the healthy simplicity of his moral and ethical codes.

Payne does not connect the Mexican bush to the concept of the *state of nature* as imagined by Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 *Leviathan*, which John Locke would accept and adopt as a starting point for his own political theory in his 1689 *Two Treatises of Government*, itself comprising a profoundly influential text in the domain of political philosophy known as social contract theory. But the similarity between Doc’s statement and these two works of political philosophy is interesting and perhaps suggestive.

For example, the fact the Doc chooses the year “*sixteen-hundred-fifty*” as the example he uses during his musings to Gales about how different (and better) the world and everything in it would be if only human beings were willing to destroy more of the

things considered to be “perfect,” in order to facilitate the process of generating new models with which to replace the old ones, appears to me to be no small coincidence – especially considering that Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* was published in the year 1651. For, in practice, it was Hobbes’ text which laid the groundwork necessary to dispel the long-standing traditional belief in the divine right of kings, thereby paving the way for more representative governments gradually to emerge, eventually replacing the feudal system and monarchical rule that had governed Britain, France, and most of Europe for centuries prior.

Doc’s mention of “democracies and monarchies” in that same passage also appears to point to this connection, further supporting the likely influence of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* as well as of Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* on Traven’s “The Night Visitor.”

Influenced by, and building upon, the foundational principles first established by Hobbes, Locke famously insisted that the people had the right and duty to dissolve governments that have become oppressive and which fail to legislate in ways that promote the interests of the people, and that, once the people had (to paraphrase Doc’s words) “made room” by destroying the older system of rule, they should set about the business of erecting “a new and different system” of government – one better able and more inclined to serve their interests – to replace the old one.

From this, I am inclined to think that, just as Traven’s story appears to suggest to readers that there might be more to Doc than initially meets the eye, Traven’s fiction (including *Sierra Madre*) may similarly imply that there is more to American notions of capitalism and limited, decentralized, democratic government than Traven’s interpreters

have heretofore fathomed or conceded.

In another article – Jeraldine Kraver’s “‘We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Badges,’ or Passports or Papers or Jewels: Defining the Credentials of Community in B. Traven’s Early Fiction” (2005) – *Sierra Madre*, again, is not the focus. It does, however, explore the familiar theme of expatriation that appears in so many of Traven’s works of fiction (certainly including *Sierra Madre*). The works that this article deals with are again the 1926 novels *The Death Ship* and *The Cotton Pickers* and the 1928 extended short story “The Night Visitor.” All three feature the same protagonist, the aforementioned Gerard Gales, an American expatriate – though, for most of *The Death Ship*, an *unwilling* one. That novel begins with Gales missing the departure from the port where the American merchant-marine ship that has been employing him has been docked, thus stranding him in Europe without any of his identification papers which alone can prove his status as an American citizen, his proper name, and even his date of birth.

After missing the departure of his ship, the rest of the story follows Gales as he tries to get the authorities of various countries — whose borders are ambiguous, poorly marked, and apparently crossed (both knowingly and unknowingly) by countless individuals in the chaos and general condition of “statelessness” (as the article’s author calls it) that characterized the majority of European nations in the immediate aftermath of World War I — to recognize his citizenship status as an American so he can get the replacement identification documents he needs in order to secure decent employment and passage on a ship bound for his American home. Because Gales encounters nothing but bureaucratic red-tape, he is unable to get the replacement identification he needs to secure either. Instead, he (like so many others left stateless in the aftermath of WWI) is forced to

take a job on a “death ship” – a dilapidated vessel destined to be sunk on purpose by its investors for the insurance money, the crews of such ships being almost entirely made up of those who, like Gales, are unable to secure employment elsewhere. In response to Traven’s *Death Ship*, Kraver writes:

Gales is the mouthpiece for the individualism and anarchism central to [Ret] Marut’s earlier work. The villains . . . are not those [individuals on the other death ship] who shanghai Gales. . . [rather,] the villains are industrialists, bankers, and capitalists who exploit the workers and destroy lives and ships for profit. . . Like Marut, Gales maintains a special loathing for bureaucrats who value identification papers over the individuals they identify. Ultimately, his anger with the bureaucracies that deny his existence transforms into a celebration of namelessness as the truest expression of individuality and freedom. (120)

From this, Kraver ultimately concludes the following:

Powerless before capitalists and bureaucracies, Gales longs for a place where he can remain nameless, “Where nobody molests me, where nobody wants to know who I am, where I come from, where I wish to go . . . *where I am free to do and to believe what I damn please as long as I do not harm the life, the health, and the honestly earned property of anybody else.*” (120; italics mine)

Kraver indicates (correctly, I think) that Gales’ response to whatever it is that antagonizes and molests him so is, understandably, to long for a life wherein he is left in peace.

However, there are several issues I see in the assessment that Kraver puts forward in this article, of which the passages quoted here are entirely representative. Kraver first implies that Gales is motivated philosophically, politically, and emotionally by sentiments which make it reasonable to conclude, as Kraver does, that Gales essentially stands for an anarchistic form of individualism. That might not be an unreasonable conclusion to reach on its own; but it certainly becomes problematic to square with the subsequent claims that Kraver makes in the sentences that follow this initial observation.

For instance, Kraver goes on to identify the villains in the story *not* as the

individuals who attack the ship that Gales is on, but aggregate groups whom Kraver terms “industrialists, bankers, and capitalists.” The problem lies in Kraver’s rationale for this assessment, which is given in a form that also acts as a definition for those terms – which is, that “industrialists, bankers, and capitalists” are those “who exploit . . . workers and destroy lives and ships for profit” (120).

Clearly, that characterization does not capture the objective, denotative meaning of the terms “industrialist,” “banker,” or “capitalist.” It *does*, however, reflect a particular contemporary connotation of those terms that is characteristic of modern critical theory, a connotation which, according to that theoretical approach, is always inherently negative, or “critical.”³

According to *The New Oxford English Dictionary*, the noun “capitalist” is defined as “a wealthy person who uses money to invest in trade and industry for profit in accordance with the principles of capitalism; [or] practicing, supporting, or based on the principles of capitalism.” And the abstract noun “capitalism” is defined as “an economic and political system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.” The term “wealthy” in the former definition is revealing because it implies that all capitalists are affluent and that individuals must have

³ *The New Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definitions: The term *industrialist* is defined as “a person involved in the ownership and management of industry.” ([Related terms:] The term *industry* is defined as “[1] economic activity concerned with the processing of raw materials and manufacture of goods in factories, a particular form or branch of economic or commercial activity, an activity or domain in which a great deal of time or effort is expended; [2] hard work.” The term *industrialization* is defined as “the development of industries in a country or region on a wide scale.”) The term *banker* is defined as “an officer or owner of a bank or group of banks.” ([Related terms:] The term *bank* is defined as “[1] a financial establishment that invests money deposited by customers, pays it out when required, makes loans at interest, and exchanges currency; [2] a stock of something available for use when required.”) The term *capitalist* and the related term *capitalism* are defined and discussed further in the pages that follow in this current chapter.

a good deal of capital to invest *any* money in a business or industry, and further that, unless they are “wealthy,” they are not perceived as capitalists. But that notion is incorrect. The term capitalist applies to all individuals and businesses in countries where the majority of economic transactions and holdings, whether industrial, technological, or agricultural, are owned and conducted by private enterprise rather than the state. All private business concerns operating in capitalist countries including America but also Britain, Germany, and other social democracies, are, properly speaking, capitalist.

The fact that the word “wealthy” has found its way into the general definition of capitalism is problematic because it excludes millions of small investors and those who, for example, are vested in large private corporations through their employers’ participation in retirement pension funds. This only seemingly objective denotation of *capitalist* is evidence that the pejorative connotations of terms specific to Critical Theory are making their way into mainstream discourse and are (for better or worse) beginning to redefine the way we understand basic models of economics and systems of government.⁴

The last line in the above passage from Kraver’s essay consists of a quotation

⁴ Further evincing the growing influence of Marxism beyond the discipline of Critical Theory, consider the preemptively loaded definition found in the Glossary section of the widely-used literary studies course textbook, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2004), edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. There, the entry “Capitalist, Capitalism” peremptorily reads as follows:

A way of conducting economic life that makes irrational self-interest paramount in human affairs, allows a small group to lay claim to the accumulated resources of the society, and exploits the work of the majority for the sake of increasing the privately accumulated wealth of the minority. Capitalism relies on the subordination of workers to the will of the wealthy. That subordination is enabled by ideology (word ideas such as ‘freedom’ that licenses the chaotic irrationality of the so-called market), vocational education to reinforce class distinctions, a legal regime that enforces inequality within the guise of formal equality, and police force. Capitalism resides on the myth of the ‘private’ ‘free’ ‘individual’ and requires the erasure of all the public, social, communal ingredients of supposedly private economic activity such as money, roads, schools, language, and the like. Anti-capitalist socialists advocate a change to an economy in which economic activity would be more publicly regulated and administered so that prices would be set at reasonable levels and compensation for labor would be set at high enough levels to assure a reasonable standard of living. The goal of the economy would not be the enrichment of the few but the overall good of the many. (Rivkin and Ryan 1583-84)

from *The Death Ship* itself, which (I believe) holds the key to untangling some of the incongruities that cast doubt on Kraver's conclusions. Those discrepancies are the cumulative result of imprecise definitions and inaccurate characterizations of important terms coupled with the conflation of several related but, in fact, separate and fundamentally distinct sociopolitical and economic concepts.

Again, Kraver quotes Traven's protagonist as longing for life in a place "where nobody molests me, where nobody wants to know who I am, where I come from, where I wish to go . . . *where I am free to do and to believe what I damn please as long as I do not harm the life, the health, and the honestly earned property of anybody else*" (120; italics mine). These words are remarkably similar to a passage from Locke's *Two Treatises* and, thus, may well evince a very different image from the greedy captains of industry and finance whom Kraver imagines. For, in Book II, Chapter II of that work, Locke claims that "[t]he state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that *being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions*" (102; italics mine).⁵

In that same article, Kraver also looks to Traven's novel, *The Cotton Pickers*, to suggest that Gales (the same American protagonist featured in *The Death Ship*) longs for independence and autonomy so desperately that he demonstrates almost a desire for complete isolation and dissociation from society altogether: "While driving cattle across

⁵ In the above-referenced passage, Locke describes the state of perfect liberty he believes people ought to be able to inhabit, which closely resembles that which is called "non-interference" by modern-day Libertarians. Although based largely on Hobbes' hypothetical "state of nature," Locke is less inclined to insist on the inevitability that life in that state would be a perpetual "war of all against all" (Hobbes 77).

Mexico, [Gales] celebrates his independence and contemplates individuality as it is reflected in the cattle” (121).

In the following passage, Kraver quotes and then responds to additional portions of *The Cotton Pickers*:

“[The herd] was a heaving sea of gigantic vitality . . . each pair of horns represented a life in itself, a life with its own will, its own desires, its own thoughts and feelings” (183). . . . However, Gales’ joy is short-lived. When he returns to Tampico, he is accused of being a Wobbly and union organizer. Gales steadfastly denies any political or union affiliation: “I never say anything to such men. I keep mum, and let others do the talking. So, it beats me, everywhere I go people say I’m a Wobbly, a troublemaker” (200). Gales embraces no particular political platform. He advocates only individual freedom. By the conclusion of *The Cotton Pickers*, however, he is frustrated by the fact that people “must always interfere in another person’s affairs” (200). (Kraver 121)

Here, again, Kraver – without realizing it – homes in on a passage that suggests, to me, a clear connection to the work of Thomas Hobbes. In Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, Leviathan is actually the name that Hobbes gives to his imagined conceptualization of the Commonwealth, which he describes in that text as a giant thriving mass of all of the individuals making up the citizenry of the Commonwealth (or “the people”) – each of whom having his/her own thoughts, interests, enterprises, etc. – together, giving rise, life, and authority to the Sovereign (ruler, leader, or governing body) of the Commonwealth.⁶

That description appears as follows in the introductory chapter of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*:

For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protection and defence it is intended; and in which the *Soveraignty* is an Artificial *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The *Magistrates*, and other *Officers* of Judicature and Execution, artificiall *Joynts*; *Reward* and *Punishment* (by which fastned to the seate of the *Soveraignty*, every joynt and member is moved to performe

⁶ I discuss this more fully in Chapters 2 and 3 of the present study.

his duty) are the *Nerves*, that do the same in the Body Naturall; The *Wealth* and *Riches* of all the particular members, are the *Strength*; *Salus Populi* (the *peoples safety*) its *Business*; *Counsellors*, by whom all things needfull for it to know, are suggested unto it, are the *Memory*; *Equity* and *Lawes*, an artificiall *Reason* and *Will*; *Concord*, *Health*; *Sedition*, *Sicknesse*; and *Civill war*, *Death*. Lastly, the *Pacts* and *Covenants*, by which the parts of this Body Politique were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that *Fiat*, or the *Let us make man*, pronounced by God in the Creation.” (*Leviathan*, Introduction xxxiv.)

The sort of confusion inherent in the claims that Kraver puts forward are representative of those present in much of the existing scholarship addressing Traven’s fiction, *Sierra Madre* included.

Melina Marie Mandelbaum’s 2021 study of Traven’s *The Death Ship* (“Administering Exclusion: Statelessness, Identity Papers and Narrative Strategy in B. Traven’s *Das Totenschiff*”) posits an interpretation of that novel which comes closer than any other scholarly work I have seen to expressing sentiments which align reasonably well with my own views concerning *Sierra Madre*, due largely to Mandelbaum avoiding the above-described tendency to assume (seemingly by default) the Critical connotations of terms, rather than using their denotatively precise definitions, which I believe (and which Mandelbaum appears, similarly, to understand) are required in order to capture accurately the meaning and the underlying import of Traven’s political and economic vocabulary. For Mandelbaum, *The Death Ship* features

an ambiguous, quasi-anonymous hero without a past who is struggling to find a secure place in society, . . . [the book] presents a scathing critique of state bureaucracy and raises questions about the nature of authority, identity, home, and belonging in communal life. . . . In the wake of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, and an environment of profound and fast-paced social, political, economic and cultural transformation, modes of articulation of communal life, governance and the relationship between individuals and collectives became subjects of intense revision and contestation. One of the central concepts around which these contestations

crystallized was citizenship . . . which “concentrates, in a particularly clear manner, the tension between individualization and belonging,” . . . [and indeed] citizenship became the dominant form of social and political membership in the early twentieth century. By the same token, citizenship’s opposite – statelessness – emerged as one of the most potent legal and symbolic signifiers of exclusion, non-belonging, and social (as well as often material) homelessness. (186)

Mandelbaum focuses on the narrative voice and structure of that novel, as well as the motif of the passport, to discuss the issues of citizenship, statelessness, and bureaucracy, which she correctly implies are the inevitable result of big government – that is, of a State more concerned with developing its own internal systems, processes, and procedures for maximizing its control and further cementing its authority over (rather than serving the interests of) its people. On this, Mandelbaum writes the following:

By disrupting established ways of narrating the dynamics of individualization and belonging, . . . [*The Death Ship*] reveals some of the complex elements of bureaucratically administered exclusion in objects such as the passport. . . . The novel is narrated in an unreliable and often satirical voice, which does not reveal conclusive biographical facts about its owner. As in Traven’s entire oeuvre, the narrative voice oscillates between the recounting of subjective experience and detached, seemingly omniscient, political comment. Interspersed throughout the often circular narration of Gales’s destiny of effective statelessness are several life stories of other stateless persons, and didactic passages reflecting on the cruelty of the bureaucratic state system and mechanisms of exploitation. (186-187)

That said, Mandelbaum also claims to “examine Traven’s novel in the light of the history of bureaucracy and statelessness that surrounded and drove its production” and to “show that Traven provides a compelling critique of modern structures of communal organization” by “reading the novel alongside relevant texts from political theory” (Mandelbaum 186-187).

As stated earlier, my own research draws upon the political theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, in whose works are found the origins and many of the fundamental

principles crucial to an adequate understanding of political science and economics, the study of which, therefore, continues to be regarded as essential within those disciplines.

By contrast, the political theories that Mandelbaum discusses in her essay date back only to the 1920s, thus limiting her analysis to works of that historical period. She fails to connect the original German version of that work, *Das Totenschiff* (1926), or its English translation, *The Death Ship* (1934), to these foundational older works of the British Enlightenment which may actually have influenced Traven most, especially considering how often passages in Traven's work (*Sierra Madre*, in particular) seem to be drawn straight from texts written by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith.⁷

A chapter titled "In 'A Far-Off Land': B. Traven's Mexican Stories" appears in Karl Guthke's *Exploring the Interior: Essays on Literary and Cultural History* (2018). There, Guthke accepts a proposed identity for Traven (i.e. the aforementioned Ret Marut). Again, this biographical approach is problematic given the mystery surrounding who Traven actually was. In Guthke's chapter, several important themes are identified. In addition to adumbrating the general socio-political and economic ambience of virtually all of Traven's fiction, Guthke states the following:

Traven's work produced during the mid to late twenties and early thirties . . . was critically, if indirectly, connected with the socio-political life of the increasingly turbulent Weimar Republic, notably with its left-of-center ideological factions. [T]hey championed the downtrodden, the disenfranchised, and the ignored of early twentieth-century society – proletarians one and all, whether they were stateless sailors or itinerant American laborers in the oil-fields near Tampico or . . . *indios* enslaved by their colonial Spanish masters. (155)

⁷ I explore this in greater detail in later chapters of the present dissertation, most notably in Chapters 5 and 6.

Guthke further describes *The Death Ship* as “a philosophical reflection on the tyranny of the supposedly enlightened and humane capitalist bureaucracy” (160) and *The Cotton Pickers* as a transitional piece in which Traven experiments with a theme which he would develop further in later works, one which many scholars have agreed would become one of Traven’s signatures – often characterizing it in terms similar to Guthke’s “communality of the *indios*’ lifestyle vs. European and American money-grubbing and selfishness” (161). Additionally, Guthke characterizes *Sierra Madre*, as well as Traven’s *The Bridge in the Jungle* and *The White Rose*, as works in which “the Indian idyll, austere as it is in its own way, is threatened by the presence of Americans who are out to exploit its resources and ‘civilize’ the native population” (161).

The incongruity of the phrase “capitalist bureaucracy,” the use of the terms “money-grubbing” and “selfishness” to describe American and European capitalists, and the association of Americans with colonialist and imperialist motives that is evident in such characterizations of Americans as those “who are out to exploit its resources and ‘civilize’ the native population” (161) appear, once again, to indicate a reliance on a loaded understanding of capitalism that is specific to Critical Theory. Employing this “Critical” connotation of “capitalism” instead of its more accurate, value-neutral definition is a mistake on the part of scholars when it comes to Traven’s work, given how many passages especially in *Sierra Madre* seem derived from the respective works of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith – three works that, together, comprise the foundation for the system of economics that would eventually become known as capitalism.

However, Guthke also hints at the limitations of critics’ unexamined assumptions about capitalism more than most scholars have been willing to do, admitting that

[t]here is a certain naivete “unspoilt” by “civilization” about some of the *indios* that come into focus in [a number of Traven’s short stories], but shrewd is the observer who can tell where it shades into deviousness or where an innocent becomes a clever crook. . . . Cunning is everywhere in the Mexican bush and its villages, and all too often the line is hard to draw between criminal fraud and mere deviousness when it comes to outwitting the white man. . . . Crooks rule the day. . . . Theft and armed robbery are orders of the day in the bush. If one needs to organize a wedding on a shoestring, a nearby American farmer will find that two of his cows are missing . . . [or] a chief of police reveal[ing] his monumental incompetence [demonstrates] that organized banditry is rampant. And it was always so, and in all classes of society. . . . Violence is the law of the land. (169-171)

This description is virtually indistinguishable from the harsh, implacable conditions in *the state of nature* (conceptualized by Hobbes, adapted by Locke, and tacitly accepted by Smith) that defines societies where government and the rule of law do not exist. Indeed, Hobbes’ famous declaration in Part I, Chapter 13 of *Leviathan* claims that “the life of man” in “the state of nature” is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 77).

Importantly, Guthke also points to the long history of exploitation of the rural native population wrought by the Catholic Church in that region of Mexico as well. In his view, the fact that the *indios* (and other locals) are “enslaved and exploited by both the government and the Church” contributes to readers seeing the Indians of Traven’s tales as sympathetic despite their equal propensity for fraud and general criminal malfeasance. This runs counter to the way readers generally perceive the non-native characters in these tales as more heinous, though their crimes are similar to those committed by the indigenous population in Traven’s fiction.

What Guthke’s analysis hints at, but never explicitly states or fully realizes, is that this unequal ascription of villainy by critics (and their readers) is the result of applying to the characters of European origin the blanket critical evaluation of self-interested,

exploitative capitalists.

The rampant exploitation of the masses by the Catholic Church in Mexico (or, “New Spain,” as it was called throughout most of Europe, terminology adopted from the Spanish Crown’s colonialist forces better known as “Conquistadors”) is a prominent antagonistic force in Traven’s *Sierra Madre* as well. Hence, Guthke’s analysis of this element makes the following point particularly important: that regardless of the penalties and deterrents put in place by Church leaders through their doctrines, all that any religious institution, organization, or tradition can expect from those on whom they impose their beliefs (by force, by coercion, or by both) is merely a superficial, outward expression of piety. The reason is that *true faith can never be forced*.

Sierra Madre proffers a parallel to this truth in its evident familiarity with the foundational lesson in *Leviathan*, where Hobbes dispels the previously-held, longstanding traditional belief in the divine right of kings in favor of the notion that a sovereign entity (royal, oligarchical, or democratic) properly holds power over subjects or citizens only by means of a mutually beneficial contract. This sentiment is also present and centrally important within Locke’s, as well as Smith’s, respective doctrines; and it is a fundamental principle of paramount importance also reflected in the founding documents, and judicial and political systems, of the United States of America since its founding.

I next turn to Michael L. Baumann’s “B. Traven: Realist and Prophet” (1977), an article which raises several noteworthy points that are consequential to my own research, and which, therefore, warrant attention in the pages that follow.

Focusing on Traven’s 1928 *Land des Frühlings* (*Land of Spring*) – the only book

of non-fiction ever authored by Traven, which he declined to have published in English⁸ – Baumann offers the following assessment of those human sentiments which he sees as mattering most in Traven’s work: “Individual ambition, greed, and lust for power—*these* [Baumann claims] are the motives that drive white men to action, and it is this triad of vices that makes whites exploit, enslave, and kill other human beings [in those literary works]” (77).

However, in the same article, Baumann also states that

In [Traven’s] eyes, the [Mexican] Indians are the only genuine Christians on earth, though . . . [Traven] does not call them that. [Traven *does* write that] “[t]he interests of the Indian . . . never deviate[s] from the interests of the community. His interests are identical with the interests of all, without his even being aware of the fact.” (77; quotation from *Land of Spring*)

In fact, Traven’s description of the Indians’ interests referenced by Baumann in the above passage is remarkably analogous to Adam Smith’s concept of “self-interest” and the famous “invisible hand” metaphor for which he is perhaps best known, which Smith used to describe the self-regulating nature of the free market and to explain how the free-market system of economics is not only profitable, but morally sound as well.

As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. *He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.* Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own

⁸ Like many Traven scholars, Baumann makes it clear at the outset of his article that he too subscribes to the theory mentioned earlier that posits B. Traven to be the German far-left revolutionary Ret Marut (a hypothesis which, again, has no proven basis in fact and which, therefore cannot legitimately serve as a conclusive launching point for evaluating Traven’s work).

interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it. (Smith 572; italics mine)

Additionally, Baumann claims that, in many Traven texts, including *Sierra Madre*,

Traven makes every effort to have his white readers understand the Mexican Indians' simple demands, their human dignity—and their communal sense. Although Traven finds it difficult to describe that communal sense, he returns to . . . [that] notion . . . again and again and sets it off against European and American individualism. The phrase "communal sense" becomes an almost chiliastic invocation in *Land [of Spring]*. Communal life, . . . organized in communes and made possible by people who are rational and generous enough not to be constantly in each other's hair, or, worse, at each other's throats, has been the dream of most philosophical anarchists, including Traven. A note of nostalgia for the communes of the past is sounded in *Land*, a longing for the way Traven believes the Indians on the North American continent used to live before the white man came and brought with him the institution of the state." (Baumann 80)

Interestingly, Adam Smith speaks of the deleterious effects of State intrusion in terms similar to those that Baumann uses to describe the point that Traven makes in several of his works of fiction. For, in Part IV, Chapter II of his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith writes as follows:

What is the species of domestic industry which his capital can employ, and of which the produce is likely to be of the greatest value, *every individual, it is evident, can, in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him.* The statesman, who should attempt to direct people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it. (Smith 572-73; italics mine)

Again, although most of the scholarship to which I have just responded focuses primarily or entirely on Traven works other than *Sierra Madre*, many of the same themes,

including a pronounced contrast between native self-reliance and State intrusiveness, are present too in *Sierra Madre*. These include corruption, greed, and materialism, which the scholars whom I have cited generally ascribe to invasive, non-native “capitalists” and “industrialists” as shown above. But in *Sierra Madre* the negative embodiment of these themes is at least as attributable to the intimidating force of organized religion; to expatriation, which scholars have tended to associate with issues of citizenship, nationality and “statelessness,” and the rampant banditry that abounds in the novel (e.g., the brutal band of thieves who decapitate the character Dobbs near the conclusion of the book).

These characters, decidedly lacking in Traven’s prized “communal sense,” are not motivated by capitalist competition but by base human greed and by their physical superiority over their victims; in this most brute state of nature, Hobbes tells us that “there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain.” There is only the ceaseless “war of every man against every man,” in which superior strength wins the day; for without the “common power” of a social contract administered by an accepted sovereign, only “force” and “fraud” (now become “two cardinal virtues”) can win that war (Hobbes 77).

An important aspect of my work here comes from an acceptance of a fact that some academics have been more willing than others to admit: that Hobbes, Locke, and Smith shared certain values in common which can be seen in the respective systems of political philosophy put forth by each. One such principle that is highly important to the argument I posit in the chapters that follow is that Hobbes, Locke, and Smith shared in

common the understanding that individuals who are not allowed to own property are therefore slaves.

For, as most of us even today are quick to understand, persons who labor entirely for the benefit of others rather than for themselves because they are not legally permitted to own property (including money they might otherwise earn in exchange for their labor) are, therefore, slaves, since their labor is (as Abraham Lincoln argues tirelessly) being “stolen” from them and the fruits of their labor never benefit them.⁹

It is with this in mind that Hobbes, Locke, and Smith and other thinkers of the British Enlightenment recognized property rights as the primary mechanism by which individual liberty and sovereignty are secured, and that the liberty and sovereignty of the individual ought to be the goal and chief object of preservation in and by civilizations, societies, governments, and the governed (“the people”), precisely because the consequence of failing to do so is that the people live their lives as de facto slaves, exploited under, and solely for the benefit of, tyrannical leaders or governments.

In fact, when Traven’s three miners finally begin to unearth substantial quantities of gold from their mine, Howard points out that they now must consider a host of additional questions that come with owning and managing property of their own. Traven speaks through his characters to voice political, cultural, and social views that (like Hobbes, Locke, and Smith) imagine the individual as primary and the state as secondary.

As previously mentioned, most Traven scholarship puts forth a Marxist interpretation of Traven’s fiction and claims that his works demonstrate a critical stance

⁹ One’s “property” generally includes the money he or she makes from working. Therefore, when I speak of “persons who are not allowed to own property,” I am speaking about persons who are not paid for the work they do. Persons who work but never get paid are called “slaves.”

toward American free-market capitalism, viewing America's economic policies and the philosophical and ideological belief in ideals such as "rugged individualism" and "self-made entrepreneurship" as being characteristic of a society in which there is rampant exploitation of the laboring classes and underrepresented minority groups.

Admittedly, there are passages in *Sierra Madre* which might at first glance appear to support such a conclusion. Two terms in particular stand out as likely signposts which, to the untrained eye, could cause passive readers prematurely to interpret the novel according to a Critical Marxist perspective. Those terms are "proletariat" and "Bolshevik." There are several points in the novel where the latter term appears and even fewer where Traven uses the former. However, it is important to treat at least a few of those passages here, in order to challenge what scholars have traditionally concluded from these passages, and to argue instead (as I attempt to do in the pages that follow) that in fact Traven's inclusion of these terms ought to be interpreted very differently.¹⁰

The term "proletarian" first appears in *Sierra Madre* a few sentences after the conversation during which Traven's three miners discuss whether or not it is wise to register their mine with the Mexican authorities, effectively conducting a cost-benefit analysis, weighing the pros and cons of submitting the required paperwork to the Mexican government in order to legalize their claim to the gold yielded from the mine.

The following passage from the novel provides the details of their thinking which ultimately leads them to conclude that the less the government knows about their

¹⁰ The term "proletariat" appears first on page 85 of *Sierra Madre*, a mere five sentences after the above-quoted long passage in which Traven's miners discuss whether or not to register their mine with the Mexican authorities. That term next appears a few paragraphs later on page 86. The term "Bolshevik" appears four times in the novel, on pages 170, 236, 239, and 260.

property (their gold), the better, since they have nothing to gain, but much to lose, by informing the Mexican government of the gold they now possess.

Occasionally the question was brought up as to legalizing their claim and obtaining the license necessary to mine [t]here. It did not cost a fortune, but the government was very particular about this permit and stood ready to collect its legal share of the profits. It was not because the fellows wanted to cheat the government of its taxes that they were reluctant to have the claim registered. Many other considerations caused them to avoid letting the government know what was going on. The government as such was honest and trustworthy in every respect. But who could guarantee the honesty of the petty officials, of the chief of police in the nearest town, of the little mayor of the nearest village, of the general of the nearest military post? Who was to vouch for the character of the clerk in the government's office? On filing the claim with the authorities the exact location [of the mine] . . . had to be given. The three men were of little consequence; even the American ambassador could give little protection should it happen that they got into trouble. It happened in this country that chiefs of police, mayors of towns, congressmen, and even generals were implicated in cases of kidnapping for ransom and in open banditry. The government, both state and federal, could at any time confiscate not only the whole field but every ounce of gold the men had mined with so much labor and pain. While the three miners were at work they would be well guarded. Only when on their way back with their hard-earned loads would they be waylaid or hijacked by a party of fake bandits acting under orders from someone who was paid by the people to protect the country from bandits. Things like that have happened *even* in the country to the north; why not here?¹¹ It is the influence of the atmosphere of the continent. (85; italics mine)

Traven continues:

The three partners knew both sides, and knew them well. Now their battle was only with nature. Once they had their claim registered, there was every possibility of facing a long fight with more dangerous foes. Apart from the taxes paid to the government, they might have to pay all sorts of racketeers, or, as they called them here, coyotes, and so reach port again with but a small percentage of their profit left in their pockets. There was still another danger, which might be most serious of all. A great mining company in good standing

¹¹ I italicize the word "even" in this line of *Sierra Madre* because I find Traven's use of that word particularly telling, as it suggests that Traven's American protagonists are implying that such events did *not* usually happen in the United States. Traven's characters, therefore, appear to suggest that, although corruption can happen occasionally in any civil society, most of the time, the American system is *not* corrupt and that (therefore) it is not an inherently corrupt system. This supports my thesis that Traven's novel is not reflexively anti-American nor anti-capitalist in nature, as most scholars have assumed.

with the government or certain officials might receive word of the filing of the claim. How long would these three miserable proletarians last after the great company started to bring before the courts claims of prior rights to this field, with some native puppet ready to swear away the blue sky for a hundred pesos? (85)¹²

At this point, it is important to note that the old and wise prospector Howard (by far the most knowledgeable and experienced of the three) makes the following statement, effectively declaring where he stands on the matter.

“Here you see for yourselves, provided you have brains to think with, that, much as we want to, we can’t afford to be honest with the government.” Howard finished up his explanation. “I certainly don’t like to cheat anybody out of a just share in my profits, not even a government. . . . [W]e have no alternative. Not alone our earnings but our life and health depend upon forgetting about the license.” . . . So the question of the license was settled. If you have a license, you are not protected at all against bandits or racketeers. If nobody knows what you have, you have a better chance of safety. The bush is so wide and the Sierra is so great and lonely that you disappear and nobody knows where you are or what has befallen you. (86)

The above passage communicates a sentiment that appears also in other works of Traven’s fiction as well, as many scholars have noted. That sentiment is expressed here by Traven’s three miners but has, in several of Traven’s other novels (*The Death Ship*, *The Cotton Pickers*, “The Night Visitor”), been conveyed through the protagonist Gerard

¹² In Part 4, Chapter 5 of his *Democracy in America* (1835), Alexis de Tocqueville points out that “mines are . . . natural sources of industrial wealth. As industry has developed in Europe, as the production of the mines becomes of more general interest and their profitability is made more difficult because of the division of ownership which is brought about by equality, most governments have claimed the right to possess the ground which contains the mines and to supervise the work; *that has never been the case with any other kind of property*. Mines, which were private property, subject to the same obligations and provided with the same guarantees as other real estate, have thus fallen into the public domain. It is the state which works them or leases them out; the owners are transformed in to tenants, obtaining their rights from the state, and, furthermore, the state claims practically everywhere the power to direct them; it lays down rules, imposes methods, subjects them to constant inspection, and, if they resist, an administrative court will dispossess them and the public administration transfers their rights to others. Thus, the government possesses not only the mines but has all the miners under its thumb. However, as industry develops, the working of the old mines increases. New ones are opened up. The mining population expands and grows. Each day, the sovereign governments expand their domain beneath our feet and people them with their agents.” (Tocqueville 798; italics mine)

Gales featured in the three Traven works mentioned above. The message, however, is the same in *Sierra Madre* as it is in those other works, and that is that the characters who make this point are essentially saying that they want to be left alone to live their lives and manage their affairs for and by themselves without the intrusion, interference, or regulation and predation of their hard-earned money or property by bandits, legal or otherwise. The frustration they feel is evident; and the repeated inclusion of this sentiment in Traven's works makes it not only a hallmark of his fiction but also a highly important one at which scholars and readers alike must give more than merely a passing glance in order to appreciate fully and understand accurately the meaning Traven intends.

The critical Marxist interpretation of *Sierra Madre* undoubtedly seems likely to be reinforced when the terms "proletariat" and "Bolshevik" appear in the novel. For example, the paragraph that concludes the chapter in which the miners discuss registering their mine reads as follows (the final sentences of which I suspect often contribute to readers incorrectly assuming a Marxist interpretation of the text):

The discussion about the registration of their claim brought comprehension of their changed standing in life. With every ounce more of gold possessed by them they left the proletarian class and neared that of the property-holders, the well-to-do middle class. So far they had never had anything of value to protect against thieves. Since they now owned certain riches, their worries about how to protect them had started. The world no longer looked to them as it had a few weeks ago. They had become members of the minority of mankind. Those who up to this time had been considered by them as their proletarian brethren were now enemies against whom they had to protect themselves. As long as they had owned nothing of value, they had been slaves of their hungry bellies, slaves to those who had the means to fill their bellies. All this was changed now. They had reached the first step by which man becomes the slave of his property. (86-87)

On the surface, this might sound something like Karl Marx's description of the working class living and working as slaves under, and for the benefit of, the business and

property-owning class, whom he refers to (rather problematically, and confusingly) as “capitalists;” while the working class he calls “proletarians.” This, however, is *not* what Traven means to imply. A close reading of the passage in question, along with a more thorough consideration of this passage in the broader context of the novel’s plot, evinces instead a connection to the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, the first two of whom predate Marx’s work by nearly two centuries.

Helmut F. Pfanner speaks to this in “Slaves of Property: A Comparison of B. Traven’s *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and Ilf-Petrov’s *The Twelve Chairs*,” which appears as an essay in Ernst Schürer’s and Philip Jenkins’ *B. Traven: Life and Work* (1986). In that essay, Pfanner writes the following:

Perhaps there is no greater disagreement in today’s world than the way in which material property is conceived by the two major ideological systems. While the followers of capitalism defend the right to personal possession as a means to economic and industrial growth, the advocates of socialism want all property to be state-owned for the same purpose. What divides the social theorists of the East and the West is thus not so much the question of wealth as such, since it is deemed necessary for the progress on both sides, as the problem of its distribution and ownership. But there is also the belief, almost as old as mankind itself, that the quest for material possessions enslaves the will of man and his power of moral action. The positive as well as the negative aspects of this question converge in the highly ambivalent position of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who both approved of wealth and condemned it in different parts of his book [*The Social Contract* (1762)]. The seeming contradiction in Rousseau’s thinking can be resolved if his once positive, once negative judgment of property is applied not to the material goods themselves but to man’s way of handling them. Being basically “a product of human convention and devising,” property, like other products of human artifice, has a two-sided edge for good or evil [(Keohane, N. O. “Rousseau on Life, Liberty, and Property: A Comment on MacAdam,” in *Theories of Property*, 203-17; the quotation is from p. 204.). (Pfanner, in Schürer and Jenkins, 337)

Based on the above, Pfanner presents this primary theme in Traven’s *Sierra Madre* in terms of the corrosive effects of the “accumulation of property” on “man’s moral action”

(337). However, Pfanner's analysis is based much more firmly in the tradition of moral philosophy than that produced by most other scholars. Though I do not necessarily agree with all of Pfanner's views, his approach is refreshing as it considers the novel in terms of economics and political philosophy as well as considerations about slavery.

Additionally, Pfanner considers Traven's representation of the Catholic Church and organized religion, in general, "as an institution which took part in the colonial exploitation of the Mexican Indians" (Pfanner 341).¹³

"Greed," according to Pfanner, "is a universal human trait . . . and the slaves of property which Traven . . . depict[s] are timeless human characters who exist under [all] . . . form[s] of government" (342). Indeed, Pfanner suggests that greed exists and presents a potential danger to individuals in both capitalist and socialist societies, and claims that neither system can prevent/protect against the deleterious effects of this vice. I find Pfanner's reading unsatisfactory and will here offer details to support my counter-interpretation.

Ultimately, Pfanner concludes that Traven "see[s] greed as a universal trait which is not connected to any political system" (343). In fact, Pfanner maintains that Traven, "in his judgment of man's ability to control his greed for material possession, . . . [views]

¹³ As I mentioned earlier in the present chapter, scholars have often pointed to a particular passage in Traven's *The Cotton Pickers* which captures Gales' philosophical musings at their most dramatic and passionate and most seemingly aware of his organic, almost spiritual, connection with the enormous herd of longhorn cattle he has successfully driven hundreds of miles. This is the passage which I suggested sounds very much like Thomas Hobbes' description and characterization of his Leviathan – that is, his illustration of the Commonwealth, made up of, and animated by, masses of individuals commonly referred to as "the people." (It is interesting to note that, in the above-mentioned scene in which Gales marvels at his cattle and his psychic connection to them, one could argue that, in this part of that work, *Gales* might be said to be the Sovereign [of the Commonwealth], *the cattle*, the citizenry [of that Commonwealth]) and *the cattle drive* the Commonwealth [itself (as a whole)].)

the problem [as] . . . not one of politics, but [one] of the individual human character” (343).

While I see merit in Pfanner’s observation that succumbing to the temptations of money and the inclination of individuals to become (in Pfanner’s words) “enslaved by property,” and motivated by greed has mostly to do with a person’s individual character rather than being inevitable for all persons living under a particular political system, I emphatically disagree with the first part of Pfanner’s conclusion: that is, that this issue of greed was, for Traven (as he presents it in *Sierra Madre*) not at all political.

Notwithstanding what has just been said about individual character determining the likelihood that an individual will become consumed by greed, it is my position that Traven was well aware that collectivist systems have corruption and greed built into them from the start, while capitalist systems simply harbor participants who sometimes succumb to the temptations of greed and corruptibility.

In my opinion, it ought to be clear to anyone reading Traven’s work – “provided [they] have brains to think with,” as he puts it in *Sierra Madre* – that Traven was quite familiar with the formal and practical differences between the various forms and types of political and economic systems – and with the defining characteristics that distinguish (socialist and communist) *collectivist* societies from *capitalist* societies, in particular. Ultimately, I maintain that Traven used his fiction as a vehicle for raising his own concerns and warning others about what he saw as symptoms of expanding and increasingly corrupt, dictatorial, and exploitative regimes during his lifetime. Such oppressive governance also consistently appears to be operating wherever in the world Traven’s protagonists find themselves in his fiction, his scathing criticism of such

corruption and oppression on the part of those in power being made possible only under the protection that satire has long provided.

Additionally, for most of Traven's works, there is a decade or so that separates their publication in the original German (in the 1920s) and the subsequent English-language publication of those works (in the 1930s). I believe that this gap between the publications of the German and English editions of Traven's works is attributable to what must have been Traven's concern that, starting in the 1930s, the U.S. federal government had begun implementing collectivist-style social and economic policies that were uncharacteristic of America up until that point. The most consequential of those policies were, of course, the various programs and legislation included in President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal (enacted between 1933-1939) that were meant to mitigate the financial ills and social suffering experienced during the Great Depression that followed the Stock Market Crash of 1929 by using unprecedented government intervention in, and artificial manipulation and regulation of, the economy.

Also important to mention here are the claims put forth by Lawrence D. Taylor in "B. Traven's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and the Continuing Allure of 'Gold Glitter' in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands Region" (2018) as well as those registered in a chapter titled "The Anarchist Imagination and the Materiality of Cultural Production: Anonymous Authorship in B. Traven" contributed by Scott Drake to Jeff Shantz's edited volume *Specters of Anarchy: Literature and the Anarchist Imagination* (2015). Like many other scholars, Lawrence D. Taylor asserts that Traven's *Sierra Madre* "has long been recognized as a noteworthy tale of greed and adventure" (Taylor 678), writing that

While most of the novel's action takes place in the Mexican gulf port of Tampico and the sierra region of Durango, certain important background elements, in the form of stories or parables told by the old prospector Howard are rooted in the history of the western U.S.-Mexico borderlands. . . . [Taylor argues that] this region is still in large part motivated by a "gold rush mentality" in its quest for new sources of wealth in order to provide jobs and sustenance for increasingly affluent lifestyles and extravagant tastes.¹⁴ This, in turn, [Taylor claims] has put considerable pressure on the maintenance of an equilibrium between resources and human consumption and between economic growth and the preservation of natural spaces. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, with its frequent references to Mexico's colonial past and tales concerning lost gold mines in New Spain's northern borderlands, provides, perhaps more than any other novel of the modern era, the perfect dramatic synopsis of the evolution of the gold rush syndrome in North America, as well as the strains and conflicts that it has produced throughout its history. (Taylor 678-679)

The work by Scott Drake similarly provides a focused analysis of the parable-like sub-stories that appear at various points in Traven's *Sierra Madre*. As its title suggests, Drake's article posits that in Traven's lifelong dedication to maintaining his anonymity, and in the literature that he produced (*Sierra Madre*, in particular), there exists evidence of political leanings that Drake believes to be "anarchistic" in nature. However, one cannot help but notice immediately that what Drake calls "anarchism" is defined in his article specifically as a reaction against the exploitation and other perceived evils of *capitalism* (despite that being no part of the *actual* definition of the term).

In response to the above overview of the Traven scholarship that exists to date, I offer an alternative interpretation: that Traven's *oeuvre* in general, and *Sierra Madre* in particular, evinces a more complex and ambivalent political frame of reference than has been acknowledged in some of the facile conclusions (and uneasy concessions) in the extant criticism surveyed above. Thus, my project suggests that Traven's concern for the

¹⁴ One might call this "upward mobility."

rights of individuals and his focus on the relationship between the individual and the state, as well as the state's proper role in the lives of individuals, all derive in large part from the ideas — and often in the very language — of the British Enlightenment, of which the central tenets of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith are entirely representative.

Indeed, I believe that *Sierra Madre* advances a complex reflection upon the relationship between politics and economics (or, more accurately, the Marxist tendency to conflate the two), between “the people” and their government, and between the individual (the ordinary citizen) and those who occupy positions of power. Although there has been a tendency among scholars to paint a broad-brush, reflexively anti-imperialist, dismissively negative portrait (based on an inherently Marxist definition) of “capitalism” in Traven’s work (a case admittedly easy to make at first glance), I believe that there is nevertheless substantial evidence to conclude that this standard reading of the universe of ideas in Traven’s fiction is a reductive and unsatisfactory instance of radical sloganeering that does a disservice to the richness of *Sierra Madre*.

With that in mind, I offer a more nuanced appreciation of *Sierra Madre* in the chapters that follow. I begin (in Chapter 2) by looking at how historians of ideas have connected the principles central to the respective political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, before providing an overview (in Chapter 3) of those ideas that can be seen reflected throughout *Sierra Madre* and prove most consequential in terms of illuminating the true nature of the political philosophy and political economy that I believe Traven’s novel endorses.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HOBBS-LOCKE-SMITH CONNECTION: HOW HISTORIANS OF IDEAS HAVE CONNECTED THE WORKS OF THESE THREE PHILOSOPHERS

As stated in my introductory chapter, I believe that many of those principles important to the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith are also important to the political philosophy and political economy ultimately endorsed in Traven's *Sierra Madre* (which, again, I argue aligns best with the platform of contemporary social and political Libertarianism). Therefore, in this chapter, I look at how historians of ideas have traditionally and more recently associated the works and connected the ideas and principles found in the respective systems of political philosophy proposed by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith in their seminal texts. The scholarship I point to in this chapter demonstrates that all three philosophers can be connected to the tradition of natural law-social contract classical liberalism, and consequently, that all three can be seen as contributing to the framework of the systems of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism.¹ To accomplish this, in the pages that follow I attempt to show how those principles can be traced back to the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith as well as how they progressed and changed as they passed from each philosopher to the next.

In light of the myriad points of connection between Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), it is perhaps surprising to learn that, during the two centuries following Locke's death in 1704 (for, it was only after Locke's

¹ This is essentially what I mean to imply when I say "Hobbes-Locke-Smith Connection" – a term I use throughout the present dissertation to refer to the common philosophical underpinnings that connect the three political philosophers, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith (references to whose works I see reflected throughout *Sierra Madre*, and which I further argue help define the political philosophy and political economy that I believe the novel ultimately endorses).

death that documentation emerged in which Locke officially claimed authorship of the *Two Treatises*, which had until then been published anonymously), most scholars studied, taught, and classified the two writers and their works in isolation from one another.

As Thomas Pangle and Timothy Burns point out in *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (2015), Locke never mentions Hobbes or *Leviathan* by name in the Second of his *Two Treatises* and only once, in passing, in the First. This is because, although Locke accepted Hobbes' radically subversive rejection of the exalted classical and biblical views of human nature that had spawned traditional Aristotelian and Thomistic accounts of each individual's innate moral ideas as the building blocks of a civil social order, he also perceived "that Hobbes had failed to grasp the correct way to advocate an innovative and shocking teaching, . . . [in Hobbes'] novel, lowered, but true view of human nature" (Pangle and Burns 278).

In reality, Locke adopts most of the principles and tenets comprising the political system that Hobbes had described decades earlier in *Leviathan* (1651) as the basis for the one Locke presents in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), thus "hid[ing] its radicalism under a veil of apparently conservative rhetoric" which he believed would prove more agreeable to dissenting British Anglicans and Protestants of the seventeenth century (Pangle and Burns 278).

Recent scholarship has also supported this connection between these two works, acknowledging that, whatever additional claims Locke brings to the table (regarding the role of government, the natural limit of its power, and the importance of property rights as the primary mechanism of securing individual liberty), they are built upon, and are meant to follow logically from, the fundamental laws and principles that Hobbes' system

mandates.²

Therefore, while Locke is widely regarded today as the “father of Classical Liberalism” – well-known for his insistence on the primacy of the individual over the State and his notion that private property is the chief mechanism by which individual liberty is realized – earning that status would have been unimaginable for Locke had he not succeeded in incorporating Hobbes’ conceptions of the “state of nature, natural rights, and . . . acquisitive individualism, in such a way as to make those ideas no longer shocking to [the] moralism and Christian piety” of his generally British, Protestant contemporary reading audience (Pangle and Burns 279).

His skillful use of the language of the Bible and Christian rhetoric, in general, allowed Locke to say in biblical and religious language that which Hobbes had presented in purely secular terms a generation earlier. This recalibrated language would not repel theistic readers of his age and the rhetorical change proved wildly successful, as it effectively got readers to accept much of the Hobbesian political program without their conscious knowledge (as was necessary, since the Church and prior scholars had effectively caricatured Hobbes and his work as heretical in the century following his death). Hence, this rhetorical repackaging stands out as one of Locke’s most significant contributions to the field; in fact, some scholars have pointed to this mainstreaming of Hobbes’ views as Locke’s greatest achievement.

Either way, it is clear that, while Locke obviously appreciated the profound nature and consequences of the brilliantly formulated system that Hobbes puts forth in his

² In addition to Pangle and Burns, see also Jeffrey Collins, *In the Shadow of Leviathan: John Locke and the Politics of Conscience*, Cambridge U P, 2020.

Leviathan, Locke also understood that his audience – while largely unopposed to Hobbes’ dismissal of the belief in the divine right of kings³ that had been customary in Britain and throughout Europe for centuries prior to Hobbes dismantling it in his text – did not support Hobbes’ notion that the Sovereign (ruler, leader or governing body), alone, could enact religious toleration.⁴ In this reading of *Leviathan*, Hobbes is thought to be suggesting that religious institutions and religious liberties follow from, and are secondary and subordinate to, civil institutions and governmental authority. This, therefore, explains why Locke has traditionally been associated with religious toleration, while Hobbes has not.

This is also part of the argument that Jeffrey Collins puts forth in his 2020 text titled *In the Shadow of Leviathan: John Locke and the Politics of Conscience*, seeing this as one of the ways in which Hobbes and Locke can be compared and contrasted within the tradition of classical liberalism. In his book, Collins traces the history of how Hobbes and Locke came to be interpreted: first, independently and as if diametrically opposed to one another (in large part due to the above-described rewriting of Hobbes that Locke undertook using Christian rhetoric); and later, during the twentieth century’s interwar period, how this changed once Hobbes became reinterpreted, most importantly by Leo Strauss (in response to the work of Carl Schmitt) primarily concerning religious toleration and the proper roles for, and relationship between, religion and government.

³ Robert Filmer’s posthumously published *Patriarcha* (1680) was one of several defenses of the divine right (and unquestioned authority) of kings, derived by Filmer from the patriarchal authority of Adam in the Old Testament. That book (Filmer’s *Patriarcha*) is the subject of Locke’s attack in his *First Treatise of Government*.

⁴ This is only one of several interpretations of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and continues to fuel scholarly debate today.

On this, Collins writes,

When in the mid-twentieth century the Cambridge contextualists first critiqued efforts to historicize liberalism within the seventeenth century, their dominant foils were the interpretations developed in Harold Laski's *The Rise of European Liberalism* (1936), his student C. B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1962), and Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). (Collins 7)

Here, Collins makes the following important observation:

This socialist tradition interpreted liberalism primarily, in J. G. A. Pocock's words, as a political economy oriented around "propertied individualism". Hobbes and Locke both played a role in this interpretation, but in truth any actual language of liberal politics defined in Macpherson's terms only traced back to mid-eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith and William Robertson. In this idiom, neither Hobbes nor Locke figured as a significant intellectual forbearer. (8)

However, Collins also insists that "[t]he case [was] . . . different with historiographies of liberalism taking individual conscience as their master category. This, it can be argued, is the current dominant understanding of historic liberalism . . . [and is] particularly true of the Rawlsian tradition" (8). Collins further explains this in the following passage:

Early in his career, [John] Rawls kept his attention fixed on questions of property and redistribution. But the communitarian critique of his work reoriented Rawls's priorities by targeting the ethical or metaphysical axioms of his system. Communitarians⁵ rejected his supposed neutrality, his notion of public reason, and his methodological individualism. The primary context for this was political conflicts over the public role of religion in liberal studies. . . . Locke enjoys a heroic role in this Rawlsian mythology, but a revisionist reading of Hobbes can also be accommodated. This is true in no small part thanks to an interpretive understanding of liberalism again developed (as with Laski and Macpherson) by anti-liberals, this time situated within interwar German culture. The liberal Hobbes and Locke emerged not least from the works of Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss. (Collins 8-9)

Schmitt's interpretation is one still held by many scholars today: that Hobbes'

⁵ *Communitarianism* is defined as "a theory or system of social organization based on small self-governing communities." The term is often used in the context of organized religion, specifically to refer to the notion that individual churches ought to function independently.

system granted the Sovereign religious as well as political authority over subjects, thereby combining state and religious power under one secular authority. Collins' work reveals, however, that when Schmitt wrote of this in his 1932 *Concept of the Political*, "with . . . his theory . . . [by that time] serving the full-blown Nazi project," that "Schmitt wrote that the juridic formulas of the omnipotence of the state are in fact only superficial secularizations of the theological formulas of the omnipotence of God" (Collins 9). Collins insists that, "[in Schmitt's view,] Locke, by contrast, led the revolt in favor of purely procedural, depersonalized, and disenchanting forms of authority" (Collins 9).

The liberal 'machine state' supplanted the church (and Hobbes's charismatic Leviathan) and rendered religion a mere private matter. The rise of disenchanting procedural politics was partly the fruit of the Reformation. [Collins quotes Schmitt to the effect that] "Privatization has its origins in religion The first right of the individual in the sense of the bourgeois order was the freedom of religion." Schmitt's tracing of liberal society to the privatization of religious conscience was more original than might appear to us today [for] it affirmed an absolutist reading of Hobbes and a liberal reading of Locke in terms of political theology and . . . this interpretation has endured in many quarters. (Collins 9)

Here, Collins affirms that, in so doing, Schmitt had effectively "co-opted the power of God for the state," explaining that "[t]his affront to ecclesial Christianity had been a staple of anti-Hobbesian polemic for centuries," insisting moreover that "Schmitt's originality lay in his appreciative evaluation" (Collins 10).

It was in response to Schmitt's work that the well-known historian of ideas, Leo Strauss, pointed out that Schmitt had missed an important element of Hobbes' system, eventually leading Schmitt to reverse his position in accordance with Strauss' interpretation. Strauss insisted that Hobbes included in his *Leviathan* all of the ingredients (particularly the fundamental right of individuals to self-preservation and self-

defense) for concluding that Hobbes considered the right to secure one's own life to be an *inalienable* right, and that this "gave individuals precedence over the state and determined . . . [the state's] purpose and limits" (Collins 10). Collins explains how the dialogue between Schmitt and Strauss led to the discovery of an implicit right to religious freedom in Hobbes' seemingly absolutist view of the Sovereign's power over religion as a function of Hobbes' belief in the right of every individual to self-preservation through the exercise of his or her individual conscience.

The individualistic proto-liberalism that Strauss perceived in Hobbes' system would become the focus of Strauss' *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936). There, Strauss amplified the idea that Hobbes was not in fact putting forth a position completely opposed to Christian teachings. For Strauss, Hobbes' conviction that each individual has the freedom to decide what is necessary to do in the state of nature in order to achieve self-preservation is transferable to participation in the social contract as a fundamental right of conscience that is "structurally Christian" in nature (Collins 10).

Strauss, thus, traces the historical evolution of the idea of liberalism by means of the connection between Hobbes and Locke within the liberal, individualist tradition, while Pangle and Burns (298) point out that Smith's system of political economy is a natural "elaboration" of the view of the relationship between individuals and their government that Locke puts forth in his *Two Treatises*. This provides the scholarly precedent for my application of a history of ideas methodology to support my thesis that the ideas of all three Enlightenment philosophers – Hobbes, Locke, and Smith – are present in Traven's *Sierra Madre*.

In order to establish the likelihood that Traven would have been familiar with the

works of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, including those by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, I now turn to Niall Bond's "Rational Natural Law and German Sociology: Hobbes, Locke and Tönnies" (2011). There, Bond provides evidence to suggest that the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke played a significant role in the work of German sociologist, economist, and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936).⁶ Bond states:

While the roots of modern German sociology are often traced back to historicism, the importance of rational natural law in the inception of the founding work of German sociology, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* by Ferdinand Tönnies, intended as a "creative synthesis" between rational natural law and romantic historicism, should not be overlooked. (Bond 1175; from the article's Abstract)

According to Bond, Tönnies began his philosophical development as a "deeply ethically concerned student of the classics, convinced of the importance of firm commitment by intellectuals to resolving the social issues of the age and more generally concerned with the costs of rationalism and its economic manifestations in capitalism" (Bond 1176).

Like most other German intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, Tönnies had been immersed in romanticism and the works of philosophers including Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. While those romantic influences have been well-documented and widely acknowledged, Bond chooses to explore the earlier influences of rationalist English philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, pointing out that "a close analysis of the first series of studies in which . . . Tönnies presented the conceptual dichotomy

⁶ "Ferdinand Tönnies (1858-1936), Georg Simmel [(1858-1918)], and Max Weber [(1864–1920)], are generally considered the founding fathers of classical German sociology" (Adair-Toteff 58). Of the many works Tönnies published during his lifetime, the following are some notable examples: "Remarks on the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes" (1879-81); *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (sub-titled "An Essay on Communism and Socialism as Historical Social Systems") (1887); and Tönnies' editions of Hobbes' *Elements of Law Natural and Political* (1889) and Hobbes' *Behemoth* (1889), published in English.

‘*Gemeinschaft*’ and ‘*Gesellschaft*,’ . . . [largely] overlooked by literature on Tönnies” reveals that “[Tönnies’] use of the dichotomy . . . diverges vastly from . . . [his] later use” (Bond 1177). After looking at ideological influences that contributed to the new direction in Tönnies’ thought, Bond concludes by insisting on “the importance that Hobbes [in particular] should be accorded in Tönnies studies and that [which] Tönnies . . . [ought to] be accorded in Hobbes studies” (Bond 1177).⁷

It is important to keep in mind that, although Thomas Hobbes is considered the “first modern and secular thinker,” and John Locke is considered the “father of Classical Liberalism,” while Adam Smith is considered the “father of Economics,” all three were, properly speaking, Moral Philosophers. So, while the texts written by Hobbes and Locke are today referred to as works of “political philosophy” and those by Smith are considered works of “political economy,” all arose from, and contributed to, the same field of study that was known as “Moral Philosophy” throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Clearly, that field covered a broad range of subjects, but it was only following the publication of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 that the discipline was divided into several distinct fields of study, two of which were Political Philosophy (today, Political Science) and Political Economy (today, Economics). Therefore, many scholars have not explicitly connected the works of all three philosophers, Hobbes,

⁷ Tönnies’ concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are defined as follows: *Gemeinschaft* is defined as “a spontaneously arising organic social relationship characterized by strong reciprocal bonds of sentiment and kinship within common tradition; *also*: a community or society characterized by this relationship.” *Gesellschaft* is defined as “a rationally developed mechanistic type of social relationship characterized by impersonally contracted associations between persons; *also*: a community or society characterized by this relationship — compare GEMEINSCHAFT.”

Locke, and Smith. When they do, it is often from within the modern field of Economics, of which the following scholarly work is an example.

Agder University College (Norway) Professor of Economics, Arild Saether, contributes a chapter titled “Self-Interest as an Acceptable Mode of Human Behavior” to editor Michalis Psalidopoulos’ Routledge Studies in the History of Economics anthology textbook, *The Canon in the History of Economics: Critical Essays* (2003). In that chapter, Saether explores the origin of the idea of “self-interest,” which provides support for my claim that Hobbes, Locke, and Smith share a common theoretical basis and that this evinces a common connection to the same philosophical tradition.

Indeed, Saether confirms that “the pursuit of self-interest became an acceptable human behavior through accumulated influence from a narrow range of natural law philosophers” (45) from the Reformation onward, explaining that

[t]he Reformation started a process that gradually released human reasoning from the chains of dogmatic theology, and broke down the secular power of the Universal Church over rigid social systems. . . . There [began, at that time,] . . . a move towards reason as the basis for the development of modern natural law theories away from revelation and theology. These new theories were independent of theology and found their basis in an investigation of human nature. However, [Saether notes that] . . . many of their conclusions were not so different from the medieval thought of the scholastics. Thomas Aquinas, as the foremost representative of the scholastics, . . . distinguished between positive and natural law. [For Aquinas,] [n]atural law was . . . the earthly manifestation of divine law. This law was revealed through nature based on reason. Positive law was the law created by humans. The new “modern” natural law tradition maintained that knowledge of the natural order could be achieved through the discovery of the natural laws that governed not only the physical but also the social universe. These laws could be discovered with or without the existence of God. The scholastics maintained that following the natural laws would lead to happiness, which for the scholastics was Heaven. For the modern natural law philosophers, following the natural laws would lead not only to material prosperity and peace on earth, but since most of them also were true believers, ultimately to Heaven. (Saether 45-46)

Saether continues:

The first of the moderns was the Dutchman, . . . Hugo Grotius [(1583-1645)]. . . . Grotius declared in his *Prolegomena* [(1625)] that man is an animal, but a social animal in need of association with others [which Grotius called “sociableness”]. . . . Accordingly it follows that laws must be derived from the needs of men living together in society. Natural law is therefore as universal as society. The human instinct of sociability is its origin and the preservation of society is its objective. . . . [It was on] this foundation [that] Grotius built his law of nature and his law of nations. (Saether 46-47)

Saether then turns his attention toward the work of the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who first proposed that human beings were motivated by self-interest, or what he referred to as self-preservation or self-love. In terms of Hobbes, Saether reminds us that it was Hobbes who initially proposed that human beings were “self-centered creatures who restlessly pursued their own good” (Saether 47).

The craving for intercourse between people [or, what Grotius called “sociableness”] is [according to Hobbes] not the driving force but [rather, the driving force is] fear and pure egoism . . . “such that, . . . [if they are not] restrained through fear of some coercive power, every man will dread and distrust each other.” (Saether 47)

According to Saether, “[Hobbes’] views can be outlined as follows: Man is moved by appetites and aversions and the driving force is his own self-interest” (Saether 48). From there, Saether goes on to show how Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694) undertook to “unify Hobbes’ natural law doctrine of self-interest with Grotius’ natural law doctrine of ‘man’s inclination for society’ and to integrate these new ideas with the scholastic methods of the sixteenth-century thinkers” (Saether 49).

As Saether points out, by combining the theories of Grotius and Hobbes, Pufendorf constructed his own theory based on two primary principles: (1) that human

beings are committed to, and motivated by, their own self-interest and self-preservation; and (2) that human beings are also driven by their enjoyment of being, and the necessity to be, social and to join in society with others (Saether 50-53). In addition, Saether provides the following passage from Pufendorf's *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* . . . (On the Law of Nature and Nations . . .), first published in 1672:

[N]ature has not commanded us to be social . . . to the extent that we neglect to take care of ourselves. Rather the sociable attitude is cultivated by men in order that by the mutual exchange among many of assistance and property, we may be enabled to take care of our own concerns to greater advantage. [(Pufendorf 214)] (Saether 53)

Saether goes on to connect the dots between Hobbes, Locke, and Smith in his conclusion:

Self-interest as a mode of human behaviour, therefore, did not become acceptable until Samuel Pufendorf made a synthesis of Grotius' and Hobbes' views in his natural law works. He claimed the individual pursuit of self-interest, checked by man's inclination to live in society with others, his sociability, as the driving force behind human behaviour. This behaviour would also lead to the best society, which for Pufendorf was a society at peace. The law of sociability teaches man how he should conduct himself to become a good member of human society. Pufendorf's sociability is not benevolence in today's meaning of the word. He introduces the concept of mutual benevolence which may be fostered among men. Here man tends to promote the advantage of others if he cultivates his own "soul and body" so that useful actions may emanate from him to others. (Saether 63)

Saether writes:

The natural law philosophy of Pufendorf was brought to Scotland by Gershom Carmichael and Francis Hutcheson. Although they did not . . . support his strong emphasis on self-interest, they made his theories known to their students. Hutcheson, who attached great significance to man's passion towards altruism and cooperation, made his student Adam Smith study the works of the natural law philosophers in general and Pufendorf in particular. (63)

He continues:

The fundamental question Smith asks is how man, who basically is a creature trying to pursue his own self-interest, can form moral judgements in which

self-interest seems to be checked or transmuted to a higher plane Smith finds, building on Pufendorf, the answer in the fact that men are also social beings dependent on each other. To explain how individual self-love is checked and becomes something that can be accepted by all men living together in society, he introduces the concept of an “impartial spectator”. The impartial spectator enters into every man’s conduct and lets him view himself in a light in which he is conscious of how others will view him. (63)

Through Pufendorf’s contextualization of Hobbes, which proved central to the German Enlightenment, Hobbes’ ideas would have been widely dispersed in German university curricula of the late nineteenth century. Tönnies’ invocation of Hobbes in his foundational contributions to German sociology also played a role in the elevation of Hobbes and his ideas in this process. Assuming that Traven was either university-trained or a well-read autodidact, those facts mean that he was likely to be familiar with Hobbes’ masterpiece, *Leviathan*.

There is evidence to suggest that Germany was, by the 1890s, saturated with study of Locke and Smith as well. In 1975, the *Journal of the History of Ideas* published an article by Klaus P. Fischer titled “John Locke in the German Enlightenment: An Interpretation,” in which Fischer argues that, in terms of the degree to which their respective works “materially affected the direction of German thought” (Fischer 44), Hobbes’ work proved more influential in Germany than did Locke’s. Still, Fischer acknowledges that Locke’s work had been prominent in German intellectual circles since the eighteenth century, stating: “[N]o one denies that Locke was well known and widely read in Germany. Being [that Locke was] a major European philosopher, how could it be otherwise?” (44).

As scholars involved in the 2022-2023 University of Edinburgh research project “Rethinking Enlightenment: The Reception of John Locke in Germany” point out, Locke’s *Essay on Toleration* (1689) was first translated into German in 1710. They further point to

discussions of that and other Lockean texts in German academic journals and the attention that Locke's work received from renowned German philosophers – including Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), who responded to Locke's *Essay* in his text *Nouveaux Essais* (1765) – as evidence placing Locke firmly within the realm of what was being studied, published, and disseminated by German academics by the late eighteenth century.⁸

In his posthumously published work, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought, Volume I* (1995), famed economist Murray N. Rothbard echoes Fischer in stating that, like Locke, Smith also did not initially gain much traction in Germany. However, Rothbard explains that “it is no wonder that Smith's *Wealth of Nations* made little headway at first in Germany” (Rothbard 494), considering that the country “had been ruled, ever since the late sixteenth century, by cameralism” (494).⁹ Rothbard reveals that, despite this, “[the electorate of Hanover] was a continual possession of the British dynasty in the heart of Prussia, and . . . therefore [was] under strong British cultural influence. Hence the first German review

⁸ Indeed, according to those same researchers, “[a]rdent admirers of Locke's *Essay* [*Concerning Human Understanding* (1689)] can be found among the so-called popular philosophers (*Popularphilosophen*) at the University of Göttingen” (Knapp, et al.), identifying several figures who pioneered the effort of exposing German readers to Locke's ideas and written works.

These [included] . . . mainly Johann Heinrich Feder (1740-1821), whose lecture *De sensu interno* (1768) stimulated further Locke studies at the University of Göttingen, and Christoph Meiners (1745-1810), a student of Feder who became familiar with philosophical thinking by reading Locke. The first German translation of Locke's main work (published [in] 1757 by Johann Heinrich Poley . . .) led to a broader dissemination of Locke's thought in Germany, even more extensive than that in the first half of the century. [Indeed,] Immanuel Kant, for example, referred to material which can only be found in Poley's translation. It is [therefore] not too bold to state that the epicenters of the German Enlightenment were optimally informed about Locke's thought. (Knapp, et al.)

⁹ Rothbard provides the following definition of the term *cameralism*: “Cameralists, named after the German royal treasure chamber, the *Kammer*, propounded an extreme form of mercantilism, concentrating . . . on building up state power, and subordinating all parts of the economy and polity to the state and its bureaucracy” (Rothbard 492).

of the *Wealth of Nations* appeared in the official journal of the University of Göttingen, in Hanover” (494).

Considering that “[t]he three most influential German universities of the day were those of Göttingen, Halle in nearby Prussia, and Leipzig” (Rothbard 502n11), it seems reasonable to conclude that the University of Göttingen served as one of the earliest bases from which Smith’s ideas and works came to be disseminated throughout German academia. Indeed, Rothbard claims that the University of Göttingen “developed the most respected department of philosophy, history, and social science in Germany, and [that] by the 1790s it had become a flourishing nucleus of Smithianism in the otherwise hostile German climate” (Rothbard 494).¹⁰

¹⁰ Rothbard specifically identifies the following four figures as those who were most responsible for introducing German readers to Smith’s work: (1) Friedrich Georg Sartorius Freiherr von Waltershausen (1765-1828); (2) Christian Jakob Kraus (1753-1807); (3) August Ferdinand Lueder (1760-1819); and (4) Ludwig Heinrich von Jakob (1759-1827).

The first figure Rothbard identifies is Sartorius, of the University of Göttingen. According to Rothbard, Sartorius was among the first to publish excerpts from Smith’s texts for dissemination throughout the German academy (495). In addition, he also published two of his own texts: the first, titled *Handbuch der Staatswirthschaft* (1796), was basically an economics textbook summarizing Smith’s views; the other was “an expanded summary of Smith’s work . . . [published] a decade later” (Rothbard 495), the translated title of which is *Concerning the Elements of National Wealth and State Economy according to Adam Smith* (1806).

The second promoter of Smith’s work Rothbard identifies is Kraus, “a distinguished professor who . . . studied under Immanuel Kant at the University of Königsberg, . . . [and who] took his doctorate at the University of Halle, but spent his formative years at Göttingen” (495). According to Rothbard, “Kraus was one of the first persons in Germany to acclaim . . . [Smith’s] *Wealth of Nations*, which he hailed as ‘the only true, great, beautiful, just, and beneficial system’ . . . [and] ‘certainly one of the most important and beneficial books that have ever been written’” (Rothbard 495).

The third Smith devotee Rothbard mentions is Lueder. According to Rothbard, Lueder was another product of the University of Göttingen, studying and later becoming a professor of philosophy there, who published the following three Smith-minded works, the titles of which translate as follows: *National Industry and State Economy* (1800-02), *Criticism of Statistics and State Policy* (1812), and *Critical History of Statistics* (1812), with the second and third of these appearing as two separate volumes of a single work that Lueder published on statistics (Rothbard 496). Interestingly, according to Rothbard, Lueder began his academic career immersed in the field of “national statistics,” a field dedicated to the study of how governments use statistics as a tool to make and justify state policy (496). As a direct result of his exposure to Smith’s work during his tenure as a professor at Göttingen, Lueder ultimately came to denounce the field and study of national statistics, publishing the two volumes in 1812 (the titles of which are the second and third of the three listed above), in which he criticized government use of, and reliance on, statistics as a tool for policy making, since the practice resulted in an ever more bureaucratic and ever more baseless

The picture thus emerges that academic interest in, and university curricula covering, Smith's work in Germany came mostly out of the work produced by professors at the University of Göttingen, as well those at the Universities of Halle and Leipzig. The net result of this, Rothbard claims, was that "the Smithians rather rapidly took over one economics department after another . . . [such that] in a little over a decade Smithianism had triumphed over cameralism in Germany" (Rothbard 498).

In light of the evidence presented above, it appears extremely likely that a German intellectual of the late nineteenth century (such as Traven presumably was) would have been exposed to the ideas, theories, and respective works of political philosophers Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, as German academic circles were clearly steeped in a tradition that included the work of all three of those philosophers by the 1890s (presumably when Traven would have been of university age).

In my next chapter, I explain more about how those ideas and theories function within the systems of political philosophy proposed by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith in their respective seminal texts.

dependence and focus on the collection, review, and identification of statistics to defend, support, and justify the state directive and whatever policies, programs, and legislation that the state supported at any given time (Rothbard 496-497).

Lastly, the fourth promoter of Smith's work Rothbard identifies is Ludwig von Jakob, who studied at the University of Halle and then taught political economy and political philosophy there for most of his life (497). According to Rothbard, "Jakob became a consultant to several commissions at St. Petersburg, and helped spread Smithian economics to Russia" (497). In addition, "like Christian Kraus, . . . [Jakob] combined Kant and Smith's individualism into an economic and philosophical whole. Like Kraus also, Jakob played an important advisory role in the liberal Stein-Hardenberg reforms in Prussia," publishing his most important work in 1805, the title of which translates as *Principles of Economics* (Rothbard 497-498).

CHAPTER THREE: OVERVIEW OF THOSE IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES FROM THE WORKS OF HOBBS, LOCKE, AND SMITH OF MOST CONSEQUENCE TO MY INTERPRETATION OF TRAVEN'S *SIERRA MADRE*

In this chapter, I identify those ideas which are centrally important to, and unique about, the systems that political philosophers Hobbes, Locke, and Smith each put forward in their respective seminal texts. In addition, the principles and concepts that I choose to highlight in the three subsections that follow (one for each of these three thinkers) are those which are also of most relevance to my interpretation of, and those which I see reflected most in, Traven's *Sierra Madre*. In what follows, I attempt to provide a basic working understanding of how each idea or principle functions within the overall system put forth by that philosopher in his seminal work.

Thomas Hobbes

To start, I turn my attention to the question (as presented by Hobbes) of the proper relationship between *religion* (ecclesiastic/spiritual authority) and *government* (political/secular authority) within civil society. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes ventures a groundbreaking idea: the notion that there is no legitimate place within civil government for religious or spiritual concerns because the two domains involve intrinsically different kinds of activity.

According to Hobbes, the entire business of civil government is concerned with the tangible, empirically-based experiences of the individual that are of this world and concern the fate of the individual's soul in this life. This contrasts with religion, which is concerned principally with the intangible, unverifiable, purely faith-based experiences of the individual that are otherworldly in that they involve the disposition of an individual's

soul after this life. As a result, Hobbes claimed that it is most reasonable to conclude that religion and civil government have no legitimate business to conduct with one another and, therefore, that the two ought not be joined under, nor controlled by, a single authority.

Hence, Hobbes is able to make the first real argument against the longstanding doctrine of the divine right of kings that had been customarily accepted in England and Europe since the Middle Ages (but which irrevocably ceased in Britain after James II's ouster during the Glorious Revolution of 1688). That doctrine insisted that monarchs were selected by God and that their rule was divinely authorized and, therefore, not subject to challenge. In contrast, within the system that Hobbes puts forth in *Leviathan*, the Sovereign's power is founded upon a mutually beneficial social contract rather than divine decree – making Hobbes the first truly modern, secular thinker.

One of the necessary consequences of Hobbes' refutation of the traditional belief in the divine right of kings is that it makes room for a different idea entirely: namely, that human beings are actually born equal to one another—and, indeed, this is exactly what Hobbes argues in *Leviathan*. Hobbes bases his support of this premise on the fact that any human being can kill another human being, if they really want to. Hobbes offers the following explanation of this idea in Chapter XIII of his text:

Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind th[an] another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe. (Hobbes 75)

Hobbes continues:

As for the faculties of mind, . . . such is the nature of man, that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent, or more learned; Yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves; For they see their own wit at hand, and [that of] other[s] . . . at a distance. But this proveth rather that men are in that point equall, than unequall. (Hobbes 75).

Following this to its logical conclusion, Hobbes writes:

From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies, and in the way to their End, . . . endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass, that where an Invader hath no more feare, than an other mans single power; if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossesse, and deprive him, *not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty.* And, the Invader again is in the like danger of another. (Hobbes 76)

This leads us another idea introduced by Hobbes that is important to my study—namely, the notion that human beings are driven by their desire for self-preservation. Indeed, Hobbes claims that the entire reason for which human beings enter into the social contract and agree to join civil societies – and (by doing so) submit willingly to the authority and rules of law set forth by a Sovereign or government – is in order to protect and secure their individual “life, liberty, and possessions.” Under the terms of the social contract, that “protection” comes as a result of the laws established and enforced by a Sovereign or government authorized by the people with the authority to do so. That Sovereign or government is also tasked and solely authorized to administer justice and punish the guilty in cases when those laws are violated. That administration of justice includes not only determining the guilt or innocence of those accused of violating the society’s laws, but also of mandating how, by whom, and in what amount, compensation

will be repaid to victims for damages they have suffered to themselves or their property in such cases. For, according to Hobbes,

The final cause, end, or design of men (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them live in Common-wealths) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants and observation of th[e] Lawes of Nature For the Lawes of Nature (as *Justice, Equity, Modesty*, and (in summe) *doing to others, as wee would be done to,*) of themselves, without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our naturall Passions, that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge and the like. And Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. (Hobbes 105)

Hobbes introduces a total of nineteen Laws of Nature that give structure to a civil society and by which persons in such a society ought to be bound in order for the society to survive and not devolve into chaos and civil war – which, Hobbes maintained, would be no different from the state of constant war of all against all to be had in the state of nature (where no ruling or governing power exists). According to Hobbes, in the state of nature, there exists no Sovereign or government to establish and enforce rules of law and, thus, no way to administer justice or punish those who harm (the life, liberty, or possessions of) others.

Hence, in Chapter XIV of *Leviathan*, Hobbes maintains that, in such a state as the state of nature, “naturally, every man has a right to every thing” (Hobbes 87).

The Right of Nature, which Writers commonly call Jus Naturale, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing anything, which in his own Judgment, and Reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. By Liberty, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to

do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him according as his judgement, and reason shall dictate to him. A Law of Nature . . . is a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. . . . [B]ecause Right, consisteth in liberty to, or to forbear; Whereas Law, determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that Law, and Right, differ as much, as Obligation, and Liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent. (Hobbes 79)

In that same chapter, Hobbes establishes the Right of Nature – namely, *the right of every one to every thing* – which, according to Hobbes, is the one right that people have in the state of nature. From this, Hobbes also establishes the existence of another natural right – namely, *the right to self-preservation* – which, again, every person has in the state of nature.

[B]ecause the condition of man [who is not joined into a civil society that is regulated by some set of laws which are established and enforced by an authorized Sovereign or governing body] . . . is a condition of war of every one against every one, in which case every one is governed by his own reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be an help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies; it follows, that in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing; even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be,) of living out the time, which nature ordinarily alloweth men to live. (Hobbes 87, italics mine)

Hobbes is clear that, as he sees it, in the state of nature (where there is no ruler or governing body to make and enforce laws, nor to administer justice on behalf of those who are harmed when those laws are violated), individuals have unlimited freedom, in the sense that they have the right to anything and everything they desire, and to do whatever to and with whomever and whatever they desire, whenever, however, for any reason, and for any purpose whatsoever they desire. That said, it is *also* the case in the state of nature that every *other* individual *also* has that *same* unlimited freedom and that

same “right to every thing.” Therefore, every individual in the state of nature has the same right and the same freedom to take and use anything and everything they want to, so long as they can beat out every individual *also* trying to secure, take, or keep possession of that same item or resource.

As such, Hobbes concludes that life in the state of nature ultimately consists entirely of trying to take and keep possession of resources. Thus, life consists of a vicious cycle in which one is constantly forced either to be engaged in the process of trying to acquire resources (even if that means stealing them from other people) or, in the process of trying to defend oneself against the inevitable attacks of others who are, themselves, also constantly trying to acquire those same resources.

This, Hobbes concludes, is no way to live. The reason he gives for reaching this conclusion is that, in such a state, there is no time for leisure, recreation, education, or *anything* other than acting endlessly in the above-described vicious cycle of attacking others to steal and secure resources and guarding against being attacked in kind by others similarly looking to steal and secure those same resources for themselves.

Because Hobbes believed that human beings are reasonable, he insisted that individuals would naturally prefer to live *outside* of the state of nature and that, in order to do so, they would be willing to forfeit their “right to every thing” to a sovereign or governing body, which they would authorize with the power to create and enforce laws (which would be aimed at promoting the interests and the security of the lives, liberties, and possessions of the individuals they governed) and to administer justice on their behalf (should they or their property be harmed in cases where those laws are violated).

In Chapter XIV, Hobbes establishes his First – or, “Fundamental” – Law of Nature:

[I]t is a precept, or general rule of reason, *that every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of war.* The first branch of which rule, containeth the first, and fundamental law of nature; which is, *to seek peace, and follow it.* The second, the sum of the right of nature; which is, *by all means we can, to defend ourselves.* (Hobbes 87)

In the above passage, Hobbes essentially establishes a natural, inalienable right to self-defense as a fundamental part of his system. Indeed, according to Hobbes, the right to self-defense is a right that every person has in the state of nature. But, unlike the right to self-preservation (or, the “right of every one to every thing,” mentioned earlier) the right to self-defense is not forfeited once one enters into the social contract to join a civil society. In fact, Hobbes maintains that the right to self-defense is the *only* right which *cannot* be surrendered to a sovereign or government. Rather, this right is retained even after one leaves the state of nature and joins a civil society via the social contract. This makes the right to self-defense the one natural right that each and every individual always has – in both the state of nature (where government does not exist) and in civil society (where government does exist).

And while Hobbes’ First Law of Nature instructs that one ought to “seek peace and follow it” by laying down his or her weapons and pursuing peace when others are willing to do the same, Hobbes is also clear that one should never lay down one’s own weapons unless others are willing to lay down theirs. For, when others are not willing to lay down their weapons, they are clearly not interested in pursuing peace. Therefore, in such cases, Hobbes believes that all individuals should keep their weapons at the ready

and their guards up and be ready and willing to do anything and everything, and use any and every tool at their disposal, to defend themselves against the others' seemingly imminent attack. Hobbes believes wholeheartedly that to do otherwise in cases where peace is clearly not possible (since others are not willing to lay down their weapons in order to find a peaceful resolution), would be unnatural, irrational, and foolish.

From this follows Hobbes' Second Law of Nature, which he refers to as the Gospel Law:

From this fundamental law of nature, by which men are commanded to endeavour peace, is derived this second law; *That a man be willing, when others are so too... to lay down his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.* For as long as every man holdeth this right, of doing any thing he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of war. But if other men will not lay down their right, as well as he; then there is no reason for any one, to divest himself of his: for that were to expose himself to prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose himself to peace. *This is that law of the Gospel; whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them.* And that law of all men, *quod tibi fieri non vis, altri ne feceris* [do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself]. (Hobbes 80; italics mine)

This is how Hobbes is able to reason his way out of the tradition of the divine right of kings. For, by including the "Gospel Law" which mandates that we do unto others that which we would have them do unto us, Hobbes is able to claim that his system has the approval of God, while simultaneously insisting that his system neither requires nor seeks that approval. (Again, the reason Hobbes insists that his system neither requires nor seeks God's approval is because he believes that religion and civil government have no

legitimate business to conduct with one another, since the focus of each is diametrically opposed to that of the other.)

Yet, by including this Gospel Law among his Laws of Nature, Hobbes implies a number of consequences that his system therefore also mandates. First, it establishes an ethical imperative and the moral basis of his system (which is also a characteristic of both Locke's and Smith's systems). It also establishes a precedent for the concept known in contemporary times as "the separation of church and state."¹

In Chapter XV of *Leviathan*, Hobbes establishes his Third Law of Nature to be that of justice:

From that law of nature, by which we are obliged to transferre to another, such Rights, as being retained, hinder the peace of Mankind, there followeth a Third; which is this, *That men perform their Covenants made*: without which, Covenants are in vain, and but Empty words, and the Right of all men to all things remaining, wee are still in the condition of Warre. And in this law of Nature, consisteth the Fountain and Originall of JUSTICE. For where no Covenant hath preceded, there hath no Right been transferred, and every man has right to everything; and consequently, no action can be Unjust. But when a Covenant is made, then to break it is *Unjust*. And the definition of INJUSTICE, is no other than *the not Performance of Convenant*. (Hobbes 88)

Like Smith, Hobbes insists that individuals must be free to enter into contracts willingly and to determine for themselves whether the proposed terms are worth whatever they stand to gain from the agreement. For, without this prerequisite, it would be impossible for individuals to enter into the social contract, and thus impossible for individuals willingly to join together in civil society. However, Hobbes requires also that individuals

¹ As mentioned in Chapter 2, some scholars have interpreted Hobbes as insisting that only the sovereign could allow religious toleration, while others have insisted that Hobbes simply considered one's religious affiliation an inalienable human right that came before, and was not under the jurisdiction of, and could not legitimately be infringed upon by, any sovereign or government. (This is essentially the debate that Schmitt and Strauss engaged in during the inter-war period and which Pangle and Burns, as well as Collins, discuss in their more contemporary texts, as referenced in my previous chapter.)

perform the duties they accept according to the terms of their covenants (or, of the contracts into which they enter willingly).

Therefore, the laws in place in a civil society have most to do with deterring and punishing individuals who might refuse to perform their part of an agreement when the other side had performed theirs. This includes, of course, the covenant of the social contract itself, which the laws of a civil society are also meant to uphold (along with the edicts laid down in Hobbes' various Laws of Nature). Yet, Hobbes goes an important step further still, writing the following in that same chapter:

[B]efore 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 terrour of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their Covenant; and *to make good the Propriety, which by mutual Contract men acquire, in recompence of the universall Right they abandon: and such power there is none before the erection of a Common-wealth.* (Hobbes 88; italics mine)

Hobbes continues:

And this is also to be gathered out of the ordinary definition of Justice . . . For they say that *Justice is the constant Will of giving every man his own.* And therefore where there is no *Own*, that is, no Propriety, there is no Injustice; and where there is no coercive Power erected, that is, where there is no Common-wealth, there is no Propriety; all men having Right to all things. (Hobbes 88-89)

From this, Hobbes concludes the following:

[W]here there is no Common-wealth; there is nothing Unjust. So that the nature of Justice, consisteth in keeping of valid Covenants: but *the Validity of Covenants begins not but with the Constitution of a Civill Power, sufficient to compell men to keep them: And then it is also that Propriety begins.*² (Hobbes 89; italics mine)

² In "Civilization, Persuasion, and Propriety" (2023) Leonidas Montes reminds us that "during the seventeenth century 'property' and 'propriety' were used interchangeably. . . . [and] had the same meaning. Today [the word] property has a material sense, but [the word] propriety is still morally loaded. . . . [From this, it becomes clear that] the meaning and understanding of property has an ethical underpinning." (Montes)

Hobbes is stating here that, as he sees it, justice and property are only possible with “the Constitution of a Common-wealth” (Hobbes 88), such that justice and property emerge as hallmarks of civil society, with the reciprocal implication of this being that their absence emerges as a hallmark of un-civil society.

Hence, in addition to those principles already mentioned, we see here yet another revolutionary idea of import to my study, to which Hobbes gave an early voice, one of the many that both John Locke and Adam Smith would go on to adopt and incorporate into later in their own respective systems of political philosophy, with both echoing this and many other Hobbesian sentiments in their works.³

Using this groundwork that Thomas Hobbes laid for the establishment of a politically workable social order, the epochal contribution to this framework made by John Locke lies primarily in the critical connection he makes between property, labor, and individual liberty, as well as the case that he makes for the people being justified in removing from power those leaders, and even entire governments, that legislate in ways that harm, impoverish, or otherwise fail to serve the interests of the people they govern. Locke’s ideas are the focus of the next subsection in this chapter.

John Locke

Locke begins by accepting the existence of the same hypothetical scenario of the state of nature that Hobbes established in *Leviathan* (1651) as the foundation upon which Locke proceeds to build his own system of political philosophy in his *Two Treatises of*

³ In his *Second Treatise*, Locke insists that “government has no other end but the preservation of property” (Locke 140-141). And, in Book V, Chapter I of his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith writes: “Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all” (Smith 907).

Government (1689). As has previously been mentioned, Locke also adopts several other important principles from Hobbes as well, including man's inclination to act in ways that promote his self-preservation and the idea that the social contract and all of the power with which the Sovereign or government is invested in a civil society requires the consent of the governed. For, in Chapter VIII of his *Second Treatise*, Locke writes: "Men being, . . . by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent" (Locke 141).

Locke diverges, however, from Hobbes primarily in his explicit insistence that Sovereigns (or, "Magistrates," as Locke often refers to them) or entire governments that prove tyrannical or harmful to those they govern ought to be removed from power or dissolved so that the people can select and authorize new leadership that they believe will better serve them and their interests. Additionally, Locke departs from Hobbes in his more detailed understanding of the central importance afforded to property creation and property rights.

For example, Locke writes in Chapter XVIII of his *Second Treatise* that "[T]he difference betwixt a king and a tyrant... consist[s] only in this: that one makes the laws the bounds of his power, and the good of the public the end of his government; the other makes all give way to his own will and appetite" (Locke 189). In that same chapter, Locke states the following:

It is a mistake to think this fault [i.e. that of a ruler, magistrate, or other such head of a government who becomes tyrannical in administering rule and governance] is proper only to monarchies; other forms of governments are liable to it, as well as that: for wherever the power, which is put into any hands for the government of the people, and the preservation of their properties, is applied to other ends, and is made use of to impoverish, harass, or subdue them to the arbitrary and irregular commands of those that have it;

there it presently becomes tyranny, whether those that thus use it are one or many. (Locke 189)

Locke goes on to state in Chapter XIX:

When any one, or more, shall take upon them to make laws, whom the people have not appointed so to do, they make laws without authority, which the people are not therefore bound to obey; by which means they come again to be out of subjection, and may constitute to themselves a new legislative, as they think best, and being in full liberty to resist the force of those, who without authority would impose any thing upon them. (Locke 194)

In that same chapter, Locke writes the following:

Whensoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the *lives, liberties, and estates* of the people; by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society. (Locke 198-199; italics mine)

Here, Locke establishes the limit to the Sovereign's or government's power and authority, defining said Sovereigns or governments that overstep the limits of their power and legislate in ways which prove harmful to, or fail to promote the interests of, the people they govern as "tyrants."

I turn now to another area in which Locke adds substantially to Hobbes' initial framework: his theory regarding property and property rights. For Locke views each person's body as that person's first and most basic property holding. From this springs the ability of each person to perform labor using his or her own body and mind. Locke believed that all of these – [1] a person's body, [2] his or her labor, and [3] the results produced by said labor – are the property of the individual who performs that labor.

Indeed, it is clear from the following passage that appears in Chapter IX of his

Second Treatise, that Locke begins with Hobbes' basic framework, but adds his own important contribution:

[I]f man in the state of nature be so free as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom, why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others; for all being kings as much as he, every man is equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers; and *it is not without reason that he seeks out, and is willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name property.* (Locke 154-155; italics mine.)

As a consequence of Locke's above-described theory of property, another important notion is brought to the fore: that Locke's theory of property inherently provides the philosophical argument that renders slavery invalid.⁴

Indeed, Locke's understanding of this connection (his belief that our labor is the most important way we create property), and his belief that creating property is critical to realizing individual liberty, can then be used to argue against systems in which individuals cannot or do not own any property at all, or those in which their ability to own property is limited by caste, for such hindrances (imposed by social custom or legally enforced as a matter of law by the ruling monarch or assembly) effectively makes

⁴ It is worth noting that this also provides the foundational philosophical justification for the distinct, but related, positions and arguments made in support of women's reproductive rights (captured in the phrase "My body, my choice!") and in support of "bodily autonomy" (also referred to as "bodily sovereignty"). In light of Locke's theory of property that insists that individuals are born equal, in the sense that each is born with the same respective and exclusive property right to and over his or her own body, it becomes clear that *both* of these more contemporary positions are philosophically sound, truly egalitarian, and consistent with the tenets that have traditionally distinguished Classical Liberalism.

slaves of the individuals who live under such systems.⁵

From these original properties (one's own person and one's own labor), Locke details how one goes about accruing other types of property and in various quantities as well. As previously stated, it is interesting to note how Locke uses scripture as a foundation to begin building his theory of property, as can be seen in the following passage from Chapter V of Locke's *Second Treatise*:

God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And though all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and nobody has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them . . . yet . . . there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. (Locke 111)

The following section contains arguably the most famous lines of Locke's entire text:

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. *Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided . . . he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.* It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. (Locke 111-112; italics mine)

By "labor," Locke means any directed human action toward acquiring some resource or achieving some end, including such actions as: bending over to pick up an apple that fell off a tree; or gathering berries, taking them home, and making a pie out of them; or

⁵ In Chapters 5 and 6 of the present dissertation, I present evidence found in Traven's fictional *Sierra Madre* that reflects sentiments which imply something very similar.

contracting to work on someone else's farm for an agreed-upon wage, in exchange for helping that farm owner harvest grain.

Locke also extended his theory to include a way that a person could acquire property in the land itself. Of course, “in the beginning,” when men were few and unappropriated land was plentiful, Locke admits that there would have been no conflict between men over owning land (there being enough for everyone). In such a state, Locke insists only that no person take for himself more than he can make use of (mix his labor with) and that whatever is reaped from such efforts does not spoil or go to waste in his possession. Locke's logic here is that God made the earth and its natural resources for men to use productively, *not* for them to waste. Whatever *does* go to waste in one's possession, or whatever one *fails* to cultivate, is deemed by Locke as being more than one's fair share, and that which Locke believes should have been the property of someone else who could have made some use of it.

But how does one make sure that nothing spoils or goes to waste in his possession? Locke's answer is that one may sell whatever he cannot use, or trade it for something that he can use, or for something non-perishable, whether that be nuts that will last longer than his grain, or gold, silver, or paper money that will last longer still. Thus, by trading, selling, or renting out that which is *perishable* to others for that which is *not*, people gain the ability to hoard (or grow) their wealth and property. All of this is legitimate, to Locke; and government and the laws it creates have no greater purpose than protecting one's ability and right to keep and grow his own property and wealth in the above-described fashion.

Thus, Locke's theory regarding property begins with the idea that every person has, at the very least, property in his own person. This also is the reason why he disagrees with Robert Filmer and others that “no man is born free,” but is destined to be under the rule of some magistrate (monarch) his entire life. Locke believes, instead, that each individual has property in his own person, and that each person is (thereby) “born free” – not only because he is in this way “propertied,” but also because this property means that he also has property in whatever labor his person (his body and mind) produces.

Because all of these – [1] a person’s own body and mind; [2] the labor that person produces using his or her own body or mind; and [3] the resulting “fruits of that person’s labor” –ought to be considered the rightful property of that person whose body or mind produces said labor, one’s ability to apply one’s labor freely to whatever enterprise one chooses emerges as the mechanism by which individuals are able to accomplish their goals and the means by which the individual is able to realize his or her personal version of “happiness,” and, in so doing, secure and exercise his or her own individual liberty and individual sovereignty. Hence, Locke directly associates *the right to own property* with the Enlightenment notion of the ideal of *liberty*.

From this, we see that Locke acknowledged and supported a system in which individuals owned considerably different amounts of property and wealth. He believed that this was not only *natural*, but *just* – as long as nothing spoiled or went to waste in anyone's possession.⁶

⁶ This, however, remains a source of ongoing debate among scholars, some of whom have even suggested that Locke actually supported a system of community ownership or collectivism, wherein all property would either be owned by everyone in a particular society (in common, as part of a collective) or by none of them (which, of course, would look much more like socialism or communism than it would capitalism).

Adam Smith

Written nearly a century after John Locke published his own ideas concerning property ownership and property rights in his *Two Treatises*, and even longer after Thomas Hobbes introduced such fundamental principles as the separation of church and state; consent of the governed; the basis of the social contract; and the nature and motivations of human beings in his *Leviathan*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) described the nature, intricacies, economic and moral basis of, and the benefits that an individual and (by extension) a nation, can expect by implementing, a free-market system of economics such as that which Smith describes in his text.⁷

Though Smith's *Wealth of Nations* has become known as "the bible of free-market capitalism," the term "capitalism" does not come from Smith, himself; rather, it is the name given to Smith's system by those who read his work and then began to teach it at the university level following its publication in 1776.

As has been noted earlier, Smith (like Locke before him) adopts much of what Hobbes had established over a century earlier in *Leviathan* (1651) as the starting point upon which he then builds the system of political economy that he lays out in *Wealth of Nations*. Many of the notions and conceptualizations taken from Hobbes have already been mentioned, including the essentially hedonistic and self-interested nature of human beings: that is, the hypothetical scenario of the state of nature as the logical reason for which man willingly enters into the social contract and agrees to forfeit some of his freedoms in exchange for the safety and security that a sovereign or government can

⁷ Again, I maintain that much of the framework of Smith's system is aligned with, and derives from, that which was central to the respective systems put forth by Hobbes and Locke.

provide with rules of law, a justice system, and a police force, in order to safeguard his own life and property.

One of those ideas that I believe resonates particularly strongly throughout Traven's fictional *Sierra Madre*, is perhaps the concept that is the most famous from Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: the invisible hand metaphor that Smith uses to describe the self-regulating nature of the free market, as well as the way in which competition breeds quality in a free market, so the result is that the quality of the goods competitors offer for sale is kept as high as possible, while the price at which one seller offers a particular item for sale is typically very close to the price that his competitors ask for the same item. Thus, the quality and prices are regulated such that the quality of the items being sold is kept as *high* as possible and the prices as *low* as possible. For, if a merchant's offerings were of a lower quality than those of his competitors, or if he offered his items for sale at prices that were higher than those asked by his competitors, that merchant would likely go out of business because consumers will always buy from those sellers who offer the best quality items for the lowest price.

This establishes the *logically* sound nature of the free-market system at the same time that it highlights its intrinsically ethical, *morally* sound nature, as well. Indeed, "fair play" is an inherent feature, a core principle, and a built-in foundational element, of free-market economics; and this feature, not only exposes the *inherently egalitarian* nature of the free-market model of economics, but it also suggests that the free-market system is actually the *only* system of economics that is truly *egalitarian by nature*.

Another important idea that Smith puts forward is that the Sovereign has three, and *only* three, legitimate duties to attend to, as well as Smith's assertion that a Sovereign

or government which does more or less than those three things, in so doing, fails the people who have granted it the power and authority to rule in the first place – which is sure to be detrimental to the people, antagonistic to their interests, and injurious or threatening to their “lives, liberties, and estates.” According to Smith, those three duties are: (1) protecting society (as a whole, and each of the individual members of it) against the hostile attacks and violent or predatory acts of aggressors, both foreign and domestic; (2) the administration of justice; and (3) the administration and maintenance of certain public works and institutions. For, In Book IV, Chapter IX of *Wealth of Nations*, Smith states the following:

According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understandings: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual, or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society. The proper performance of those several duties of the sovereign necessarily supposes a certain expence; and this expence again necessarily requires a certain revenue to support it. (Smith 874; italics mine)

Smith also discusses what exactly is required in order to successfully provide for and facilitate each of those three duties. In Book V, Chapter I of the *Wealth of Nations*, Parts I, II, and III are dedicated to specifying the functions that should properly be performed by the Sovereign or State. Here, Smith identifies the three duties which he believes are the *only* legitimate duties the State ought to concern itself with or try to perform.

According to Smith, the first duty of the State is that of “protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies, [which Smith explains] can be performed only by means of military force” (Smith 879). The second duty of the State is that of “protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or [in other words] the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice” (Smith 901). Finally, the third duty of the State that Smith identifies is that of “erecting and maintaining those public institutions and public works” (Smith 916). Smith goes on to explain that “the other works and institutions of this kind are chiefly those for facilitating the commerce of the society, and those for promoting the instruction of the people,” explicitly stating that “[those] institutions for instruction are of two kinds; those for the education of the youth, and those for the instruction of people of all ages” (Smith 917).

Importantly, Smith insists that the reason those three duties are to be undertaken by the Sovereign or the State (rather than by private individuals) is because the nature of those activities is such that they cost more to administer or facilitate than they are designed, or can ever be expected, to yield in profit. Therefore, Smith believes that it would be unreasonable to expect, and unethical and exploitative to mandate, that any of those three duties be undertaken or made the responsibility of any private individual(s) or entity. Instead, Smith insists that those three activities remain under the purview of the Sovereign or the State, and that the scope of any Sovereign’s or government’s power and authority be strictly limited to those three tasks, and nothing more.

For Smith, one of the most consequential aspects of any civil society is its economic system; and this, according to Smith, is also one of the areas that sovereigns

and governments frequently attempt to control that is outside of their proper scope. On this, Smith writes the following in Book IV, Chapter IX of his *Wealth of Nations*:

Every system which endeavours, either, by extraordinary encouragements, to draw towards a particular species of industry a greater share of the capital of the society than what would naturally go to it; or, by extraordinary restraints, to force from a particular species of industry some share of the capital which would otherwise be employed in it; is in reality subversive of the great purpose which it means to promote. It retards, instead of accelerating, the progress of the society towards real wealth and greatness; and diminishes, instead of increasing, the real value of the annual produce of its land and labour. All systems either of preference or of restraint, therefore, being thus completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord. Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men. The sovereign is completely discharged from a duty, in the attempting to perform which he must always be exposed to innumerable delusions, and for the proper performance of which no human wisdom or knowledge could ever be sufficient; the duty of superintending the industry of private people, and of directing it towards the employments most suitable to the interest of the society. (Smith 873-874)

Another contribution that Smith's text makes that I think is significant in terms of Traven's *Sierra Madre* has to do with the customs and laws such as primogeniture, entails, and enclosure which have their origins in feudalism. Importantly, the purpose of all such laws and customs has, historically, always been the same: to designate, limit, or otherwise control and dictate who *could* and who *could not* inherit, purchase, or otherwise claim rights to certain property, in a given civil society. That certainly included fortunes, but those mechanisms most often applied to what is called "real property" – meaning *land* – from which we get the term "real estate."

The purpose of restricting who was eligible to inherit, claim, or purchase said "real property" was to keep that land in the hands of certain individuals and out of the hands of others. Thus, primogeniture, entails, and enclosure became the customs and laws

used for centuries to keep certain tracts of land in the hands of a single family, thereby allowing that family to continue to keep and to grow its wealth, elite status, and the social, economic, and political influence that such standing inevitably ensures.

That said, Smith was ahead of his time by explicitly characterizing those laws and customs as being inherently antithetical to egalitarianism as well as to economic progress.

In the following passage that appears in *Wealth of Nations*, Smith explains how those laws and customs came into existence in feudal times:

[W]hen land was considered as the means, not of subsistence merely, but of power and protection, it was thought better that it should descend undivided to one. In those disorderly times, every great landlord was a sort of petty prince. His tenants were his subjects. He was their judge, and in some respects their legislator in peace and their leader in war. He made war according to his own discretion, frequently against his neighbours, and sometimes against his sovereign. The security of a landed estate, therefore, the protection which its owner could afford to those who dwelt on it, depended upon its greatness. To divide it was to ruin it, and to expose every part of it to be oppressed and swallowed up by the incursions of its neighbours. The law of primogeniture, therefore, came to take place, not immediately indeed, but in process of time, in the succession of landed estates, for the same reason that it has generally taken place in that of monarchies, though not always at their first institution. (Smith 312-313)

In Book III, Chapter II of his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith writes the following about the right of primogeniture:

The right of primogeniture . . . still continues to be respected, and as of all institutions it is the fittest to support the pride of family distinctions, it is still likely to endure for many centuries. In every other respect, nothing can be more contrary to the real interest of a numerous family, than a right which in order to enrich one, beggars all the rest of the children. (Smith 490)

Entails are the natural consequences of the law of primogeniture. They were introduced to preserve a certain lineal secession of which the law of primogeniture first gave the idea, and to hinder any part of the original estate from being carried out of the proposed line either by gift, or device, or alienation; either by the folly, or by the misfortune of any of its successive owners. . . . When great landed estates were a sort of principalities, entails

might not be unreasonable . . . [b]ut in the present state of Europe, when small as well as great estates derive their security from the laws of their country, nothing can be more completely absurd. (Smith 490-491)

‘Great tracts of uncultivated land were, in this manner, not only engrossed by particular families, but the possibility of their being divided again was as much as possible precluded for ever. It seldom happens, however, that a great proprietor is a great improver. . . . If little improvement was to be expected from such great proprietors, still less was to be hoped for from those who occupied the land under them. (Smith 491-492)

In addition to what has already been asserted about slavery being a condition that has historically been distinguished by enslaved individuals’ lack of property rights, Smith writes the following in Book III, Chapter II of *Wealth of Nations*:

In the ancient state of Europe, the occupiers of land were all tenants at will. They were all or almost all slaves; but their slavery was milder than that known among the ancient Greeks and Romans, or even in our West Indian colonies. [They were granted a small number of limited rights and certain protections.] *They were not, however, capable of owning property.* (Smith 492-493; italics mine)

In that same chapter, Smith maintains that this legal capacity to own property is the “one very essential difference between [land cultivators who are *freemen* compared to those who are *slaves*],” insisting that “[s]uch tenants . . . [who are] *freemen, are capable of acquiring property.* . . . *A slave, on the contrary who can acquire nothing but his own maintenance,* consults his own ease by making the land produce as little as possible over and above that maintenance. (Smith 495; italics mine)

Lastly, in Book IV, Chapter VII, Part 2 of *Wealth of Nations*, Smith writes the following passages in a chapter titled “Causes of the Prosperity of New Colonies,” in which he notes the factors that he sees as being responsible for the greater success of the North American British colonies than those established by any other nation that were operational anywhere in the world at that time. In fact, Smith writes: “There are no

colonies of which the progress has been so rapid as that of the English in North America. Plenty of good luck, and liberty to manage their own affairs their own way, seem to be the two great causes of the prosperity of all new colonies” (Smith 724-725).

All of this helps to illuminate the plot and politics of *Sierra Madre*. But before turning exclusively to the novel itself, I first provide evidence to suggest that those ideas and principles that are most important to the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith are also those which have been centrally important to, and (indeed) have become cornerstones of, the American legal, judicial, economic, and political systems since the country’s inception, which would explain their tacit presence in the ideas and dialogue of the *American* protagonists featured in Traven’s novel. Such is the focus of my next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW THE PRINCIPLES FROM THE WORKS OF HOBBS,
LOCKE, AND SMITH ARE REFLECTED IN, AND CENTRALLY IMPORTANT TO,
THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

In this chapter, I explore the Hobbes-Locke-Smith connection as it is reflected in America's founding documents and important examples from early American case law and legal commentary, in order to suggest that those same Enlightenment principles that are central to the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith have also been of central importance to the ongoing and evolving American experiment since its inception. Additionally, I further posit that those principles – as they are reflected in such documents as the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and U.S. Constitution (ratified in 1788) – are also those which best characterize the versions of *liberal democracy* and *free-market capitalism* recognized the world over as distinctly *American*, despite Marxist connotations that aim to cast those forms of social and economic order in a different light. My thesis is that B. Traven's principal characters in *Sierra Madre* embody this capitalist ethic in their words and actions, as I will show in Chapter 5.

Scholars have long acknowledged Locke's *Two Treatises* as a source from which Jefferson and his co-authors are believed to have borrowed several of the central ideas, principles, sentiments, and phrases (often quoted verbatim) that appear in the Declaration of Independence – verbal and conceptual parallels that reflect many of the same Enlightenment ideals and threads of Classical Liberalism which I believe characterize the genuine political and economic worldview at the heart of Traven's *Sierra Madre*. Establishing the influence that the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith have had on the American political and legal systems lends support to one of the primary points of my

central thesis, which is that Traven's novel shares with *American* democracy and *American* free-market capitalism an individualist, classically liberal viewpoint that casts further doubt upon the collectivist political and economic message that most scholars (like those surveyed in Chapter 1) have interpreted from Traven's fiction.

Like the American founders in their reliance upon the classical liberal philosophers of the British and Scottish Enlightenments, I think that Traven similarly believed in the primacy of the individual over the state and the inherent value of limiting the role and scope of governmental power and authority to the functions necessary to safeguard the rights, liberties, and properties of the individuals they govern. Indeed, both Hobbes and Locke have been acknowledged as the likely sources of a number of lines, phrases, and even a few of the original ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.¹

Locke's theory linking property to labor as the primary way in which individuals achieve self-preservation and realize individual liberty and sovereignty is memorialized and incorporated in the Declaration of Independence. Along with Locke's notion of property and property rights. Hobbes' conceptualization of the social contract, his Laws of Nature, and his understanding of self-preservation and self-defense as the most powerful of human instincts and motives also appear to have informed the Founders' understanding of individual liberty. Additionally, Locke's views on religious toleration, Smith's notion that individuals acting in their own self-interest benefits society as a whole as well as themselves, and Locke's insistence that oppressive governments be

¹ For Smith's presence in the work of the American founders despite *Wealth of Nations* being published as late as 1776, see Iain McLean and Scot M. Peterson, "Adam Smith at the Constitutional Convention." See also Pangle and Burns in Chapter 8 (on Hobbes) and Chapter 9 (on Locke), who list several amendments to the U.S. Constitution, some generally acknowledged to have been taken from the political theory of Thomas Hobbes, others widely accepted as deriving from the writings of John Locke.

dissolved when they prove harmful to the peoples' interests also provide subtext to the documents of America's founding. The Declaration begins as follows:

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. (The Declaration of Independence)

A footnote appended to this passage in annotated copies of the Declaration indicates that, while Thomas Jefferson is credited as the source of much of the text that appears in that document (explaining, as it does, that Jefferson "based much of [its] text on his preamble to the Virginia constitution and on Virginia's Declaration of Rights [composed by George Mason], both written in June 1776"), "scholars still debate the relative influence on Jefferson from other documents, including Locke's 1689 [*Two*] *Treatises*," stating that "it is clear that the Enlightenment concepts of 'natural law' and the 'natural rights of mankind' found an early forceful expression in the 1776 Declaration" (*America in Class*).

However, one might argue that Locke's influence is evident foremost in the fact that the occasion that brought about the drafting of this momentous document was the resolve of the North American British colonists to end their subjugation under the British Crown after enduring "a long train of abuses"— another line taken straight from Locke's *Two Treatises*. That passage comes from Chapter XIX of Locke's *Second Treatise*, in which he states:

Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient laws, and all the slips of human frailty, will be borne by the people without mutiny or

murmur. But, if *a long train of abuses*, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the people, and they cannot but feel what they lie under, and see whither they are going; *it is not to be wondered; that they should then rouse themselves, and endeavour to put the rule into such hands which may secure to them the ends for which government was first erected.* (Locke 199; italics mine)

The above passage appears near the end of Locke's *Second Treatise*, in one of its final chapters which covers the overthrow, dissolution, and other instances in which the removal from power of tyrannical, despotic, and abusive rulers and governments would be justified, and describes the circumstances under which Locke would sanction such a course of action. The following familiar passage from the Declaration contains the line which echoes that sentiment using some of the very language that Locke uses in his *Two Treatises*:

. . . [T]o secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . . [W]henver any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. *But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.* (The Declaration of Independence; italics mine.)

The above passage, of course, begins with the most famous line of the entire document, which reads as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that *all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* (The Declaration of Independence; italics mine.)

As has already been pointed out, this line – “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” – is taken straight from the pages of Locke’s *Two Treatises*. That passage appears in Chapter II of Locke’s *Second Treatise* and reads as follows: “The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his *life, health, liberty, or possessions*” (Locke 102; italics mine).²

According to *America in Class*, “[t]wenty-seven grievances are given [in the Declaration of Independence], many in vague or overstated language for the purpose of persuasion and dramatic intensity. All relate to Britain’s increase of imperial control after the French and Indian War (1754-1763), which ended the relative autonomy long valued by the colonies” (*America in Class* annotated copy of the Declaration of Independence; note 2). Indeed, the tenth grievance listed reads: “He [(meaning King George III of Britain)] has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.”

Annotated copies of the Declaration additional information to contextualize this grievance:

Of the new offices created after 1763, the most unpopular were the British customs agents (tax collectors) who arrived in 1767 with expanded authority to conduct searches of ships and warehouses for goods smuggled into the colonies (a practice, long ignored by Britain to avoid British import taxes). . . . [It is also noted that] [t]he 1789 Bill of Rights bans “unreasonable searches and seizures” (Fourth Amendment).] (*America in Class* annotated copy of the Declaration of Independence)

² And, of course, as has also already been noted, Locke gets this notion from Hobbes.

Another grievance reads:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world. ([Note 16 of the *America in Class* annotated copy of the Declaration is associated with grievance and explains that] “[i]n 1774, Parliament closed the port of Boston and in 1775, with the outbreak of war, ordered the total blockade of American shipping.”) (*America in Class*)

It was through the Declaration of Independence that the North American British colonists officially rejected any further obligation to recognize, obey, pay, or otherwise operate according to the rules, laws, taxes, tariffs, and slew of sanctions, embargoes, and restrictions imposed on them by their own Sovereign an ocean away – King George III, back in England – which many of the colonists felt amounted to tyranny on the part of the Crown, whose taxes and tariffs were considered by the colonists on whom they were imposed as being so economically “injurious” to their interests as to pose a threat to their very survival.

Significantly, many of the sentiments at the core of the individual grievances listed in the Declaration reflect parallel grievances raised in *Sierra Madre* (1935; 1927). This, of course, makes sense when one considers the fact that many of the world’s most oppressive fascist, socialist, and communist regimes rose to power during the 1920s and 1930s – the two decades which saw the publication of most of Traven’s works of fiction, first in their original German during the 1920s (including *Sierra Madre*, originally published in German in 1927), and later in their English translations during the 1930s (as was *Sierra Madre*, its English translation being published in 1935). Again, I argue that Traven’s growing distrust of, and hostility toward, government is clearly evident in his stories and novels, including *Sierra Madre*, and that the omniscient narrator (likely Traven himself) believes, and is frustrated by, the fact that government authorities grow

increasingly corrupt in direct proportion to the rate at which the State's power and reach expands.

The Declaration of Independence concludes with the following passage:

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. . . . We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right, ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor. (The Declaration of Independence)

We should also not be surprised to see *Smithian* ideas echoed in the U.S.

Declaration and Constitution, since many of those ideas, as my work attempts to stress, are also *Hobbesian* and *Lockean* at their core. Published the same year as the Declaration of Independence, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) includes some noteworthy observations about the state of the American colonies around the time they declared their independence from Britain. Indeed, Smith makes the following evaluation of Britain's North American colonies, as they compared to the colonies held by other nations at that time:

[T]here are no colonies of which the progress has been more rapid than that of the English in North America . . . Plenty of good land, and *liberty to manage their own affairs their own way*, seem to be the two great causes of the prosperity of all new colonies. . . . In the plenty of good land the English colonies of North America, though, no doubt, very abundantly provided, are,

however, inferior to those of the Spaniards and Portugueze, and not superior to some of those possessed by the French before the late war. But *the political institutions of the English colonies have been more favourable to the improvement and cultivation of this land, than those of any of the other three nations.* (Smith 724-725; italics mine)³

Indeed, Smith lists the following reasons as those which he believes explain the greater success of Britain's colonies: (1) "[t]he engrossing of uncultivated land has been more restrained [than in other colonies]"; (2) "[p]rimogeniture and entails are less prevalent

³ In his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith immediately follows this passage with this detailed explanation:

First, the engrossing of uncultivated land, though it has by no means been prevented altogether, has been more restrained in the English colonies than in any other. . . . *Secondly*, in Pennsylvania there is no right of primogeniture, and lands, like moveables, are divided equally among all the children of the family. In three of the provinces of New England the oldest has only a double share, as in the Mosaical law. Though in these provinces, therefore, too great a quantity of land should sometimes be engrossed by a particular individual, it is likely, in the course of a generation or two, to be sufficiently divided again. In the other English colonies, indeed, the right of primogeniture takes place, as in the law of England. But in all the English colonies the tenure of the lands, which are all held by three socage, facilitates alienation, and the grantee of any extensive tract of land, generally finds it for his interest to alienate, as fast as he can, the greater part of it, reserving only a small quit-rent. In the Spanish and Portugueze colonies, . . . great estates . . . go all to one person, and are in effect entailed and unalienable. The French colonies, indeed, are subject to the custom of Paris, which, in the inheritance of land, is much more favourable to the younger children than the law of England. But, in the French colonies, if any part of the estate, held by the noble tenure of chivalry and homage, is alienated, it is, for a limited time, subject to the right of redemption, either by the heir of the superior or by the heir of the family; and all the largest estates of the country are held by such noble tenures, which necessarily embarrass alienation. But, in a new colony, a great uncultivated estate is likely to be much more speedily divided by alienation than by succession. The plenty and cheapness of good land . . . are the principle causes of the rapid prosperity of new colonies. The engrossing of land, in effect, destroys this plenty and cheapness. The engrossing of uncultivated land, besides, is the greatest obstruction to its improvement. But the labour that is employed in the improvement and cultivation of land affords the greatest and most valuable produce to the society. The produce of labour, in this case, pays not only its own wages, and the profit of the stock which employs it, but the rent of the land too upon which it is employed. The labour of the English colonists, therefore, being more employed in the improvement and cultivation of land, is likely to afford a greater and more valuable produce, than that of any of the other three [aforementioned] nations, which, by the engrossing of land, is more or less diverted towards other employments. . . . *Thirdly*, the labour of the English colonists is not only likely to afford a greater and more valuable produce, but, in consequence of the moderation of their taxes, a greater proportion of this produce belongs to themselves, which they may store up and employ in putting into motion a still greater quantity of labour. . . . *Fourthly*, in the disposal of their surplus produce, or of what is over and above their own consumption, the English colonies have been more favoured, and have been allowed a more extensive market, than those of any other European nation. Every European nation has endeavoured more or less to monopolize to itself the commerce of its colonies, and, upon that account, has prohibited the ships of foreign nations from trading to them, and has prohibited them from importing European goods from any foreign nation. But the manner in which this monopoly has been exercised in different nations has been very different" (Smith 725-729; italics mine).

and alienation more frequent [than in other colonies]”; (3) “[t]axes are more moderate [than in other colonies]”; and (4) “[t]he trade monopoly of the mother country has been less oppressive [than in other colonies]” (Smith 725-729).

Hence, in his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith discusses the positive impact that he saw as the result of the fact that certain practices and customs that had long dictated who could and could not buy, sell, and inherit property in Britain and other European nations had been noticeably absent in the systems established and observed in Britain’s North American colonies. Later, those practices would be intentionally left out, or gradually phased out, of the official legal system established by, and in, the newly independent United States of America, following its break from the British Crown subsequent to its victory in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783).⁴

In the year 1976, *The Journal of Law and Economics* dedicated all three of its annual issues to articles written directly about the principles and ideals upon which America and its institutions were founded, built upon, and dedicated to, from their inception in 1776. One article that appeared in that journal’s December 1976 issue is Stanley N. Katz’s “Thomas Jefferson and the Right to Property in Revolutionary America.” In that article, Katz writes,

In 1776 every American colonist was aware that his legal and political rights were threatened. For those patriots who demanded independence from Great Britain, the issue was the preservation of their historic rights (variously described as the rights of Englishmen and natural rights) in the face of imperial tyranny. They revolted in order to preserve their rights. For those

⁴ I specifically identify areas in which the American tradition departs markedly from the systems and traditions in place in the eighteenth century in Britain, France, and other European nations – most importantly, the notions of property and property rights – in order to establish that America deliberately left out such customs as primogeniture, entails, and enclosure laws (all of which were mainstays in Britain, with male primogeniture also widespread on the Continent). The American “experiment,” as Alexis de Tocqueville characterized it, began by being dedicated to the notion that property and property rights were of central importance to realizing individual liberty, freedom, and sovereignty so that the American system of free-market economic activity was structured with that in mind.

loyalists who opposed independence, Great Britain and its traditional regard for the rights of individuals was the best safeguard against that revolutionary anarchy which threatened the traditional order of things in America. (Katz 468)

Katz continues:

For most colonists, however, the best alternative was not so clear. *The only certainty was that they would have to make a perilous political choice as to how best they could preserve their lives, liberties, and estates.* The very fact of revolutionary ferment threw their rights into question, and they were thus confronted with the hard choices that face the politically inactive mass in the early stages of any revolution. *Liberty and property were both thrown into question.* (Katz 468; italics mine)

Katz maintains, therefore, that “[f]or Englishmen in the years since the seventeenth-century civil war, the problem of reconciling revolution with the continuation of the traditional property system had taken a characteristic form” (468). He continues:

The difficulty . . . which first emerged in 1688 and is best expressed in the work of John Locke, was to destroy the monarchy without destroying the social system which was the legal and logical consequence of the royal system of government: *the right to the Crown was, legally, an hereditary property right, and if this most significant of all property rights could be abolished, how could one revolt without also destroying the right to property everywhere in the society?* (Katz 468-469; italics mine)

Katz insists that:

We must remember that we are discussing a world which was only barely post-feudal. The solution, as Locke defined it, was to separate the “two paths of descent,” by arguing that the principles of inheritance of government were altogether separate from those of the inheritance of private property.⁵ (Katz 469; quoting Lucas)

Katz offers the following commentary to supplement the above statement:

Most commentators on Locke emphasize the idea that, if property is a natural right, landowners are to be protected from the depredations of the crown. It is well to remember, however, that military tenures, and certain other feudal

⁵ Katz attributes this assessment to Paul Lucas, citing Lucas’ “Essays on the Margin of Blackstone’s *Commentaries*” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1963), 230-231.

inconveniences to landowners, had been abolished in 1679. Locke had, therefore, a more important purpose. *By insisting that men had a natural right to the land on which they had first laboured; by proving that their legitimate title to the land did not require the explicit consent of others, but was permitted by the law of reason; Locke made private property antecedent to government and divorced society from government, thereby allowing for limited revolutions.*⁶ (Katz 468-469; italics mine)

Additionally, Katz includes the following in a footnote:

Like Marx and every other revolutionist, Locke had to “turn off” the revolution after it had accomplished his object, he had to prevent the perpetuation of revolution, he had to bind men to the new order. Thus he introduced a consensual basis of property in addition to his natural basis. Locke wanted the king under the law, yet sufficiently outside it (not above it) so that revolt would not endanger the law. . . . Locke wanted to imply consent to the rightly ordered state, but a natural right to one's property during rebellion in a wrongly ordered one.⁷ (Katz 469n6; quoting Lucas)

Importantly, Katz stresses the consistency with which Jefferson defended private property rights in order to make the following point especially clear:

[T]he right to property was an unquestioned assumption of the American revolutionaries. To assert this is merely to assert that they were eighteenth-century men. But one must go on to say that they did not defend property as an end in itself but rather as one of the bases of republican government. It is this sense in which property had *political value* that it was most important to Thomas Jefferson. (Katz 469-470; italics mine)

To illustrate more precisely the sort of “political value” that Thomas Jefferson and his fellow eighteenth-century American revolutionaries saw in private property rights, Katz provides examples of some of the legislation proposed by Jefferson in the early days of the republic, several of which advocated to abolish the several instances of primogeniture – “the rule of succession by which the property of an intestate should pass to his eldest

⁶ Again, Katz attributes this to Paul Lucas, citing Lucas’ “Essays on the Margin of Blackstone's *Commentaries*” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1963), 230-231.

⁷ Katz gets this quotation from Paul Lucas’ “Essays on the Margin of Blackstone's *Commentaries*” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1963), 212.

son” (Katz 471) – that existed on a limited scale at the local level in some of the thirteen colonies.

Furthermore, Jefferson also proposed laws that would abolish the use of entail (which, like primogeniture, existed at the local level in some of the colonies as remnants of the British Common Law that the settlers originally brought over from England).

Entail, Katz explains, refers to the “ancient English legal device by which a testator could limit the capacity of his descendants to alienate his estate” (Katz 472), either by selling off portions of the estate or by subdividing it. On this, Katz writes the following:

Jefferson felt that entail, one of the legal buttresses of the massive property holdings of the ruling families of England, was socially and politically undesirable . . . since it tended to create “a distinct set of families who, being privileged by law in the perpetuation of their wealth were thus formed into a patrician order. To annul this privilege, and instead of an aristocracy of wealth, of more harm and danger, than benefit, to society, to make an opening for the aristocracy of virtue and talent, which nature has wisely provided for the direction of the interests of society. . . [and] scattered with equal hand throughout all its conditions, was deemed essential to a well-ordered republic. To effect it no violence was necessary, no deprivation of natural right, but rather an enlargement of it by a repeal of the law. For this would authorize the present holder to divide the property among his children equally, as his affections were divided; and would place them, by natural generation on the level of their fellow citizens.”⁸ (Katz 471; quoting Jefferson)

As the above passage – in which Katz quotes at length from Jefferson’s autobiography – makes clear, not only did Jefferson endorse an inheritance system in which *all* children would inherit equally, but he specifically advocated for *females* to stand to inherit equally with their male counterparts (471). “[P]erhaps more surprisingly” (as Katz acknowledges), is the fact that, in the early days following the revolution, Jefferson also

⁸ Here, Katz quotes from Thomas Jefferson’s *Autobiography 1743-1790* found in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Volume I* (Paul Leicester Ford ed., G. P. Putnam’s Sons/Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 58-59.

proposed legislation mandating that “[n]o person hereafter coming into this country shall be held within the same in slavery under any pretext whatever”⁹ (Katz 471). (I return to this later in the present chapter.)

Another improvement that Jefferson suggested in 1776 was a bill which facilitated the disestablishment of the Church of England in colonies such as Virginia, where residents “were required by law to attend services and to support the Church financially” since the colony’s founding (Katz 472).¹⁰ One of the goals of the revolution was of course to remedy such instances of government-sanctioned religious affiliation and financial obligation. In order to accomplish this, Jefferson proposed that the Church of England be allowed to remain in existence in the newly formed nation, but that its special privileges and legal “uniqueness” be removed.

Jefferson’s reasoning was that, even though the residents of Virginia had been forced to patronize the Church of England since the colony’s founding, he realized that many Virginians still likely considered themselves “Anglican” or “Reformed” and might have real religious attachment to that church. He therefore did not wish to take away their right to worship there if they so desired. The point was that, in post-Revolutionary America, individuals would be free to worship at whichever church or religious institution they chose, without any legal obligation to patronize or support any one in particular, or any at all, unless by their own free and good will (Katz 472). This

⁹ Katz indicates that this quotation comes from the third draft of Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia Constitution, citing “The Virginia Constitution: Third Draft of Jefferson” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Julian P. Boyd ed., 1950) 362-363.

¹⁰ Katz indicates that this also comes from the third draft of Jefferson’s Virginia Constitution, citing “The Virginia Constitution: Third Draft of Jefferson” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Julian P. Boyd ed., 1950) 362-363.

sentiment, it is clear, comes from Hobbes' idea to separate church from state and the notion of religious toleration endorsed in both Hobbes' and Locke's works.

The American colonists likely believed it was more possible to improve their lives and grow their fortunes in America than in Britain, not only because, in America, the customs of primogeniture, entails, and other such mechanisms were less common than they were in Britain and in most of Europe at that time, but also because of a deeply-held belief that (at least in America) neither the opportunity to labor in pursuit of a particular goal, nor the degree of success or amount of wealth that said labor might possibly yield for the laborer and his or her investors, was restricted and available only to those born under certain conditions (e.g. being born into a wealthy family, being the first-born, or the eldest living male child of a propertied individual with an estate to be passed down to descendants upon his or her death).¹¹

This was a philosophical understanding of natural rights and the right to own property as well as the right to pursue one's own self-interest that the eighteenth-century

¹¹ Optimistic that democracy would one day be adopted in his native France, aristocrat-born and reform-minded Alexis de Tocqueville reported in his aptly-titled *Democracy in America* (1835) that the absence of primogeniture and entails in American society and its laws resulted in real property (land) being divided up more quickly than in France and other countries where primogeniture and entails remained legal custom. Hence, in America, more pieces of land became available for purchase on the free market more frequently and to a larger and more diverse pool of potential buyers. This maximized the benefits reaped by both parties (i.e., by the buyers and the sellers of such transactions). It also prevented the hoarding of unproductive lands that might otherwise be made productive by different owners. Tocqueville considered all of these consequences beneficial and appropriate in a democratic society, suggesting in his *Democracy in America* that, because primogeniture forced landless people to seek wealth outside their family's estate, the demise of the landed aristocracy was accelerated. This, Tocqueville believed, contributed to, and quickened, the movement toward democracy (Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* [Chapter 3: "The Social Condition of the Anglo-Americans"]). Importantly, Adam Smith made this same observation nearly sixty years earlier in his 1776 *Wealth of Nations*, putting forth a very similar argument in support of the abolition of such estate laws and inheritance practices as primogeniture and entails. Indeed, Smith even suggested in Book IV, Chapter VII of his *Wealth of Nations* that the greater prosperity of the British American colonies was due, in no small part, to the fact that primogeniture and entails were much less common and practiced far less frequently there than they were in the colonies of other nations.

Enlightenment brought to the fore. Originating of course in the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, these ideals and principles would have been well-known not just to the educated founding fathers, but likely to ordinary citizens as well, increasingly so in the years leading up to the American Revolution.

In order to illustrate how the less frequent use of primogeniture, entails, and other such mechanisms of controlling and enclosing land in the American legal system were interpreted by American judges, I point to a well-known case from early American jurisprudence known as *Pierson v. Post*, decided by the New York Supreme Court in 1805.

This now-famous property law case remains one of the first lessons that present-day law students in the United States learn, for it establishes the important principle that (in America, at least) *pursuit* does not equal *possession*; and that it is *possession*, not *pursuit*, that primarily determines the legitimacy of a property rights claim.

In fact, this case becomes even more relevant when one considers that the circumstance that produced the conflict between Pierson and Post was a fox hunt, an activity that had been a beloved and longstanding British tradition for generations and which the British settlers brought over to the new world from the old. Thus, the fox hunt became grandfathered into American common law in the early days of the republic.

Originally, Post sued Pierson, claiming that he (Post) had a property right in the fox he had been pursuing in a fox hunt when Pierson entered the scene and killed and snatched up the fox before Post could reach it. As Post saw it, Pierson had stolen his

property.¹² Initially, the lower court found in favor of Post, declaring the fox-snatching Pierson guilty of trespassing upon another's (Post's) rightful property. When Pierson appealed that decision, the newly titled appellate case *Pierson v. Post* came before the New York Supreme Court, which did not agree with the finding of the lower court and reversed its decision. Ultimately, the New York Supreme Court found that, although Pierson's killing and taking possession of the fox – while Post was in hot pursuit of the animal – might have been *rude*, it was *not* illegal.

The opinion that New York Supreme Court Justice J. Tompkins delivered for the court in this case reads, in part, as follows:

If we have recourse to the ancient writers upon general principles of law, the [original] judgment . . . is obviously erroneous. Justinian's Institutes (lib. 2, tit. 1, sec. 13), and Fleta (lib. 3, ch. 2, p. 175), adopt the principle, that pursuit alone vests no property or right in the huntsman; and that even pursuit, accompanied with wounding, is equally ineffectual for that purpose, unless the animal be actually taken. The same principle is recognized by Breton (lib. 2, ch. 1, p. 8).

Puffendorf (lib. 4, ch. 6, sec. 2 and 10) defines occupancy of beasts feroc nature, to be the actual corporeal possession of them, and Bynkershock is cited as coinciding in this definition. It is indeed with hesitation that Puffendorf affirms that a wild beast mortally wounded or greatly . . . maimed, cannot be fairly intercepted by another, whilst the pursuit of . . . the person inflicting the wound continues. The foregoing authorities are decisive to show that mere pursuit gave Post no legal right to the fox, but that he became the property of Pierson, who intercepted and killed him.

It, therefore, only remains to inquire whether there are any contrary principles or authorities, to be found in other books, which ought to induce a different decision. Most of the cases which have occurred in England, relating to property in wild animals, have either been discussed and decided upon the principles of their positive statute regulations, or have arisen between the huntsman and the owner of the land upon which beasts feroc nature have

¹² Though this case was decided in 1805, it involved “an incident that took place in 1802 at an uninhabited beach near Southampton, New York.” The original lawsuit was brought by local resident Lodowick Post against another local resident, Jesse Pierson (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierson_v._Post).

been apprehended; the former claiming them by title of occupancy, and the latter *ratione soli*. Little satisfactory aid can, therefore, be derived from the English reporters.

Barbeyrac, in his notes on Puffendorf, does not accede to the definition of occupancy by the latter, but, on the contrary, affirms that actual bodily seizure is not, in all cases, necessary to constitute possession of wild animals. He does not, however, describe . . . the acts which, according to his ideas, will amount to an appropriation of such animals to private use, so as to exclude the claims of all other persons, by title of occupancy, to the same animals; and he is far from averring that pursuit alone is sufficient for that purpose. To a certain extent, and as far as Barbeyrac appears to me to go, his objections to Puffendorf's definition of occupancy are reasonable and correct. That is to say, that actual bodily seizure is not indispensable to acquire right to, or possession of, wild beasts; but that, on the contrary, the mortal wounding of such beasts, by one not abandoning his pursuit, may, with the utmost propriety, be deemed possession of him; since thereby the pursuer manifests an unequivocal intention of appropriating the animal to his individual use, has deprived him of his natural liberty, and brought him within his certain control. So, also, encompassing and securing such animals with nets and toils, or otherwise intercepting them in such a manner as to deprive them of their natural liberty, and render escape impossible, may justly be deemed to give possession of them to those persons who, by their industry and labor, have used . . . such means of apprehending them. Barbeyrac seems to have adopted and had in view in his notes, . . . the more accurate opinion of Grotius, with respect to occupancy. . . .

We are the more readily inclined to confine possession or occupancy of beasts *feroe naturae*, within the limits prescribed by the learned authors above cited, for the sake of certainty, and preserving peace and order in society. If the first seeing, starting or pursuing such animals, without having so wounded, circumvented or ensnared them, so as to deprive them of their natural liberty, and subject them to the control of their pursuer, should afford the basis of actions against others for intercepting and killing them, it would prove a fertile source of quarrels and litigation.

However uncourteous or unkind the conduct of Pierson towards Post, in this instance, may have been, yet this act was productive of no injury . . . or damage for which a legal remedy . . . can be applied. We are of opinion the [original] judgment . . . was erroneous, and ought to be reversed. (*Pierson v. Post*)

Thus, the court ruled in favor of the fox-snatching Pierson and the case henceforth has established the important legal precedent that (in America, at least) one does *not* have a

legitimate legal property claim to that which is not under (or has not previously been under) one's "immediate control." Hence, the New York Supreme Court established that only said "immediate control" can establish possession, and that it is not *pursuit* – but *possession* – that forms the basis of a legitimate claim to property.¹³

Though the counselors and the justices in this 1805 court pointed to and considered the works of such renowned authors as Pufendorf and Grotius in their arguments and written opinions, it is easy to see that many of those ideas and legal concepts at issue in this early case owe their origin to the work of John Locke and the arguments he develops regarding the issue of property ownership and property creation (most specifically in Chapter V of his *Second Treatise*). The court's opinion in this 1805 case, then, helps to explain why the Declaration of Independence uses Locke's "life, liberty, and estate" line, but changes "estate" to "pursuit of happiness."

Still, it is also important to note (as did Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*) that, in terms of the lofty and enlightened principles that shaped the notions of property and property rights in early America, the obvious exception was, of course, the institution of slavery, which persisted in the American South until the conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865 and the subsequent passage of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution in 1865 and 1868, respectively, that outlawed slavery, emancipated all of the individuals held in slavery, and explicitly recognized, and extended to formerly enslaved persons, all of the rights guaranteed to others at that time under the U.S. Constitution.

¹³ This 1805 case thereby helped to establish the well-known legal rule of thumb that "possession is nine-tenths of the law."

It must be remembered, however, that the legal practice of slavery was never crystalized into the framework of, nor protected by law under, the country's original founding documents; and, therefore, it cannot legitimately be interpreted as an inherent precept or fundamental component of the American system as envisioned by the country's founders, primarily based on the fact that they did *not* sanction the practice of slavery as legal within the country's founding documents (though they certainly *could* have, if they had, in fact, wanted to). I suspect that the reason this is the case is because the authors of the Declaration and Constitution were familiar, and generally in agreement, with Locke's views regarding property and property rights, sharing his fundamental understanding of the relationship between property and labor, which (as noted earlier) provides the philosophical argument rendering slavery invalid, since it argues that it is essentially stealing a person's labor when that person is not able to reap the fruits of his own labor (i.e. which is the case when such persons are not compensated for their labor or allowed to own property).¹⁴

It is important to remember that, although it took centuries to abolish slavery and to extend to *all* Americans (first, to African-American men; then later to women) the full rights guaranteed under the Constitution, the desire to be extended those rights by those who were originally *denied* them was always strong.

Indeed, African-American female journalist and early civil rights activist Ida B. Wells famously insisted that the critical right that African-Americans *most* needed

¹⁴ I will return again to this issue in Chapters 5 and 6 of the present dissertation, as it remains an important aspect of the philosophical considerations that Traven voices in *Sierra Madre* that deserves additional analysis.

recognized in the American South (where their constitutional rights went unacknowledged and *illegally* unenforced for years after the abolition of slavery) was the right to “keep and bear arms” guaranteed under the Constitution’s Second Amendment. For Wells, it was that right alone that could actually protect black individuals from the violent attack of aggressors, and (therefore) the only right that could actually preserve and protect the lives, liberty, and property of black individuals in a post-slavery American South. In a chapter titled “Self-Help,” Wells makes this point abundantly clear in the following now-famous passage that appears in her *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892):

Of the many inhuman outrages of this present year [(1892)], the only case where the proposed lynching did *not* occur, was where the men armed themselves . . . and prevented it. The only times an Afro-American who was assaulted got away has been when he had a gun and used it in self-defense. (Wells 22)

Wells immediately follows this statement with a powerful declaration that reads as follows

The lesson this teaches and which every Afro-American should ponder well, is that a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give. (Wells 22; italics mine)

One might logically infer from this that, for *all* Americans, the constitutional right to “keep and bear arms” guaranteed by the Second Amendment might be the most important right of all, since it might, in fact, provide the *only* means by which individuals are *actually* able to protect themselves (i.e., their lives, liberty, and possessions) from being harmed by other individuals or entities, including the government.¹⁵

¹⁵ In *Capitalism and Freedom* (1964), U.S. economist Milton Friedman (1912–2006) explains that the most important component in America’s economic system is that it is a system of competitive capitalism, which

Appearing in another issue of *The Journal of Law and Economics* published in 1976 to commemorate the bicentennial was an article by Morton J. Horwitz of Harvard Law School titled “The Legacy of 1776 in Legal and Economic Thought.” In that article, Horwitz points to several other later cases from early American jurisprudence in order to illustrate what he terms “the transformation in the American ideal of social justice” (Horwitz 621), the evidence of which, Horwitz maintains, is the marked divergence that took place between Americans of the Revolutionary War generation and Americans one hundred years later, in terms of their respective ideological, moral, and ethical values, imperatives, and core principles.

According to Horwitz, at its core, that generational divide was a product of the Revolutionary War generation’s “virtually unanimous agreement . . . [in their] opposition to any program of social and economic equality [or wealth redistribution] . . . [resulting from that generation’s strong] commitment to the ideal of equality of *opportunity* [as opposed to the ideal of equality of *outcomes*]” (Horwitz 621; italics mine). By contrast, Americans of the later generation “protested against [what they saw as] the ‘unequal distribution of wealth and privilege’ and ‘the vice and misery’ that it produces . . . insist[ing] . . . [as they did] that there [existed] . . . an inevitable link between economic inequality and social injustice” (Horwitz 621).

Horwitz maintains that, between 1776 and 1876, something changed in America, shifting the country’s focus, priorities, efforts, and objectives in a new direction: specifically, one dedicated to “deal[ing] with the problems of achieving justice under

Friedman maintained went hand-in-hand with freedom (for essentially the same reasons as Wells had for insisting on the vital importance of Second Amendment gun rights).

industrial capitalism” (Horwitz 621). Of the origins of the Revolutionary War generation’s ideal of equality of opportunity, Horwitz writes the following:

The American revolutionary generation was part of a more general international liberal reaction against the economic and political premises of eighteenth-century mercantilism. In both England and America, a system of state control and regulation of the economy was attacked for its corruption, its fostering of a bloated, patronage-hungry bureaucracy, its strong disincentives to individual initiative, and its perpetuation of feudal and aristocratic property arrangements. The triumph of Liberalism in early nineteenth-century England freed the commercial and industrial classes from the increasingly burdensome restraints of a paternalistic state apparatus and also freed them to engage in unmitigated exploitation of the lower classes, who had formerly received some measure of protection, however imperfect, from the state. (Horwitz 622)

In the more benevolent and underdeveloped environment of America, however, Liberalism was able to express its most noble and idealistic face. With the bitter exception of slavery, there was substantially more equality and, even more important, infinitely greater opportunity for social mobility in America than in any other country in the world. It was possible, therefore, to establish a relatively just social order on the principle that the removal of artificial or hereditary restraints on opportunity would allow all to participate in the promise of American life. In this land of abundance, if all were allowed to begin the race at the same starting point, we would not trouble too much over the fate of losers. (Horwitz 622)

As part of this abstract commitment to the ideal of equality of opportunity, there remained an almost paranoid fear of the threat of substantive equality. Nowhere more often than in this most politically democratic country in the world did the political elite [and propertied Americans in general, I suspect] express the fear that equality of opportunity was in constant danger of being overwhelmed by the leveling impulse. No theme is more pervasive in the political thought of America than the constant fear of redistribution of wealth or, as it was called, of tyranny of the majority.¹⁶ The entire structure of legal and political ideas and institutions that emerged from the American revolution was devoted to erecting barriers that would prevent the redistribution of wealth and would assure that accumulations of wealth by the shrewd, the calculating, the ambitious, and the able would be protected. (Horwitz 622)

¹⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville warns against this “tyranny of the majority” as early as 1835 in his *Democracy in America*.

Horwitz explains that during and immediately following the Revolutionary War period the legislative and adjudicative actions demonstrated a fundamental understanding of property rights in terms of the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Smithian social contract tradition. For, according to Horwitz,

from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the American elite was forced to choose between a legalist intellectual structure that stood as an important barrier to the redistribution of wealth and a consequentialist, efficiency-oriented, instrumental conception of the law which undermined that structure in the interest of economic development. It was at this point that the individualist, natural rights presuppositions of revolutionary legal thought confronted a collectivist and positivist mentality of those who in the nineteenth century wished to harness the law to the goal of increasing the Gross National Product. (Horwitz 624)

. . . One of the ideas in which the revolutionary generation deeply believed was the familiar Lockean conception that property was a presocial right that existed normatively prior to the state. Property was not the creation of the state; indeed, the state existed to enforce and protect these preexisting natural rights. Similarly, legal rules did not create property rights. Rather, the function of legal rules was simply to reflect the presocial definition of property. This of course meant that redistribution of property by the state was a violation of natural right. (Horwitz 624)

So, while the outcome of the aforementioned 1805 *Pierson v. Post* case reinforced the property rights of the individual (in that case, the property rights of Pierson) based solely on that individual's possession of said property (and *not* on that individual's mere "pursuit" thereof), Horwitz reveals that later cases (starting in the 1830s) began to demonstrate a conception of property and property rights more concerned with the public good, national economic development, and collectivist-style redistributive method of growing the economy.

According to Horwitz, "The legalist mentality was . . . one of the most powerful intellectual contributions of the postrevolutionary generation towards creating the

appearance of a politically neutral system of legal thought” (Horwitz 624). It legitimized the notion that the problem of substantive inequality was outside the proper sphere of the law. And more than anything else it laid the foundations for an enormous intellectual schism between the revolutionary ideal of the rule of law – of a government of laws and not of men – and substantive conceptions of social justice (Horwitz 624).

But there were . . . powerful currents in early nineteenth-century America which almost immediately began to subvert these legal and political ideals. Beginning in the 1790’s, the goal of economic growth began totally to capture the imagination of Americans. And it was not at all easy to maintain a conception of a neutral, nonpolitical law amid the widespread desire to use law to facilitate economic growth. (Horwitz 624)

In terms of the notion of *American* capitalism, I turn to the work of U.S. economist Milton Friedman (1912–2006), for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1976. In *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Friedman argues for “competitive capitalism – [which he defines as] the organization of the bulk of economic activity through private enterprise operating in a free market – as a system of economic freedom and a necessary condition for political freedom” (Friedman 4). In such a system, Friedman insisted that government should play a minimal role and impose minimal artificial and arbitrary regulations on economic activity, if it is to achieve the goal of individual liberty required under traditional liberalism. In his text, Friedman writes the following:

In a much quoted passage in his inaugural address, President Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” To the free man, the country is the collection of individuals who compose it, not something over and above them. He is proud of a common heritage and loyal to common traditions. But he regards government as a means, an instrumentality, neither a grantor of favors and gifts, nor a master or god to be blindly worshipped and served. He recognizes no national goal except as it is the consensus of the goals that the citizens severally serve. He

recognizes no national purpose except as it is the consensus of the purposes for which the citizens severally strive. The free man will ask neither what his country can do for him nor what he can do for his country. He will ask rather “What can I and my compatriots do through government” to help us discharge our individual responsibilities, to achieve our several goals and purposes, and above all, to protect our freedom? And he will accompany this question with another: How can I keep the government we create from becoming a Frankenstein that will destroy the very freedom we establish it to protect? . . . How can we benefit from the promise of government while avoiding the threat to freedom? Two broad principles embodied in our Constitution give an answer that has preserved our freedom so far, though they have been violated repeatedly in practice while proclaimed as precept. First, the scope of government must be limited . . . The second broad principle is that government must be dispersed. (Friedman 1-3)

On the relationship between economic freedom and political freedom, Friedman states,

So long as effective freedom of exchange is maintained, the central feature of the [free] market organization of economic activity is that it prevents one person from interfering with another in respect of most of his activities. The consumer is protected from coercion by the seller because of the presence of other sellers with whom he can deal. The seller is protected from coercion by the consumer because of other consumers to whom he can sell. The employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work, and so on. And the market does this impersonally and without centralized authority. Indeed, a major source of objection to a free economy is precisely that it does this task so well. It gives people what they want instead of what a particular group thinks they ought to want. (Friedman 14-15)

Thus, Friedman concludes:

Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself. The existence of a free market does not of course eliminate the need for government. On the contrary, government is essential both as a forum for determining the “rules of the game” and as an umpire to interpret and enforce the rules decided on. What the market does is to reduce greatly the range of issues that must be decided through political means, and thereby to minimize the extent to which government need participate directly in the game. The characteristic feature of action through political channels is that it tends to require or enforce substantial conformity. The great advantage of the market, on the other hand, is that it permits wide diversity. It is, in political terms, a system of proportional representation. Each man can vote, as it were, for the color of tie he wants and get it; he does not have to see what color the majority wants and then, if he is in the minority, submit. (Friedman15)

Friedman goes on to illustrate also the fact that the economic system of competitive capitalism provides a much better bulwark against discrimination than do government-directed initiatives that aim to impose diversity and weed out discrimination by mandate.

It is a striking historical fact that the development of capitalism has been accompanied by a major reduction in the extent to which particular religious, racial, or social groups have operated under special handicaps in respect of their economic activities; have, as the saying goes, been discriminated against. . . . The Southern states after the Civil War took many measures to impose legal restrictions on Negroes. One measure which was never taken on any scale was the establishment of barriers to the ownership of either real or personal property [that is, of course, after emancipation]. The failure to impose such barriers clearly did not reflect any special concern to avoid restrictions on Negroes. It reflected rather, a basic belief in private property which was so strong that it overrode the desire to discriminate against Negroes. The maintenance of the general rules of private property and of capitalism have been a major source of opportunity for Negroes and have permitted them to make greater progress than they otherwise could have made. To take a more general example, the preserves of discrimination in any society are the areas that are most monopolistic in character, whereas discrimination against groups of particular color or religion is least in those areas where there is the greatest freedom of competition. (Friedman 108-109)

Steven Travers makes the same point in his *One Night, Two Teams: Alabama vs. USC and the Game that Changed a Nation* (2007) that Friedman makes in his *Capitalism and Freedom* about the virtues of decentralized government and the better results yielded when government interference in the economy is limited – as it is in America under competitive capitalism – thus establishing how free-market capitalism ultimately wins out over, and fares much better in comparison to, centralized systems of government in which government-directed plans to set the terms, conditions, and standards of a society's economy (in the hopes of achieving certain desired outcomes) is facilitated through government-imposed regulations that determine arbitrary limits, restrictions, and other

unnatural impediments to that society's economic advancement. What Friedman had claimed in the pages of his *Capitalism and Freedom* in 1962 about the inherent ability of competitive free-market capitalism to stamp out discrimination more thoroughly than any other alternative model of economics, a now-legendary "fairly played football game" between the all-white team of the (at that time) still segregated University of Alabama and the integrated team of the University of Southern California demonstrated in Birmingham, Alabama in September of 1970.

Travers' *One Night Two Teams* tells the now-legendary, true story of how segregation in college sports was finally stamped out once and for all in the American South, ushering in a new era in which integrated teams set a new higher standard of excellence that was demanded, *not* by government, but by the competitive free market and by Southerners themselves, who, after seeing USC's integrated team wipe the floor with the University of Alabama's all-white team, knew that, if they wanted their sports teams to be able to compete against other schools, they were going to have to integrate their college athletics teams. Hence, it was Southerners' love of football and their desire to see their schools and their sports teams succeed that ultimately proved stronger than even the racism that had been entrenched in the American South for so long prior.

What this anecdote makes clear is that the centralized governments characteristic of collectivist systems like socialism and communism, are not only ineffective at producing economic success, they also hamper and run counter to the notion of individual liberty that was the primary goal of what was originally termed "liberalism," but which (according to Friedman) is now more commonly called "conservatism" – although the Marxist connotation of that term has also created confusion in terms of the actual inherent

characteristics, and the principles that are centrally important to the frameworks, of such collectivist systems, on the one hand, and the decentralized, limited-government model of competitive free-market capitalism, on the other hand – the latter of which has always been the *American* model.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE HOBBS-LOCKE-SMITH CONNECTION AND ITS
AMERICAN MANIFESTATION REFLECTED IN TRAVEN'S *SIERRA MADRE*

In this chapter, I discuss the singular combination of ideas from the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith that yields the distinctive political philosophy and political economy echoed throughout Traven's *Sierra Madre*. In the pages that follow, I point to a number of the novel's passages in order to draw parallels between the most important ideas, principles, and central tenets at the heart of *Sierra Madre* and those that distinguish the theories and systems put forth in the respective seminal texts by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith. Again, in doing so, I hope to demonstrate that Traven's novel derives its political and economic "lessons" from those three philosophers' epochal texts.

As I will attempt to show in the pages that follow, there actually appears to be a deliberate sequence in which the references to the respective works of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith appear in the novel—such that, as the novel progresses, we generally see references first to Smith, then to Locke, and finally to Hobbes. I believe that this is because the novel's plot moves from the heavily commercialized and industrial city centers ("civil societies" strictly regulated by laws administered by government) to more undeveloped and sparsely populated rural areas (the "state of nature" largely removed from the reach of government, where justice is administered on a local level, often even by individuals themselves.)

From the very first page, Traven's novel reveals its political and economic focus. The opening scene features Dobbs (one of the novel's three primary characters) sitting on a bench "looking for a solution to that age-old problem which makes so many people forget all other thoughts and things," and it is also here, where we first encounter him,

that Traven tells us that Dobbs had been “work[ing] his mind to answer the question: How can I get some money right now?” (Traven 1).

This opening line of Traven’s text and those that follow are immediately suggestive of a passage in Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776), evincing Traven’s an apparent familiarity with, and understanding of, Smith’s theories presented therein on Traven’s part. That passage from *Sierra Madre* reads as follows:

If you already have some money, then it is easier to make more, because you can invest the little you have in some sort of business that looks promising. Without a cent to call yours, it is difficult to make any money at all. Dobbs had nothing. In fact, he had less than nothing, for even his clothes were neither good nor complete. Good clothes may sometimes be considered a modest fund to begin some enterprise with. (Traven 1-2; italics mine)

Indeed, it is hard to deny the remarkable similarity between the above-quoted passage and one which appears in Chapter I, Book IV of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* which reads: “[W]hen we have money we can more readily obtain whatever else we have occasion for. . . The great affair, we always find, is [figuring out a way] to get money. When that is obtained, there is no difficulty in making any subsequent purchase” (Smith 539; italics mine).

Consider also the following passage that appears much earlier in Smith’s text and establishes one of the most critical components of the system that Smith puts forth therein, which Smith calls *self-interest*, but which he also sometimes calls *self-love*. That concept, Smith claims, is the primary motivator of human economic activity and explains the ways in which individuals, companies, and markets behave and can be expected to behave under certain conditions:

In almost every other race of animals each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is entirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the

assistance of no other living creature. *But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and . . . [show] them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them.* Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. (Smith 23; italics mine)

The lines which appear next in that passage are among the most famous from Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: "*It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.* We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages" (Smith 23-24; italics mine). *Less* well-known, however, is the line that immediately follows those famous words in Smith's text, which reads as follows: "Nobody but a beggar . . . depend[s] chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens" (Smith 24).

Such a sentiment is especially appropriate here as we consider the particularly dire financial state in which we encounter Traven's character Dobbs at the start of *Sierra Madre*. In particular, the above Smith quotation applies to one of the novel's earliest scenes, during which the reader follows Dobbs as he goes about his business of panhandling for money, almost exclusively from a steady stream of financially solvent American businessmen who stroll by regularly enough and the majority of whom appear willing to donate some small sum to Dobbs' personal collections plate.

Though it is clear that the upside to this approach to making money is that it requires minimal effort on Dobbs' part, Traven also eventually reveals that it is Dobbs' carelessness and lack of attention to what he is doing that ultimately brings about a rather

awkward encounter between Dobbs and one of his generous patrons. That uncomfortable encounter begins when Dobbs finds himself stunned and taken completely aback when an American man dressed in an all-white suit does not automatically surrender to him the coin he had just fished out of his pocket in response to Dobbs' approach. In fact, the man stops shy of actually handing over the money to Dobbs and, instead, takes the opportunity to scold Dobbs for soliciting money from him three other times already *that same day*.

It is worth mentioning that this rather humorous scene begins with Dobbs noting the exceptional luck he appears to be having that day successfully securing donations from men wearing white. Traven writes:

Dobbs thought: "Today I have luck with gents in white; let's try that guy." . . . Without any hesitation he approached the man . . . [as] [h]is victim burrowed in his pocket and brought forth half a peso. Dobbs reached out for the coin, but the man kept the piece between his fingers, saying dryly: "Listen, you, such insolence has never come my way as long as I can remember, and nobody on earth could make me believe . . . [your] story." Dobbs stood utterly perplexed . . . should he wait or should he run away? He could see the [coin] . . . , which made him sure that [it would] . . . sooner or later . . . land in his own hand. He let the man have the pleasure of preaching, as a small return for his money. "Well, if I get fifty centavos for listening to a sermon, it may be hard-earned money, but it is cash," he thought. So he waited. (Traven 17)

The man then recounts every single one of the several instances in which Dobbs had approached him in the past few hours, each time having secured from him a small donation:

"This afternoon you told me," the man continued, "that you had not had your dinner yet, so I gave you one peso. When I met you again, you told me you had no money for your bed, so I gave you a half peso. A couple of hours later I met you again and you said you had had no supper and you felt hungry. Once more I gave you fifty centavos. Now may I be permitted to ask you, with due politeness: What do you want the money for now?" (Traven 17-18)

Without thinking, Dobbs [blurts] out: "For tomorrow morning's breakfast, mister." The man laughed, gave him the fifty centavos, and said: "This money

is the last you'll get from me. If you want to do me a favor, go occasionally to somebody else. To tell you the truth, it's beginning to bore me." (Traven 17-18)

In response, Dobbs manages to apologize to the man and admits that he had not been paying attention before, but promises to the gentleman that it will not happen again and that he will be more careful in the future. The man appears to be satisfied and replies:

"That's perfectly all right. Don't shed tears. And to make sure you won't forget your promise, have another fifty so that you'll have your dinner tomorrow. But understand that from now on you are to try your best to make your living without my assistance. That's all," and the gentleman went his way. (Traven 18)

Hence, this scene marks a clear shift in Dobbs' thinking and approach to earning money. Indeed, he walks away from this encounter determined to move on from that location in search for work in a region with more promising economic opportunities. Notice also how Traven's character responds to the generous man's tough love:

"Seems," said Dobbs when alone, "this well has run dry now, and for good. Luck with gents dressed in white is spilled. Let's have a look in a different direction." So . . . [Dobbs] came to the conclusion [that] it might be better to leave the port and go out into the country to learn what things looked like there. (Traven 18)

Traven sets the tone of his novel from these early scenes in which Dobbs, finding but a few remaining centavos in his pocket and having just had the awkward run-in with one of his generous donors, commits himself to finding work in another region with more economic opportunity.

The above-quoted passage is also indicative of principles that underlie the system of economics that Smith describes in his *Wealth of Nations* which has come to be known the world over as the system of competitive free-market capitalism that made *Americans* and (thus) *America* so prosperous so quickly. However, it also serves to highlight one

virtually unprecedented (negative) economic situation, that being the Great Depression that followed the Stock Market Crash of 1929.

Traven's novel is set in Mexico during that particularly bleak economic period. And while the novel makes it clear that the economic situation at that time is not *great* in Mexico, it is at least somewhat better than the situation had recently become in America, evidenced (among other things) by the sheer volume of characters (primary, secondary, and those more minor still) that appear in the novel who are American expatriates currently living in Mexico, not because they have retired solvent and want to spend the rest of their days sipping margaritas on one of Mexico's sandy beaches, but rather in the hopes of securing one of the few jobs still available in Mexico, of which there must be even fewer available at the time in America (because, if there were jobs to be had in the U.S., there would not be so many individuals coming all the way to Mexico in search of employment). For, while there do not appear to be *a lot* of employment opportunities available in Mexico at that time, there are at least *some*.

This makes sense and fits historically with the financial ruin and record numbers and extended durations of unemployment suffered by Americans during the Great Depression throughout the entire decade of the 1930s. The Great Depression (during which the action of the novel takes place) began in the wake of the 1929 stock market crash, and economists now largely agree that the devastation was more severe and the period of depression longer than it otherwise would have been, if the well-intended but ill-fated progressive policies and programs instituted in the early 1930s as part of Roosevelt's New Deal, which attempted to manipulate the economy out of depression by

applying Keynesian economic principles never before tried in the United States, had not been implemented *then* either.

This historical context is critically important to accurately understanding the meaning that Traven intends in *Sierra Madre* and helps make sense of the general disposition that the novel takes toward those who hold positions of power and abuse the authority with which they have been entrusted. Indeed, the novel evinces an attitude of serious disappointment and dissatisfaction with government. Such an attitude would make sense in terms of the dire financial situation that Traven would have witnessed during his lifetime (or of which he would at least have been aware), first in Germany during the 1920s, and then in America during the 1930s.

Like most (if not all) of the protagonists featured in Traven's literary works, it is significant that *Sierra Madre's* Dobbs is an American residing in Mexico, as is the fact that the same is *also* true of all of the other primary characters that appear in the novel, and most of the secondary characters as well. The fact that the novel's three primary protagonists – Dobbs, Curtin, and Howard – are all American expatriates who find their way to Mexico amid the economic depression, underlying the entire novel's plot, is extremely telling. It is, after all, the quest for work and remuneration that has brought each of them abroad in the first place, presumably and logically because economic opportunities are not readily available at that moment in the United States. Again, this is historically consistent with the years of the Great Depression and the decade of the 1930s, which saw record unemployment rates, homelessness, and massive inflation in the

prices of goods, housing, and taxes – all of which caused significant decreases in the standard of living among *all* classes, with little hope for relief.¹

It is also interesting that Dobbs finds himself a new associate (Curtin) with whom to look for work when his search with his initial companion (Moulton) proves unsuccessful. In fact, all of the managers of the oil rigs that Dobbs and Moulton encounter over the course of their job search notify them that they have stopped hiring additional workers in the wake of the Mexican government's announcement that it has

¹ On this, historian and Senior Fellow in Economic History at the Council on Foreign Relations, Amity Shlaes, writes the following in her *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (2007), which I quote at length in order to illustrate the epochal change that occurred in America during the period of the Great Depression:

From 1929 to 1940, from Hoover to Roosevelt, government intervention helped to make the Depression Great. . . . It was a period of a power struggle between two sectors of the economy [during which] . . . [t]he public sector and the private sector competed relentlessly for advantage. At the beginning, in the 1920s, the private sector ruled. By the end, when World War II began, it was the public sector that was dominant. . . . Roosevelt was clear . . . in his second inaugural address, [in which he declared that] he sought “unimagined power.” He, his advisors, and his congressional allies instinctively targeted monetary control, utilities, and taxation because they were the three sources of revenue whose control would enlarge the public sector the most. Since the private sector – even during the Great Depression – was the key to sustained recovery, such bids did enormous damage.

There remains a question. If so much of the New Deal hurt the economy, why did Roosevelt win reelection three times? . . . In the case of the third and fourth Roosevelt terms the answer is clear: the threat of war, and war itself. . . . In 1936, however, the reason for victory was different. That year Roosevelt won because he created a new kind of interest-group politics. The idea that Americans might form a political group that demanded something from government was well known and thoroughly reported a century earlier by Alexis de Tocqueville. The idea that such groups might find mainstream parties to support them was not novel either. . . . But Roosevelt synthesized interest-group politics more generally to include many constituencies – labor, senior citizens, farmers, union workers. The president made groups where only individual citizens or isolated cranks had stood before, ministered to those groups, and was rewarded with votes.

It is no coincidence that the first peace-time year in American history in which federal spending outpaced the total spending of the states and towns was that election year of 1936. . . . *Roosevelt's move was so profound that it changed the English language. Before the 1930s, the word “liberal” stood for the individual; afterward, the phrase increasingly stood for groups. Roosevelt also changed economics forever . . . happen[ing] upon an economic theory that validated his politics and his moral sense: what we now call Keynesianism. . . . [N]amed after John Maynard Keynes, [Keynesianism] emphasized consumers who were also voters. . . . [It] also emphasized government spending. . . . Supplying generous capital to government [during Roosevelt's depression-long spending spree] made government into a competitor that the private sector could not match [thus exacerbating and prolonging the Great Depression].* (Shlaes 9-11; italics mine)

decided to nationalize its oil supply, which would thereby be forcing out all foreign oil companies currently operating in Mexico. With this bad news, Dobbs and Moulton go their separate ways and Dobbs continues searching for work with a new pal, Curtin.

Dobbs and Curtin manage to find employment with one of the last remaining oil rigs still hiring, and the two begin working there immediately. In that employment, the labor that Dobbs and Curtin perform is unskilled but also very physically demanding and dangerous. (Today, we would consider such working conditions unacceptable; but, in the 1930s, before the advent of responsible labor standards, such were common, generally accepted, and to be expected in many lines of work.)

Counter, however, to what many Traven scholars have claimed, it is *not* the undesirability of the working conditions of the job that causes Dobbs and Curtin to end their employment there. *Neither* is it the big drilling company that owns the rig which the two employees blame when their supervisor fails to pay them on time. *In fact*, it is the unscrupulous and corrupt supervisor that the two see as being responsible for the injustice they suffer by being denied their pay for the labor they have performed.

The final straw for Dobbs and Curtin comes when they witness that supervisor spending money while enjoying a night on the town after he had just claimed (yet again!) not to have received the money from the drilling company with which to pay them. The two seize that opportunity and confront the man in a final attempt to get from him the wages they are owed. This ends in the two hitting the man and taking the money they are owed from his wallet once he falls to the ground. Needless to say, that incident serves as Dobbs' and Curtin's resignation from their jobs.

However, even after they have secured all of their back pay, the amount of money that each of them has is still too small to last either of them very long. Aware of their still oh-so-familiar economic woes, they again start thinking about potential money-making opportunities they might pursue next. Fortunately, it is at this moment that they overhear an older American gentleman named Howard describing his past experiences in the gold-mining industry. Intrigued, Dobbs and Curtin introduce themselves to the old prospector, and it is eventually decided that the three should pool their available capital and go into business together mining for gold in Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains.

With Howard's knowledge and experience, and Dobbs' and Curtin's youth and physical strength, the venture appears to be a promising one. The money is used to purchase equipment and supplies which Howard indicates are necessary and the three set out for the location of the mine that Howard believes will be most lucrative. The trip is long and exhausting, but they eventually reach the designated mine and begin the work required to extract its precious metal – work which Dobbs and Curtin had never done before, and for which they are ill-prepared, but willing and incentivized to do nonetheless. Of this, Traven writes:

If Dobbs and Curtin had ever worked hard in their lives, they would have thought that what they were doing now was the hardest work anywhere in the world. For no employer would they have labored so grindingly as they did now for themselves. Each working-day was as long as daylight would make it. Convicts in a chain-gang in Florida or Georgia would have gone on hunger-strike, and not have minded the whippings either, had they had to work as these three men were doing to fill their own pockets. (Traven 81)

The above passage is illuminated significantly when one considers it in relation to Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, in particular, his notion of the individual laboring in his own self-interest in whatever profession and capacity he judges will be most lucrative and

Smith's related "invisible hand" theory. That theory proposes that as individuals labor in their own self-interest, they do so in such a way as to maximize the interests of their fellow citizens and the society as a whole, though it is never their intention to do so, nor are they usually aware that they are doing so. Rather, to use Smith's words, each individual "intends only his own gain and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention" (Smith 572). Smith continues: "Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of [his intention]. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes . . . [the interests] of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it" (572). Indeed, Smith declares,

I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. . . . What is the species of domestic industry which his capital can employ, and of which the produce is likely to be of the greatest value, every individual, it is evident, can, in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him. The statesman, who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no counsel or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it. (Smith 572-573)

In addition to the notion of self-interest that Smith sees as the primary motivator of individuals, companies, industries, etc. to do and conduct business, and his idea of the "invisible hand" that has come to stand for the self-regulating nature of the free market and individual transactions, Smith also provides the following definition of political economy that is important to my work here. In the Introduction to Book IV of *Wealth of Nations*, Smith provides the following definition of political economy and a description of its purposes, parameters, aims, and objectives, all of which resonate in terms of *Sierra Madre* and the frustration of the characters and the omniscient narrator – again, the cause

of which appears to be the failure of those in positions of power to fulfill their obligations and perform the basic functions with which they are tasked, per the terms and conditions of the social contract.

POLITICAL ECONOMY, considered as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects: *first*, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, *or more properly* to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and *secondly*, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public services. . . . [Therefore, political economy, according to Smith,] proposes to enrich *both* the people *and* the sovereign. (Smith 537; italics mine)

One of the most pressing concerns discussed and debated by Traven's trio of American protagonists in *Sierra Madre* is whether or not it is necessary to alert the government that they are operating a mining outfit by registering their mine with the proper authorities to be able to legally claim and keep any of the gold it might yield. Traven engages his three miners essentially in a cost-benefit analysis during which they discuss, debate, and weigh the pros and cons of submitting the required paperwork to register the mine. The following passage from the novel provides the details of their thinking which ultimately leads them to conclude that the less the government knows about their property (i.e., their gold), the better; for they have nothing to gain, but much to lose, by informing the Mexican government of the gold they now possess. As quoted earlier,

Occasionally the question was brought up as to legalizing their claim and obtaining the license necessary to mine [t]here. It did not cost a fortune, but the government was very particular about this permit and stood ready to collect its legal share of the profits. It was not because the fellows wanted to cheat the government of its taxes that they were reluctant to have the claim registered. Many other considerations caused them to avoid letting the government know what was going on. The government as such was honest and trustworthy in every respect. But who could guarantee the honesty of the petty officials, of the chief of police in the nearest town, of the little mayor of

the nearest village, of the general of the nearest military post? Who was to vouch for the character of the clerk in the government's office? On filing the claim with the authorities the exact location of [the mine would have] . . . to be given. The three men were of little consequence; even the American ambassador could give little protection should it happen that they got into trouble. It happened in this country that chiefs of police, mayors of towns, congressmen, and even generals were implicated in cases of kidnapping for ransom and in open banditry. (Traven 84-85)

Traven continues:

The government, both state and federal, could at any time confiscate not only the whole field but every ounce of gold the men had mined with so much labor and pain. While the three miners were at work they would be well guarded. Only when on their way back with their hard-earned loads would they be waylaid or hijacked by a party of fake bandits acting under orders from someone who was paid by the people to protect the country from bandits. Things like that have happened even in the country to the north; why not here? It is the influence of the atmosphere of the continent. (Traven 85; italics mine)

The above-quoted passage is delivered by the novel's omniscient narrator. Therefore, the disapproving nature of the terms "confiscate," "waylaid," and "hijacked" should alert the reader to the novel's – and the novelist's – dissatisfaction with the current political, legal, and economic environment. Furthermore, it also appears clear that the inclusion of the word "even" in the penultimate sentence of the above passage indicates that Traven understands America (i.e. "the country to the north") as being, until recently, so full of economic opportunity that it stood out as the quintessential example of competitive free-market capitalism to date, but that the recent depression and progressive policies implemented by Roosevelt had turned the country in an unprecedented direction, decreasing America's ability to offer economic opportunities as it once had. This is important to recognize in order to appropriately interpret the text and Traven's political message endorsed therein.

Indeed, from here, Traven goes on to write the following:

The three partners knew both sides, and knew them well. Now their battle was only with nature. Once they had their claim registered, there was every possibility of facing a long fight with more dangerous foes. Apart from the taxes paid to the government, they might have to pay all sorts of racketeers, or, as they called them here, coyotes, and so reach port again with but a small percentage of their profit left in their pockets. There was still another danger, which might be most serious of all. A great mining company in good standing with the government or certain officials might receive word of the filing of the claim. How long would these three miserable proletarians last after the great company started to bring before the courts claims of prior rights to this field, with some native puppet ready to swear away the blue sky for a hundred pesos? (Traven 85)²

Thus, Traven makes clear the level of corruption that exists in Mexico, despite the greater employment opportunities available there. At this point it is also important to note that the old prospector Howard (by far the most knowledgeable and experienced of the three) makes the following statement, effectively declaring where he stands on the matter:

“Here you see for yourselves, provided you have brains to think with, that, much as we want to, we can’t afford to be honest with the government” (Traven 86). Howard finishes up his explanation by stating “I certainly don’t like to cheat anybody out of a just share in my profits, not even a government. . . . [W]e have no alternative. Not alone our earnings but our life and health depend upon forgetting about the license” (Traven 86).

² In Part 4, Chapter 5 in his *Democracy in America* (1835), Alexis de Tocqueville points out that “mines are . . . natural sources of industrial wealth. As industry has developed in Europe, as the production of the mines becomes of more general interest and their profitability is made more difficult because of the division of ownership which is brought about by equality, *most governments have claimed the right to possess the ground which contains the mines and to supervise the work; that has never been the case with any other kind of property.* Mines, which were private property, subject to the same obligations and provided with the same guarantees as other real estate, have thus fallen into the public domain. It is the state which works them [and] . . . leases them out; the owners are transformed into tenants, obtaining their rights from the state, and, furthermore, the state claims practically everywhere the power to direct them; it lays down rules, imposes methods, subjects them to constant inspection, and, if they resist, an administrative court will dispossess them and the public administration transfers their rights to others. Thus, the government possesses not only the mines but has all the miners under its thumb. However, as industry develops, the working of the old mines increases. New ones are opened up. The mining population expands and grows. *Each day, the sovereign governments expand their domain beneath our feet and people them with their agents.*” (Tocqueville 798; italics mine)

From there, Traven's omniscient narrator takes over, concluding that passage with the following statement:

So the question of the license was settled. If you have a license, you are not protected at all against bandits or racketeers. If nobody knows what you have, you have a better chance of safety. The bush is so wide and the Sierra is so great and lonely that you disappear and nobody knows where you are or what has befallen you. (Traven 86)

The above-quoted passage from the novel appears to communicate the idea that governments are obligated to provide for the protection of the individual and his property, per the terms of the social contract, and that corruption causes governments to fail to fulfill this obligation. When such corruption is present and the government has become negligent, Howard (and Traven) insist that it can only be *detrimental* to one's interest to alert the authorities of all of one's taxable income – since those tax dollars would most likely *not* be used to benefit anyone other than the corrupt officials in charge, anyway.

That very sentiment is one which appears in other Traven works as well. While it is conveyed in *Sierra Madre* by Traven's three miners, in *The Death Ship*, *The Cotton Pickers*, and "The Night Visitor," it is similarly conveyed through protagonist Gerard Gales. The message, however, is the same in *Sierra Madre* as it is in those other works: the characters who make this point are essentially declaring that they want to be left alone to live their lives and manage their affairs for and by themselves without the intrusion, interference, regulation, or predation of their hard-earned property by bandits, legal or otherwise.

The frustration they feel is evident, and the repeated inclusion of this sentiment in Traven's works makes it, not only a hallmark of his fiction, but also a highly important aspect of his oeuvre to which I believe scholars and general readers alike must give more

than merely a passing glance in order to appreciate and fully understand the meaning that Traven intends. Moreover, the following passage from Smith's *Wealth of Nations* puts forth a sentiment very similar to the one which I believe Traven means to convey to readers in *Sierra Madre*:

Every system which endeavours, either, by extraordinary encouragements, to draw towards a particular species of industry a greater share of the capital of the society than what would naturally go to it; or, by extraordinary restraints, to force from a particular species of industry some share of the capital which would otherwise be employed in it; is in reality subversive of the great purpose which it means to promote. It retards, instead of accelerating, the progress of the society towards real wealth and greatness; and diminishes, instead of increasing, the real value of the annual produce of its land and labour. (Smith 873)

Hence, Smith insists,

All systems either of preference or of restraint, therefore, being thus completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord. *Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men.* (Smith 873; italics mine)

Smith goes further still in Book IV, Chapter IX of his *Wealth of Nations*, to make the following unequivocal point about the role of government, listing the following three duties that the sovereign or government ought to fulfill:

According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understandings: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or [in other words] the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual, or small number of individuals, though it may

frequently do much more than repay it to a great society. (Smith 874; italics mine).

Smith admits, of course, that “[t]he proper performance of those several duties of the sovereign necessarily supposes a certain expence; and this expence again necessarily requires a certain revenue to support it” (Smith 874). By “revenue,” Smith means to refer here to the money that the government collects from “the people” in the form of taxes. That said, Smith is quick to insist that it is only “[i]n the progress of *despotism* . . . [that] the authority of the executive power gradually absorbs that of every other power in the state, and assumes to itself the management of every branch of revenue which is destined for any public purpose” (Smith 924; italics mine).

When Traven’s miners finally begin to unearth substantial quantities of gold from their mine, Howard points out that they now must consider a host of additional questions that come with owning and managing property of their own. As stated earlier, one of the reasons I suspect that many academics have mistakenly applied a critical Marxist interpretation to this novel is that Traven sprinkles the terms “proletarian” and “Bolshevik” throughout the novel. For example, the paragraphs that conclude the chapter in which the miners discuss registering their mine read as follows, the final sentences of which I believe commonly lead readers astray and toward incorrectly inferring a Marxist reading of the text:

The discussion about the registration of their claim brought comprehension of their changed standing in life. *With every ounce more of gold possessed by them they left the proletarian class and neared that of the property-holders, the well-to-do middle class.* So far they had never had anything of value to protect against thieves. Since they now owned certain riches, their worries about how to protect them had started. The world no longer looked to them as it had a few weeks ago. They had become members of the minority of mankind. *Those who up to this time had been considered by them as their*

proletarian brethren were now enemies against whom they had to protect themselves. As long as they had owned nothing of value, they had been slaves of their hungry bellies, slaves to those who had the means to fill their bellies. All this was changed now. They had reached the first step by which man becomes the slave of his property. (Traven 86-87; italics mine)

While on the surface this might sound a lot like Karl Marx's description of the laboring class living and working as slaves under, and for the benefit of, the property-owning class (whom he refers to [rather problematically] as "capitalists," while the laboring class he calls "proletarians"), I do not think that this is what Traven means to imply. Rather, I believe that, when considered in light of the Hobbes-Locke-Smith Connection (which I have been arguing pervades the novel), this and all of the examples I have pointed out in this chapter evince a much stronger connection to the principles central to the systems of political philosophy and political economy presented by Hobbes, Locke, and Smith in their respective seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts than either to Marx's and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) or Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867).³

Specifically, this passage is best illuminated by considering the following statement that Smith makes in Book V, Chapter I, Part II of his *Wealth of Nations*: "Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all" (Smith 907). When viewed through the lens that this passage from

³ The former, written with Friedrich Engels, is in effect a response to the ideas put forth in Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and, therefore, can also be viewed as responding in large part to the philosophical texts written by Hobbes and Locke, since many of the foundational principles upon which Smith builds his economic theory come from Hobbes and Locke. More importantly, I believe that this is even more evidence to suggest much about the misguided but palpable underlying endorsement of collectivism, central planning, or any other manifestations of Marxism that the application of Critical Theory across so many disciplines within the academy has made possible.

Smith's work provides, the meaning Traven actually intends to convey becomes much clearer and more apparent.

Of course, while Smith spoke of *self-interest* which he often called *self-love*, he got those terms from Locke who used them as well. Locke in turn had adapted his language from that found in Hobbes, and Hobbes spoke most often in terms of *self-preservation* and *self-defense*. And, while Hobbes viewed these basic human instincts as inherent natural rights which every human being cannot be denied, whether or not government exists, Locke took these principles and built upon them to create the foundation for his own political philosophy. Among his more revolutionary contributions, Locke proposed a theory that offered a philosophical explanation for how it is that human beings are able to create private property by mixing their labor with that which is from the "common stock" or that which "nature provides."

Importantly, Hobbes, Locke, and Smith all agree that without property rights, individuals are never truly free. For, as most of us today are quick to understand, persons who labor entirely for the benefit of others rather than for themselves because they are not legally allowed to own property (including money they might otherwise earn in exchange for their labor) are essentially slaves. It is with this in mind that Hobbes, Locke, Smith, and other Enlightenment thinkers recognized property rights as the primary mechanism by which individual liberty and individual sovereignty are secured, insisting that the liberty and sovereignty of the individual ought to be the goal and chief object of individuals, societies, and governments.

Once Traven's miners have extracted enough gold from their mine to be content with their profits, they begin planning for their departure from the mountain. This final

act of closing up the mine and beginning their journey back to civilization will be the hardest and most dangerous part of their entire venture, warns Howard. This is because they will surely face all sort of bandits and corrupt law enforcement officials on their way back to Tampico, the urban city center that stands metaphorically for “civilized society” in the novel (as opposed to the Sierra Madre Mountains where the mine is located and the surrounding rural areas which represent the “state of nature,” where government and the rule of law is less present).

Significantly, “civilized society” (or “civilization”) is defined in the novel by the presence of government and, within the tradition and history of Western philosophical and political thought, is understood to be entered into via the social contract. In theory, individuals willingly enter into the social contract because they recognize that there are certain benefits that joining a civil society makes possible which are too important to pass up. They also understand and accept the fact that, by entering into the social contract and thereby agreeing to join a civil society, they are required to relinquish some of the freedoms they would otherwise have outside of society where there is no government to impose law and order or to administer justice on their behalf. Ultimately, the prospect of living their lives in relative peace and security that the government is supposed to provide for in a civil society, is viewed as more valuable than the loss of any of the rights they would have retained only in the state of nature. This leads most individuals to see the benefits as outweighing the costs of entering into the social contract and surrendering certain rights to the sovereign: specifically, the right to take the law into one’s own hands (this right being transferred to the sovereign in civil society).

Thus, Traven's *Sierra Madre* plays with the duality between "civilization" regulated by government and the "state of nature" where government does not exist, or at least is less present. Once the miners have packed up to leave the mine with their gold, they begin their journey to the city of Tampico to deposit their gold in a bank and exchange the precious metal for paper currency that will be accepted as payment for whatever they may subsequently wish to purchase. However, before they are able to break down their mining equipment to hide the mountain's vein, an unexpected interloper discovers the location of the trio's operation and their business there, much to the three's initial shock and chagrin.⁴

The introduction of this character into the novel presents an opportunity for Traven to raise issues surrounding the pros and cons of competition within markets that is important to Smith's system. That portion of the novel includes the trio's ongoing debate and changing views regarding this new character's encroachment onto their territory, and Traven takes great care to capture their private conversations and debates. Here, the three try to determine how to deal with the stranger's presence. Traven also makes it clear that the miners come to entertain differing perspectives of how the added competition might affect their own business, first seeing it as a threat, and later coming around to the notion that it could even prove to be *beneficial* to their interests.

⁴ The stranger's name is Lacaud, and I believe his introduction into the story marks the point in the novel at which Traven begins to transition from primarily referencing passages from Smith's *Wealth of Nations* to relying more heavily on references to Locke's *Two Treatises*.

At first, however, the trio assumes the worst, convinced that the interloper will pose a threat to their security and that of their mining operation. Traven writes that scene as follows:

Breakfast over, the partners did not know what to do. They couldn't go to work at the mine, for the stranger would find them out. Curtin then had an idea. He said that they all might go hunting together. The stranger looked from one to another. He was not sure what was behind this proposal. The hunt might give the partners a great opportunity to get rid of him through an accident. Thinking this over, he concluded that if they meant to kill him they would do it anyhow, accident or no accident. They alone would be the witnesses. So he said: "Okay with me. Today I'll go hunting with you, but tomorrow I've got other things to do, more important things." "What?" the three partners asked almost simultaneously. "Tomorrow I start to dig for gold here." . . . Howard . . . had become pale. So had his two partners. "Yes, I'm going to prospect here. Right at this spot or somewhere around in the neighborhood. Here is the stuff I was looking for. If none of you have found anything here, that would only be evidence that all of you are boneheads. But I don't think you are." (Traven 123-125)

When Lacaud states that his intention is to prospect for gold in the same area as the one where the trio is currently operating, Dobbs favors shooting the intruder right away, while Curtin suggests doing it in such a way as to make it appear to be an accident. Howard, however, is opposed to both suggestions. This conversation is captured in the following passage:

Now Curtin spoke up. "Perhaps we could start a quarrel with [Lacaud] . . . and make him boil over, and as soon as he draws, we could switch him off and be fully justified." "That doesn't look so very swell to me." Howard was sitting on his cot pulling off his boots [when he said this]. "No, I'm against it. It's dirty – would be dirty that way. It isn't fair." . . . [T]hey were still talking and trying to find a solution to the [Lacaud] problem which so unexpectedly confronted them. All were agreed that the stranger was not welcome and that he had to be disposed of. Yet they all admitted that killing him had many disadvantages and only one benefit. And even this benefit was rather doubtful. (Traven 120)

Howard's objection speaks first to the idea of fair play that Smith's free-market system maximizes. But it additionally speaks to the notion that competition breeds quality, which is a central precept critical to that system (i.e. capitalism). For, according to Smith, it keeps the quality of goods and services offered for sale on the free market high while keeping the prices charged for them reasonable (i.e. relatively consistent from one competitor to the next within a single market).

However, the essence of the debate moves quickly to the subject of property rights and property creation (one of Locke's most important contributions to natural rights-social contract political theory).⁵ Lacaud makes the case that he is free to set up his own prospecting business wherever he likes, including in the vicinity, since the land is not technically owned by anyone, nor has any official claim been filed with the Mexican authorities by anyone that would prohibit him from operating in that area.

Howard counters this statement by making it clear that they *do* have a claim of sorts – indeed, they have “first claim” to the area – simply by the fact that they have already made use of that which had previously been unoccupied and unproductive. Dobbs starts the exchange with Lacaud:

“Now, listen here, stranger, . . . You don't mean to rent an apartment here and spend your vacation in our neighborhood? We sure wouldn't be pleased to have you for our next-door family.” “Who cares?” the stranger answered, . . . add[ing]: “I mean to stay here. It's pretty around here.” Curtin with a voice louder than necessary said: “No parking here without our permission,

⁵ In addition to his thoughts on property and property creation just mentioned, scholars generally agree that Locke's most important contributions also include his notions concerning religious toleration and the obligation of “the people” to dissolve illegitimate, tyrannical, and despotic sovereigns and governments which prove detrimental to their interests. I discuss the latter in the following chapter (Chapter 6) as part of my discussion of the metanarrative told by Lacaud about the events surrounding a recently-committed train robbery massacre and the bandits responsible. I mention that metanarrative only briefly in the present chapter in order to point out some of its themes and connections to social contract political theory and to provide sufficient context for its place in the larger narrative of the novel's plot. A detailed analysis of that metanarrative is provided in Chapter 6.

partner.” “Bush and mountain are free, ain’t they?” “Not the way you think, friend,” Howard broke in. “Free is the bush, and the desert, and the woods, and the mountain ranges for whoever likes to camp there. In that you are right. But we were first here; we’ve got the first claim.” “Maybe. Maybe that’s what you think. But how can you prove that you were really the first here on this spot? What if I was here long before you ever thought of coming?” . . . [To which Howard responds:] “We are here right now. And suppose you have been here before, as you say you have; why didn’t you stake it? Since you didn’t, you haven’t the slightest chance in any court if you mean to fight it out.” (Traven 122-123)

This appears to mark the point in the novel at which Traven begins to transition from primarily referencing passages from Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* to relying more heavily on references to Locke’s *Second Treatise*. For, the logic that Howard relies on when he claims that the original three have an exclusive *de facto* claim to mine in that area is based John Locke’s theory of property creation which he put forward in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) to explain how property claims can be established by mixing one’s labor with that which is owned by nobody in particular or is held in common, especially when doing so means making productive that which was previously left unproductive. Indeed, Locke maintains the following in Book II, Chapter V of his *Second Treatise*:

God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And though all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and nobody has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them . . . yet . . . there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. (Locke 111)

Locke also insists that

[t]hough the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but

himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided . . . he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to [it] . . . , at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. (Locke 111-112)

There is another scene which helps to make clear the connection to Locke's understanding of property rights evident in the exchange between Lacaud and the trio during the couple of days that he spends with them on the mountain after intruding on their campsite in the hopes of convincing them to allow him to partner with them in further prospecting the mountain. The first night he is there, however, the original three go to bed still undecided about how to, but convinced nonetheless that they must, get rid of the intruder if they are to protect their rightfully earned property (i.e. their gold). Lacaud awakens the next morning and takes a sip of water from the pail belonging to the trio. Dobbs witnesses this and is instantly offended, thinking the act tantamount to theft, since the water the three had collected belonged to them as a result of their efforts (their labor) which they had exerted in collecting it from the river. The ruckus wakens Curtin, who shouts, "Water-stealing, hey? . . . Just let me catch you once more taking one thing that belongs to us. Then I'll fill your belly up, doggone it to hell" (Traven 121-122).

Importantly, in language that implies a reference to the Lockean social contract theory I have been discussing, Lacaud replies: "I thought that perhaps I was among civilized men who would not mind letting me have a drink of fresh water" (Traven 122). The fact that Lacaud thinks he may help himself to the trio's property without their consent and assumes that they will not retaliate, indicates that Lacaud assumes he has

ingratiated himself into the “civil society” of the three miners. Clearly, the three original partners do not feel the same way and view Lacaud as an outsider whose very presence threatens their mining operation and their property, including their water supply.

In defense of that property, Dobbs punches the water thief in the jaw, knocking him to the ground. When he gets up, Lacaud makes the following declaration as justification for his plan to begin to prospect in the same general area as that in which the original three have already established their own mining operation. According to Lacaud,

“[There is no less than] a full uncut million [ounces of gold to be mined from this spot,” Lacaud tells the trio, and continues:] If you haven’t found it yet, it’s your fault, not the mountain’s. I know you haven’t got the rich pot yet, although you have been hanging around here eight months or nine. . . . If you had come upon the right entrance and knocked at the door behind which the treasure is open to view, you would have had so much that you would have left long ago, because you couldn’t carry all that’s here without arousing suspicion and being waylaid on your road home. Or you would have sent back just one man to get the claim legally registered and then have formed a regular mining company, with all the machinery and a hundred men working for you.” (Traven 124)

The partners try once more to throw Lacaud off their scent, swearing they haven’t seen a speck of gold anywhere around there. Unconvinced, Lacaud replies with the following statement:

I’m not a criminal, not a crook, not a spy. [All of which the partners had accused him of being in the last twenty-four hours, though they had no evidence of such.] I’m just as decent as any one of you three fellers is. Better than you I don’t want to be. It suits me all right to be just the kind you are. We are all out here to make money. If we were looking for pleasure, we wouldn’t select this god-forsaken region full of mosquitos, yellow fever, typhoidal water, scorpions, tarantulas, [etc.] . . . I know quite well you can bump me off any moment you wish. But that could happen to me anyplace, even in Chicago walking quietly down the street. You always have to risk something if you want to make money. (Traven 125)

The “one million ounces” of gold that Lacaud mentions, however, has succeeded in capturing the trio’s attention, giving them hope that they might be able to accrue even *more* property (i.e. gold) than they have already managed to secure for themselves by partnering with Lacaud as he proposes. Lacaud admits that he cannot mine alone and that he needs the help of the trio if he hopes to extract any of the gold that he believes is still in the mountain. Therefore, he proposes that the three stay with him an additional couple of weeks to help him put his method of mining into action, and perhaps even longer if his method proves successful.

However, their negotiations are cut short when a gang of bandits is spotted in the distance ascending the mountain in the direction of the trio’s campsite. Looking for himself, Lacaud claims to recognize the approaching strangers based on the descriptions he had heard from the local villagers and local newspapers which he claims match those given of the bandits believed to be responsible for a recently committed train robbery and violent massacre.

Believing that the approaching strangers are the very bandits responsible for that train robbery massacre – and, therefore, convinced that they are dangerous and pose a threat to himself and his fellow Americans – Lacaud proceeds to tell Dobbs, Curtin, and Howard what he has heard about that train robbery incident, as the four monitor the approaching strangers’ progress from afar, as they make their way slowly up the mountain in the direction of the trio’s mine.

That story about the train robbery and massacre, which I refer to as “Lacaud’s metanarrative,” is one of the novel’s two metanarratives that provide the focus of my next chapter. For now, what is important to note is that Lacaud ends up fighting alongside the

trio in a shootout that ensues when the gang of bandits finally reaches the trio's campsite. With Lacaud's help, the three are able to fight off the bandits long enough for law enforcement to arrive, which causes the bandits to flee the area, leaving the four to resume their work in peace.

Having survived the incident with the bandits, however, the original trio is as convinced as ever that they ought to close down their mining operation and leave the mountain with their hard-earned gold before their luck runs out. It takes Dobbs, Curtin, and Howard another two weeks to complete the laborious task of filling in their mine, packing up all of their belongings (including their gold), and readying their burros for the long journey back to civilization (the city of Tampico, where they intend to exchange their gold for paper currency) and eventually back home to America.

At this point, I would like to discuss another element of Traven's *Sierra Madre* that is particularly relevant to my study: namely, the recurring appearance throughout the novel of doctors, physicians, and medicine-men. In addition to these figures themselves, the conversations and events surrounding the medical profession are also noteworthy. Indeed, throughout the novel, we meet various medical professionals and amateurs (such as Howard) performing medical services in Mexico's desolate Sierra Madre region. Importantly, all of the characters in the novel who provide medical care, (mostly) to the local Indian populations of the surrounding villages, are also *all* expatriates who originally hail from *other* countries, just like Traven's three miners.

There are three such medical "professionals" in particular whose inclusion in the novel I will be discussing in the pages that follow.

The first of these medical professionals is featured in the later-appearing of the two metanarratives that I explore in more detail in Chapter 6. Here, suffice it to say that that metanarrative is about a Spanish doctor who becomes the beneficiary of a vast gold mine after performing a miraculous operation on the blind son of an Indian chief, fully restoring the boy's vision. After searching far and wide for a cure to his only son's blindness, and after many failed appeals to the Holy Virgin and many unsuccessful attempts made by his medicine-men, the chief finally meets and hires the Spanish doctor who successfully restores the boy's vision. The payment that the doctor receives from the chief for successfully performing the operation necessary to restore the boy's sight is the property rights to the chief's family's vast gold mine.⁶

We next see doctors performing medical services in a village that the trio passes through on their way back to the civilized society of Tampico with their hard-earned gold. The trio is pleased to discover that the officers gathered in the village are not interested in questioning them. Rather, the officers explain that they have been sent to the village by the Mexican government to administer vaccinations to the local population. Although the Americans had all been vaccinated in childhood, they carry no certificates or other documentation to prove this. The physician is not interested in giving them a hard time about the certificate, but he does have a request. Apparently, the physician has had a hard time getting the native population to submit to the government's vaccination mandates, so he asks the three Americans if they would each receive the vaccine again in order to show the natives that it is safe, in the hopes that they will follow the three

⁶ Again, I analyze this metanarrative in greater detail in Chapter 6 of the present dissertation.

Americans' lead and willingly receive the vaccine. The three miners gladly comply and the plan appears to work, for the villagers line up to receive their vaccinations after seeing the Americans receive theirs.

I believe this scene to be of particular importance because of the fact that, in this portion of the novel, Traven deliberately appears to depict the act of administering medicine in such a way as to make it appear much like the act of administering religious doctrine and the performance of religious ceremony.⁷ For example, the officials' and physicians' descriptions of the troubles they have had convincing the natives to trust the vaccines and comply with the government's mandate contain undertones that imply a parallel between the coercive nature of religion and religious institutions (e.g. the Spanish Inquisition) and that of governments (seen here in the coercive tactics used by the physician and the representatives of the Mexican government to convince the natives to receive the government-issued, government-mandated smallpox vaccine). In fact, the following passage indicates that, in other cases, the vaccine has often been *forced* upon the native population against their will, supposedly because the government believes it is for their own good and will "save" them.

In Traven's passage, the Federal Health Commission officer says,

"It's the law that everybody in the republic has to have been vaccinated inside of the last five years to prevent smallpox epidemics." [To which Howard replies:] "Oh, caballeros, we were vaccinated back home when still kids. But,

⁷This portion of the novel also serves to foreshadow the upcoming transition that Traven makes shortly after this scene concludes, where Traven's attention appears to shift from focusing on references to Locke toward focusing more on references to Hobbes. Though that full transition does not take place until later in the novel, readers familiar with the work of Hobbes and Locke will detect the subtle, though unmistakable connection this scene has to Thomas Hobbes' notions of the Right of Nature and his Laws of Nature, and will also appreciate the way that Traven blurs the lines between the portions of the novel dedicated to referencing each of these two philosophers, since Locke's work essentially recycled Hobbes'.

of course, we don't carry our vaccination papers with us." "Of course not, gentlemen, and who does? Not even I do," [the officer said, laughing] . . . "You see, we are the Federal Health Commission, sent by the government to vaccinate everyone, especially the Indians, who suffer most from the smallpox. It's a hard task for us. They run away from us whenever we come to a village. They are afraid. . . . [We] have to bring along a whole regiment of soldiers to catch them. . . . "[L]ook here at my face, [said one of the officials,] all scratched up by women who defended their babies whom we wanted to vaccinate. But you know our country. Look at the thousands who have lost their eyesight on account of the ravages caused by smallpox epidemics. Look at the thousands and hundreds of thousands of pretty girls and women whose faces are scarred." "And when we come to these people to help them," another of the officials broke in, "they fight us and even stone us as if we were their greatest enemies and not, as we really are, their best friends. They don't have to pay a cent. Everything is done without any charge. The government only wishes to save them." (Traven 218-219)

Then, the physician speaks to Howard:

"See here, my good friend, I know you and your companeros over there [referring to Dobbs and Curtin standing nearby] are all vaccinated. But we would like you to do us a great favor. Let your friends come over here voluntarily and get vaccinated once more, please. What we need is to show all these ignorant people that you, white men, are not afraid of what we are doing We have been here four days, offering vaccination for nothing and persuading people to come and take it. What makes things worse for us, the church is set against vaccination because it was not ordered by the Lord, just as this same church is against educating the children, because they might read books written against the church and write sinful love-letters. . . . [All three of Traven's American miners receive new vaccinations and remark that, as they] left the plaza, the officers were so busy that they had to line up the people waiting for their [vaccinations] . . . , and among them . . . were already women offering the arms of their babies to the officers. (Traven 219-221)

This sounds very much like the promise made by missionaries who told the native populations of colonized regions that they would be "saved," if they accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and made the proper monetary donations to the Church. Of course, those religious missionaries offered salvation *after* this life, while the physicians providing vaccines to the natives on orders from the government, free of

charge, are offering salvation *in* this life, which is especially interesting to my work in light of the Hobbes-Locke-Smith connection that I argue undergirds Traven's novel.

Specifically, Traven's scene appears to reference Hobbes' notion that religion and government have diametrically opposed jurisdictions (the former, of the salvation of individual souls *after* this life; the latter, their salvation *in* this life), as well as his First (or, Fundamental) and Second Laws of Nature, which (among other things) insist upon the inalienable right of each individual to seek, and to use all he or she can in order to achieve, self-preservation – which includes protecting oneself and others (one's children, perhaps most of all) from imminent harm during an attack. Hobbes states in Part I, Chapter XIII of *Leviathan* that

The passions that incline men to peace, are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles, are they, which . . . are called the Laws of Nature: . . . The Right of Nature, . . . is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, . . . for the preservation . . . of his own Life; and consequently of doing anything, which in his own Judgment and Reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. . . . A Law of Nature is a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same. (Hobbes 79-80)

According to Hobbes, it follows

[t]hat *every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of War.* The first branch of which Rule, containeth the first, Fundamentall Law of Nature; which is, to seek Peace, and follow it. The Second, the summe of the Right of Nature; which is, *By all means we can, to defend our selves.* (Hobbes 80; italics mine)

After receiving the vaccine and now armed with the proper certificate to prove it, the trio continues their journey toward the civilized city of Tampico. However, they are delayed once again when Howard volunteers to accompany some of the native Indians

back to their village to administer whatever medical aid he might be able to provide to a young boy who has just been pulled, nearly drowned, from a nearby river.

The first passage of interest in this scene is the one containing the boy's father's description of the situation when these native Indians first approach the three Americans for help, revealing that (like most of the natives in that region) these men assume that the three Americans likely have read enough in books to be proficient at practicing medicine. Presumably, this assumption is based simply on the fact that the trio are all Americans, which the Indians also assume means that all of them can and do read well and often. (While it is implied in the novel that *Howard* can read, Traven doesn't really provide any indication of Dobbs' or Curtin's literacy.)

After Howard performs a complex series of maneuvers to the apparently lifeless body of the nearly dead boy, Howard catches himself in an unsettling state of bliss as the villagers look on in awe, hoping to see a miracle which Howard finds himself hoping to deliver. Of this, Traven writes,

All the people assembled in the house [where Howard worked to save the boy] seemed to expect that the American would now perform a great miracle such as raising the dead by sheer command. [Howard] tried artificial respiration, something these Indians had never seen before. This treatment made a deep impression and added to the belief that Howard was a great medicine-man, even a magician. . . . [The Indians] looked at each other approvingly, and once more became convinced that those god-damned gringos could do things they had thought only God Himself could do. (Traven 224)

Believing that the boy showed signs of life, Howard performs a second series of procedures, after which the boy begins to cough and then sits up. Traven writes the following reflection for Howard in the immediate aftermath of the "miracle" he had just performed:

Half of this procedure, Howard knew, was unnecessary. He had gone through it merely to impress the Indians with his great wisdom, for he noted that the Indians were watching every move he made. He admitted to himself that the boy if left entirely alone might, perhaps, have come to just as well. Why he put on this show he could not explain. He had the feeling that the more he acted, the more these people would respect and admire him; though why, again, he should yearn for the admiration and respect of these poor folk he would not have been able to explain, even to himself. All the people present considered that he had performed a miracle. Even now, when the boy opened his eyes and began to recognize his surroundings and his father and mother, the onlookers acted as if under a spell. They did not utter a word, but simply looked at the awakening boy and at Howard in awe. (Traven 224-225)

What is most noteworthy about Howard's reflection upon the events that had just transpired is that this experience sparks something new in Howard that he himself only becomes aware of immediately after his performance and the "show" he had just put on for the audience of villagers is "over," the dramatic conclusion and climactic ending having been achieved with the boy's sudden reanimation.

He finds that he rather enjoys being viewed so admiringly by the villagers, who appear to view him as having god-like "powers" which made him appear otherworldly and supernatural in their eyes. At least, this is how Howard thinks that his audience of villagers views him immediately after witnessing the "spectacle" of him performing the "miracle" of "saving" the boy, to which Howard admits (to himself) he had artificially and unnecessarily infused additional theatrical elements that elevated the suspense and drama of the moment. Indeed, those who were present are convinced that Howard's "powers" have brought the boy "back to life," literally "raising him from the dead" (not unlike the miracle that Jesus is said to have performed on Lazarus).

This, of course, foreshadows the later development of Howard's self-image as sharing a similarly awe-struck view of himself as that which the villagers appear to form

of him after witnessing the extent of his “powers.” In the scene, in the wake of working his very first “miracle,” by looking at and evaluating his own behavior, he is able to identify some elements about his own psyche that he finds disconcerting and largely incompatible with the view he had had of himself up until this event. Specifically, Howard becomes aware of the underlying psychology that must have motivated him to behave the way he did. This concerns him because it is incongruous with the way he had come to view himself prior to this event: that is, as immune to such vaingloriousness. This also hints at Howard’s adaptability to his new position and the great pride he comes to feel from having the respect of villagers far and wide as a result of his medical skill and his abilities when it comes to “saving” others and “curing” them of their ailments (which Traven reveals has transpired by the time Howard is reunited with Curtin in the final pages of the novel).

The next day, the boy’s parents again approach the trio just as they are packing up to depart in order to continue their journey to Tampico. They are so grateful to Howard for saving their son’s life that they have come to ask Howard to accompany them back to their village and to stay there as their honored guest for several weeks. Though Howard tries increasingly forcefully numerous times to decline their invitation, the Indians simply will not take no for an answer. Sensing the situation could escalate into violence should they continue to reject the natives’ generosity, the trio decides that it is not worth angering or insulting the Indians, and eventually agree that Howard will stay in order to comply with their wish, while Dobbs and Curtin will continue heading for the city of Tampico.

In addition, since the natives might not be trustworthy, the three Americans decide that Dobbs and Curtin will take Howard's burros and the rest of his belongings (including his share of the gold) with them to Tampico. Before this is decided however, it is interesting to note that the Americans believe they have provided the Indians with an indisputable excuse for declining their invitation: that is, they have business to attend to. The villagers, however, fail to respond in the way that the three expect. It becomes clear from the following exchange that, while the Americans think that business is always an urgent matter, the native Indians do not share that mentality.

“Business?” the father of the rescued boy questioned. “What is business, after all? Just hustle and worry. Business can wait. There is no business in the world which is urgent, señores. Urgent business is nothing but sheer imagination. . . . You cannot leave me . . . in debt to you. I invite you to stay with me. You rescued my son from certain death. Having done this great service I should be damned and burn in hell for all eternity if I allowed you to go without first showing you my deep gratitude. What is more, all the people in the village would believe me a sinner and a devil if I did not reward you properly for what you have done for me and my family.” (Traven 222-223)

Howard then tries once more in the following passage to refuse the invitation:

“I’m very sorry we can’t stay . . . We have to go to Durango.⁸ Unless I am in Durango inside of a week, I’ll lose all my business.” [Again, this fails to move the natives much, who reply] “In this you are mistaken, my friend. You won’t lose your business. And if you should, why, pick up another one. There is so much business in the world just waiting to be picked up. No use to hurry. All I can say is that you cannot go like this. I have to pay you for your medicine. I haven’t any money. All I can offer is my house and my most sincere hospitality. Sorry, my friend, I’m afraid I shall have to insist that you stay with me at least six weeks. . . . Why worry about your business? There is only one business on earth, and that is to live and be happy. What greater thing can you gain from life than happiness?” (Traven 226-228)

⁸ Since, here, Howard tells the Indians that the reason he cannot stay is that he has business to conduct in the city of *Durango* (rather than the city of *Tampico*, which is the city where he, Dobbs, and Curtin are *actually* heading), we must assume that Howard does this in an effort to conceal that information from the Indians.

At this point it is abundantly clear that the “business” excuse is not going to get them out of this. Actually, Howard is the only one that the villagers insist upon hosting, as Dobbs and Curtin are really of no interest to them. Who the villagers want to honor is the great and powerful Howard. Howard accepts his fate and knows he will have to comply with their request. However, his immediate reaction is worth mentioning. This, Traven writes as follows:

Howard had no means and no words with which to explain to these simple men that business is the only real thing in life, that it is heaven and paradise and all the happiness of a good Rotarian. These Indians were still living in a semi-civilized state, with little hope of improvement within the next hundred years. (Traven 228)

Though he will be staying with the villagers for many days, Howard is hopeful that without all of his baggage, he will be able catch up to his two American compatriots relatively quickly after the festivities in his honor are over and he is free to go.

Importantly, before Dobbs and Curtin depart, the three Americans write up and sign a basic contract that will serve as a receipt with which Howard will be able to access his gold, which Dobbs and Curtin have promised to deposit in the bank in his name once they reach the city. That is the plan, unless of course Howard is able to catch up to them before they reach the city (in which case, Howard can do whatever he wants with his share of the gold).

The events which transpire the first night that Dobbs and Curtin spend alone together minus Howard result in one of the most powerful episodes in the entire novel, and it serves as the final point in the text that we see Traven referencing Locke’s *Two Treatises*. The fact that we also see a strong connection to Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*

(1651) in this scene signals Traven's third and final transition from relying mostly on references taken from Locke to relying on those taken from Hobbes, from this point on.

This important scene begins when Dobbs notes how easy it would be for them to steal Howard's gold, keeping it all for themselves and leaving Howard with nothing. Curtin is horrified by this suggestion and the two engage in a debate on this topic, the details of which demonstrate a clear connection between Curtin's view that stealing Howard's gold would be wrong (unethical and unjust) and Locke's notion that mixing one's labor with something which nature has provided or which belongs to nobody in particular (such as gold extracted from a mine, assuming that mine has no owner), makes it that person's rightful property. Curtin shares Locke's ethical understanding that rights to this sort of property are exclusively those of the person whose labor was expended in order to create that property. Traven's scene continues as follows:

Curtin, still standing, looked Dobbs over from head to foot. "I signed that receipt." [Dobbs replies:] "So did I. And what of it? I've signed many receipts in my life." [Curtin admits that:] "Doubtless. I've signed lots of things too, which I forgot about as soon as the ink was dry. This case I think is different. *The old man hasn't stolen the goods. They're his honestly earned property. That we know only too well. He didn't get the money by a lousy cowardly stick-up, or from the races, or by blackmailing, or by [playing dice] . . . He's worked like a slave, the old man has.* And for him, old as he is, it was a harder task than for us, believe me. *I may not respect many things in life, but I do respect most sincerely the money somebody has worked and slaved for honestly.* And that's on the level." (Traven 236; italics mine)

While Curtin is initially confused by Dobbs' suggestion that they might steal Howard's gold, he grows increasingly uneasy around Dobbs whom he realizes has begun to lose his grip on reality. Or, as Howard describes it near the beginning of the novel, he is beginning to "lose his judgement," and as Curtin will describe it later, Dobbs "is no longer seeing reason." Curtin adamantly defends his position that he is completely

opposed to Dobbs' plan to steal from Howard, maintaining that he (Curtin) and Dobbs have a formal agreement that obligates them to perform the terms of their covenant by protecting Howard's gold and keeping it safe so that Howard can regain possession of it later. In Curtin's mind, it is a requirement not only necessitated by their original agreement and participation as business partners, but also reaffirmed by their most recent promise to keep Howard's share until he can rejoin the group once the latter's obligation to the villagers is complete. Traven writes this scene in such a way as to make it clear that Curtin places the same importance as Hobbes on the idea that the ability of individuals to contract freely according to the terms of their contracts is essential for the just and peaceful associations of persons in any civilized society.

Curtin's response to Dobbs' suggestion of stealing Howard's gold reads as follows:

“Now, get this straight, Dobby; if you mean to lift the goods of[f] the old man, count me out. And what is more, I won't let you do it.” . . . “[A]s long as I am around and on my feet, you won't take a single grain from the old man's pay.” . . . Dobbs grinned [and then responded to Curtin thusly] “I can see very plainly what you mean. You want to take it all for yourself and cut me off. That's the meaning.” [To which Curtin replies:] “No, that is not the meaning. I'm on the level with the old man exactly as I would be on the level with you if you weren't here.” [Dobbs retorts] “Mebbe I don't need you at all. I can take it alone. I don't need no outside help, buddy.” (Traven 236)

The lines that follow this exchange are especially reminiscent and illustrative of the influence of Hobbes' work and particularly his above-mentioned maxim regarding the importance of individuals being able to freely enter into contracts (what Hobbes often called “covenants”) and the obligation that doing so comes with the requirement to honor such contracts.

Next comes one of the previously mentioned appearances in the novel of the term “Bolshevik” that I suspect causes many readers to misunderstand the meaning of the above-cited passage and this entire scene (not to mention the novel, more generally). It appears in Dobbs’ retort to Curtin’s explanation (in the above quotation) for why it is that Curtin believes it would be wrong to steal Howard’s gold. There, Traven has Dobbs proclaim:

“Hell, can your *Bolshevik* ideas. A soap-box always makes me sick. And to have to hear it even out here in the wilderness is the god-damned limit.” [But Curtin insists to the contrary:] “*No Bolshevik ideas at all*, and you know that. *Perhaps it’s the aim of the Bolsheviks to see that a worker gets the full value of what he produces and that no one tries to cheat a worker out of what is honestly coming to him. Anyway, put that out of the discussion. It’s none of my business.*”⁹ And, Bolshevik or no Bolshevik, get this straight, partner: I’m on the level, and as long as I’m around you don’t even touch the inside of the old man’s packs. That’s that, and it’s final.” (Traven 236-237; italics mine)

Traven takes great care in this scene to make it clear that Curtin’s opposition to Dobbs’ plan to steal Howard’s gold is based on Curtin’s determination that doing so would be wrong because it would deny Howard his “equal share” of the gold, which I think is what Dobbs means to imply when he responds to Curtin’s objection by calling it “Bolshevik” (instead of by debating any of the things with which Curtin actually takes issue that lead him to reject Dobbs’ plan).

[A]s Dobbs talked . . . [Curtin] saw for the first time a great opportunity to enrich himself as Dobbs had suggested. This struck him as alien because never before had he had any idea of the kind. He was in no way scrupulous in life. Far from being that, he could take without remorse anything that was easy to pick up. He knew how the big oil-magnates, the big financiers, the presidents of great corporations, and in particular the politicians, stole and robbed wherever there was an opportunity. Why should he, the little feller, the

⁹ This line – “It’s none of my business.” – appears to have been a favorite of Traven’s, who features it also in his long short story “The Night Visitor” as spoken by the recurring protagonist Gerard Gales (who appears in several of Traven’s literary works). The passage from that short story containing this line was briefly discussed in Chapter 1.

ordinary citizen, be honest if the big ones knew no scruples and no honesty, either in their business or in the affairs of the nation. And these great robbers sitting in easy chairs before huge mahogany tables, and those highwaymen speaking from the platforms of the conventions of the ruling parties, were the same people who in success stories and in the papers were praised as valuable citizens, the builders of the nation, the staunch upholders of our civilization and of our culture. What were decency and honesty after all? Everybody around him had a different opinion of what that meant. *Yet, from whatever angle he looked at the accusation Dobbs had made against him, he found it the dirtiest he could think of. There was no excuse for such a thing as Dobbs had proposed.* (237-238; italics mine)

Curtin's ethical reasoning in taking this position follows Hobbes' notion of the obligation of individuals who freely enter into contracts to honor those contracts and perform the terms agreed to therein. For Hobbes states the following in Part I, Chapter XIV of

Leviathan:

[I]n buying, and selling, and other acts of Contract, a Promise is equivalent to a Covenant; and therefore obligatory. . . . Men are freed of their Covenants two wayes; by Performing; or by being forgiven. For Performance, is the naturall end of obligation; and forgiveness, the restitution of liberty; as being a re-transferring of that Right, in which the obligation consisted. (Hobbes 83-85)

Ultimately, Traven not only has Curtin stand up to Dobbs, but he also makes a point of having Curtin base his opposition on philosophical grounds that are morally as well as logically sound. In addition to Curtin believing that it would be stealing to take the gold that was Howard's rightly-earned property because Howard had toiled and troubled and expended so much labor to create it, Curtin also intends to honor his contract with Howard even if that means fighting Dobbs.

In fact, it eventually becomes clear to Curtin that Dobbs intends to murder him in order to steal all the gold for himself and that he (Curtin) will need to restrain Dobbs for the duration of their journey in order to protect himself against Dobbs shooting him and

leaving him for dead in the Sierra Madre desert. Again, Part I, Chapter XIV of Hobbes' *Leviathan* provides the philosophical justification for Curtin's decision to restrain Dobbs as well as his awareness that he will, from this moment forward, need to be on alert and prepared to defend himself against Dobbs, who now poses a direct threat to his life. That passage from Hobbes' text reads as follows:

A Covenant not to defend my selfe from force, by force, is alwayes voyd. For . . . no man can transferre, or lay down his Right to save himselfe from Death, Wounds, and Imprisonment, the avoyding whereof is the . . . [only] End of laying down any Right, and therefore the promise of not resisting force, in no Covenant transferreth any right; nor is obliging. For though a man may Covenant thus, *Unlesse I do so, or so, kill me*; he cannot Covenant thus, *Unlesse I do so, or so, I will not resist you, when you come to kill me*. For man by nature chooseth the lesser evill, which is danger of death in resisting; rather than the greater, which is certain and present death in not resisting. And this is granted to be true by all men, in that they lead Criminals to Execution, and Prison, with armed men, notwithstanding that such Criminals have consented to the Law, by which they are condemned. (Hobbes 85-86; italics are original)

Though he manages to keep Dobbs tied up for the entire next day of their journey, Dobbs eventually gets free of his restraints when they make camp that night and launches his attack on Curtin while Curtin is asleep. Believing he has successfully murdered Curtin and managed to steal both his partners' shares of the gold, Dobbs continues making his way toward the city with all of the burros and all of the gold. However, Dobbs soon becomes paranoid that Howard will eventually catch up to him to claim his share of the earnings and accuse Dobbs of theft and murder. Dobbs also increasingly fears discovery of the murder by *anyone*, which would put him at the mercy of the local authorities who dole out justice in the rural Mexican Sierra Madre desert (i.e., in the "state of nature") much more swiftly and ruthlessly than their "civilized" urban-dwelling counterparts. Until now, the fact that he had been unable to locate Curtin's body a few hours after

shooting him the final time had merely irritated Dobbs; but now it suddenly becomes a real concern for Dobbs, presenting another potential loose end that could derail his plans and a possible witness whose testimony could render him penniless and sentenced to prison or even to death.

As a result, Dobbs is eager for protection at this point in the novel.

Traven describes Dobbs' final night spent on the road, the night before he is finally going to reach the city, as follows, with Dobbs feeling almost certain that he is going to get away with his crimes now that the city lights are in view:

Evening saw Dobbs for the last time cooking his meal in a camp and living like a savage. Next day, he would be in the city, sleeping in a good bed in a hotel, sitting at a real table with well-cooked food before him, served by a bowing waiter. Two days later he would be riding in a train which would take him in two or three days to the good old home country. He was all jubilation. . . He was now safe. He could see the flares of the oil-fed engine sweeping along the railroad tracks, could hear the trains rolling by and the coughing and bellowing of the engine. These sounds gave him a great feeling of security. They were the sounds of civilization. *He longed for civilization for law, for justice, which would protect his property and his person with a police force. Within this civilization he could face Howard without fear, and even Curtin, should he ever show up again. There he could sneer at them and ridicule them. There they would have to use civilized means to prove their accusations. If those bums should go too far, he could easily accuse them of blackmailing him. He would then be a fine citizen, well dressed, able to afford the best lawyers. "What a fine thing civilization is!" he thought; and he felt happy that no such nonsense as Bolshevism could take away his property and his easy life.* Again an engine barked through the night. To Dobbs it was sweet music, the music of law, protection, and safety. (259-260; italics mine)

In reality, Curtin is not dead; and Dobbs never makes it to the safety of the city. For, after Dobbs leaves the scene of Curtin's "murder," Curtin is badly injured but still alive. Some local Indians happen across him and summon Howard to Curtin's aid (as Howard has, by that time, become the region's medicine-man), and Curtin makes a full recovery under Howard's care. First, however, Dobbs' fate is discovered and the

authorities learn that he had been ambushed, robbed, and killed, by a group of bandits just outside of the city where he had planned to complete the final step necessary to fully realize his acquisition of wealth through the sale of the gold dust.

Having no idea that the packs carried by Dobbs' burros hold anything as valuable as gold, the bandits who end up murdering him assume that the only things worth stealing from him are the burros themselves. When the bandits attempt to take the burros from him, Dobbs reacts by pulling his pistol and aims it at the advancing bandits. Irony abounds in this scene, as Traven manages to achieve something that feels like justice for Dobbs. For, indeed, as the bandits initiate their attack and Dobbs pulls the trigger of the gun in his hand, it makes a "click" sound, then another, and another, but never fires, thus revealing to Dobbs – as well as to the bandits – that Dobbs' gun is not actually loaded.

Instantly, Dobbs is reminded that he had shot Curtin with *Curtin's* gun and that he had then thrown that gun onto Curtin's body after shooting him the second and final time. And so it is that Dobbs finally learns what the reader has known for chapters: that, as a precaution, Curtin had emptied all of the bullets from Dobbs' gun days earlier, thinking that doing so might prevent Dobbs from shooting him (Curtin) while he slept. If Dobbs had used his own gun to shoot Curtin, he would have realized long before this fateful moment that his gun was empty and he surely would have reloaded it, so as to be well-prepared and well-protected against any trouble he might meet on his journey back to the civilized society of the city.

As a last resort, after his gun fails to fire, Dobbs reaches for the machete he has packed away atop his nearest burro, but fails to reach it before one of the bandits strikes him over the head with a large rock, knocking him to the ground. A moment later,

another one of the bandits moves in, swiftly takes possession of Dobbs' own machete, and uses it to decapitate Dobbs in one powerful stroke.

The details of the way that Dobbs is murdered mirror many of the ways in which Dobbs had attempted to murder Curtin. Therefore, Traven is able to "set right" Dobbs' betrayal of his two partners. Moreover, the fact that Dobbs is beheaded speaks especially vividly to the appropriateness of viewing Dobbs and his acts of perfidy as definitively unethical, but also tyrannical, despotic, and corrupt. Traven further invites readers to view Dobbs this way in the long passage quoted above wherein Dobbs longs for the safety, security, and protection of the rules of law and government that civilization provides.

That said, Traven does not allow Dobbs' murder to go unavenged, either. For, when the bandits attempt to sell the burros they have stolen from the now-dead Dobbs in a nearby village, the villagers are immediately alerted to the fact that the animals offered for sale are stolen goods based on the brands that the burros bear. Furthermore, it is obvious to the villagers that all of those animals had come from one farm in particular since the villagers had long been acquainted with the owners of that farm. Indeed, the villagers even recall that those burros had originally been sold (legally) to three Americans months earlier. This reveals that the bandits who killed Dobbs were attempting to sell the villagers stolen property when they attempted to sell them the burros they had stolen from Dobbs after they killed him. This, therefore, put the villagers in danger of potentially being arrested themselves. For, if the villagers had chosen to buy any the burros from the bandits, or even if the authorities simply discovered that the

villagers were in possession of any of those animals, the villagers would have been arrested for being in possession of stolen property.

Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, the leader of the village swiftly goes about the business of exposing the bandits and their plan to the rest of the villagers. When the bandits attempt to flee, they are quickly rounded up and brought back in restraints, while a posse is dispatched with orders to locate the American from whom the bandits claim to have legally purchased the burros (a story everyone in the village, by that time, suspects is untrue). Thinking it more likely that the bandits either harmed or killed the American before stealing the burros, a posse is dispatched and discovers the location where Dobbs was slain along with his remains and ample evidence to suggest exactly what had transpired there.

Now that the detained bandits are proven to be murderers, their punishment is going to be much more severe than originally anticipated. In fact, federal law enforcement has to be called to claim the bandits and take them away for trial and sentencing. However, because this takes place in the state of nature, outside of civilized society, Traven allows for a swifter, more efficient, but just end to these criminals. For, while the bandits are enroute to the city (i.e. to civilized society) where they are to be tried for their crimes in a court of law, the officers escorting them are ultimately forced to shoot them all, thus killing the bandits before allowing them their day in court. Traven writes that scene as follows:

[Hearing shots fired, the sergeant declares:] “Now, what the hell can that be? I hope the prisoners didn’t try to escape. That would be too bad.” [Speaking to the privates who had fired the shots, the sergeant states:] “You should have saved the life of the prisoners. They should have had a trial in court. They are citizens and are entitled to a fair trial as the Constitution demands. Of course,

if they attacked you, tried to kill you and then make their escape, it was only your duty to shoot them, . . . I shall recommend you to the colonel for your quick action.” (Traven 293-294)

The implication here appears to be that, in some cases (such as this one in Traven’s novel), justice might be served just as well, and perhaps even better, *outside* of the courtroom and *outside* the judicial system run by the State. Again, this is the result of corruption, general inefficiency, and rampant unaccountability – all of which Traven’s novel seems to suggest become increasingly pervasive and ubiquitous within a civil society as that society’s government grows bigger and more powerful (i.e., as it gains authority and control over more and more sectors, industries, institutions, etc. within that society).

Keep in mind, however, that it is specifically the political – and not necessarily the economic – aspect of civil societies which appears to be under scrutiny here. So, while many scholars have been quick to conflate this and other similar statements in *Sierra Madre* that are clearly critical of corruption, their assumption that, by extension, Traven implicates capitalism as his intended target is misguided. For, as I have argued throughout the present dissertation, political matters of state are related to, but in fact separate from, economic matters; therefore, corruption only *necessarily* follows from the former to the latter in *collectivist* societies (those that adopt socialism or communism, for example) which, by definition, intertwine their state’s political and economic systems. This is *not* the case, however, in places like America, Britain, and many other Western countries because, in such nations, the country’s political system has been kept separate from its economic system.

As the novel concludes, several additional revelations come to light. Among these, we learn that Curtin was able to crawl to safety after being shot by Dobbs (solving the mystery of where his body had gone, since Dobbs was never able to locate it the next day); only Dobbs' share of the gold has actually been lost, while Curtin's and Howard's are returned to them; and the "medicine" that Howard has been peddling as a panacea to any ailments from which his patients suffer is nothing more than hot water and local harmless herbs, none of which have known healing properties, but since the ingredients of the prescribed medicine remain unknown to his patients, the harmless concoction has positive results despite being nothing more than a placebo.

The fact that Dobbs' share is the *only* share of the gold that is lost is important as a way of finding justice for his two partners (Curtin and Howard) whom he betrayed by attempting to steal their shares of the gold, and the fact that Dobbs is murdered by the bandits can be seen as justice for Dobbs attempting to murder Curtin in the process. As for Howard's elixir, I believe it is a sign of Howard's acceptance of the fact that he needs to fill whatever niche or role is required of him in Mexico's Sierra Madre in order to survive – and that, as reluctant as he was to embrace his new role as the region's medicine-man, he seems to have taken to it quite well and has found a way to capitalize on the situation. This, I realize, is another element of the plot that likely causes many readers to perceive a Marxist undertone. However, that conclusion would also be misguided, and Traven makes as much clear in the following passage from the novel:

Howard did as all doctors do. He prescribed a medicine which, to make business still better, he himself manufactured by cooking up grass, leaves, herbs, roots which he was certain would not harm even a baby. The [patients were] . . . so grateful that [they] . . . would have given him a hundred silver pesos . . . Howard had been content with [just] ten centavos. . . . All the

Indians of the region swore by Howard and his miracles. They would have made him president of the republic had they had the power to do so. . . . Howard could have lived [t]here until the end of his days and been worshipped and fed and treated like a high priest. Everything was at his disposal, for he was intelligent enough to live by the approved doctrine – that is, by doing what the people wanted him to do and expected him to do, never trying to reform anybody or change the conditions of life about him, never telling other people that they were all wrong and he alone was right. And so everybody liked him and was happy to have him among them. Yet [Traven’s narrator insists] he would not have been a true American had he not longed for a change, whether for better or worse. (Traven 296-297)

Traven’s two remaining miners are originally led to believe that their shares of the gold have also been lost along with Dobbs’ and their responses are worth noting:

“So we have worked and labored and suffered like galley-slaves for the pleasure of it,” Howard said to Curtin . . . “Anyway, I think it’s a very good joke – a good one played on us and on the bandits by the Lord or by fate or by nature, whichever you prefer. And whoever or whatever played it certainly had a good sense of humor. The gold has gone back where we got it . . .” Curtin, however, was not so philosophical as Howard. He was in a bad mood. All their hard work and privations had been for nothing. [Laughing hysterically, Howard sums up the situation thusly:] “Since I was robbed, I’ve been made into a great performer of miracles, a doctor whose fame is spreading all over the Sierra Madre. I have more successful cures to my credit than the best-paid doc in Los An[geles]. You’ve been killed twice and you are still alive, and will be, I hope, for sixty years to come. Dobbs has lost his head so completely that he can’t use it any longer. And all this for a certain amount of gold which no one can locate and which could have been bought for three packages of cigarettes, worth thirty centavos.” Howard couldn’t help it, he had to laugh again and again. At last, Curtin also began to see the joke and broke out laughing. When Howard saw this he jumped up and pressed his hand over Curtin’s mouth. “Not you, old boy, don’t you try to imitate me, or you’ll burst your lungs. Better be careful about them, they aren’t yet entirely healed.” (Traven 306)

However, the two ultimately discover that both of their shares of the gold still remain hidden in their packs. They discuss what they should do with their money, entertaining the idea of opening a grocery store together, but decide against it, on account of the depressed economic state that they fear will make it hard for a small business such as that

to succeed for long. Since the economic situation remains so uncertain, the two figure that they have everything they need in their current place among the natives. Realizing that they could not likely do better anywhere else in those depressed economic times, they decide they had better stay where they are among the Indians, which they agree to do for another couple of months, at least. With Howard in the role of medicine-man and Curtin serving as his assistant, they are sure to have everything that they need.

A final statement by Howard leaves readers with the feeling that the future facing Howard and Curtin remaining with the Indians will not prove to be as utopian as might be tempting to assume at first glance. For, in the novel's final pages, Howard says to Curtin:

“To be a good medicine-man is not as easy as you might think. You can't learn that profession in a university. A good medicine-man is born, not made. I'm a born medicine-man, I can tell you that. Just come over to the village where I have my headquarters. Yes, my boy, even you will take off your hat when you see how much respected I am there. Only the day before yesterday they wanted to make me their legislature – the whole legislature. I don't know what they mean by that, but I figure it must be the greatest honor they can bestow.” (Traven 307-308)

From this, I conclude that, seeing how America had allowed progressive policies to interfere with its free-market economy to such an extent that it left many jobless Americans so desperate that they were forced to look for work elsewhere in places such as Mexico, I think that Traven was likely motivated to translate *Sierra Madre* into English for publication in 1935 in order to alert Americans to the many similarities he was starting to see between America's growing State and what had befallen nations such as Italy, Germany, and Russia as the State assumed more control in those places, leading to such symptoms as crippling taxes, record unemployment, and the devaluation of the

currency, results which were not dissimilar to those of the progressive policies of Roosevelt's New Deal.

I also think that Traven could have been trying to warn Americans of the increasingly miserable circumstances that he could have thought would befall them if they failed to change course by continuing to support policies that were essentially aimed at redistributing wealth and resources. Especially viewed through the lens of the Hobbes-Locke-Smith connection, the novel gives the distinct impression that, while many Americans had been ruined financially by the stock market crash of 1929, many more were impoverished over the decade that followed it as a result of the policies put in place at the start of the 1930s which effectively grew the wealth and "revenue" of the government through higher and higher taxes, at a time when its people could least afford it, causing record foreclosures and impoverishing individuals and families at an unprecedented rate.

Traven's point appears to be that the free-market system of economics known the world over as "American capitalism" had proven itself the best equalizer and the most able system by which individuals can secure their own self-preservation, and that of society as a whole; but it relies on remaining largely free from state intervention and artificial manipulation in order to function optimally. When that requirement was not met during the Great Depression, the nation began to creep closer and closer to becoming a government-run, planned economy, as Roosevelt's New Deal began to intermingle America's political and economic systems to an unprecedented degree.

I believe that the examples I have pointed to in this chapter undermine the notion that Traven's novel endorses collectivism, central government planning, or any other

such manifestation of Marxism that previous scholars have reflexively assumed. Again, I maintain that the application of Critical Theory across so many academic disciplines has made such unsubstantiated readings popular. The Marxist bias of earlier scholarly assessments of Traven's *Sierra Madre* provides one stark example of a pervasive condition within the institution of humanities scholarship and the American academy.

CHAPTER SIX: MINING FOR CLUES IN *SIERRA MADRE*'S METANARRATIVES

In this chapter, I turn my attention to two of *Sierra Madre*'s embedded narratives (or, "metanarratives"), each of which consists of a story told by one of the novel's characters in order to communicate an important piece of information, illustrate a powerful idea, or impart a valuable pearl of wisdom. For convenience, I refer to these metanarratives according to the name of the character who relates each in the novel. Hence, I refer to the earlier-appearing of the two as "Lacaud's metanarrative," because *that* story is told by Lacaud; and the later-appearing metanarrative, I refer to as "Howard's metanarrative," because *that* story is told by Howard. This chapter also includes my analysis of the brief episode that appears in the novel in between those two metanarratives. That episode not only provides the vital separation needed to break up the double instances of extended storytelling resulting from the close proximity of the two metanarratives, but it also serves as a bridge in the novel connecting them. For this reason, I refer to that episode as the "connecting episode."

In the pages that follow, I point to specific passages from the portion of Traven's novel where these three consecutive passages occur, tackling them individually (one in each of the three subsections below) in the same order in which they appear in the novel (that order being as follows: [1] Lacaud's metanarrative; [2] the connecting episode; [3] Howard's metanarrative).

Although separate and distinct events in the novel, I view these three sections as functioning as a unit (i.e. *as a single subset of consecutively-occurring events* within the novel), and posit that the net result of creating this subset is that Traven creates for

himself yet another opportunity to reiterate and re-illustrate important elements (likely) of his own political philosophy and (certainly) of that which is ultimately endorsed in and by his novel, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

That said, due to the unique “metanarrative-connecting episode-metanarrative” structure of this unit, it is possible for Traven to present that message in a slightly different form in this portion of *Sierra Madre* than he does in the rest of the novel. Specifically, the work’s political message is here presented in condensed form, resulting in an especially clear and powerful restatement of the novel’s central thesis. Additionally, rather than the references progressing from Smith, to Locke, to Hobbes (as they typically do in *Sierra Madre*), in this portion of the novel, Traven appears to reference those three philosophers in reverse order. Thus, in this portion of the novel, we see the references to those philosophers progress as follows: [1] starting with references to Hobbes (in Lacaud’s metanarrative); then [2] moving on to include references to Locke (in the connecting episode); and finally [3] ending with references to Smith (in Howard’s metanarrative).

I believe that this entire part of *Sierra Madre* provides additional evidence of Traven highlighting as critically important several Enlightenment principles that connect the works of political philosophers Hobbes, Locke, and Smith (those which, as I have already noted in previous chapters, establish what I call the “Hobbes-Locke-Smith Connection”), and which also connect the work of those Enlightenment thinkers to the American experiment (with many of those principles also prominently reflected in America’s founding documents). Most significantly, Traven appears to illustrate several of those Enlightenment principles in this portion of the novel, in ways that are unique to

it. I believe that Traven's illustration of these particular Enlightenment principles in this portion of *Sierra Madre* provides further evidence of the nature, matter, and form – as well as of the major works of political philosophy that inspired and helped to shape much – of the political philosophy at the heart of *Sierra Madre*. Again, I contend that that political message is one that applauds the American experiment (championing the Enlightenment principles upon which it was originally founded) and endorses the American system of limited, decentralized, democratic self-government as well as the American system of competitive, free-market, capitalist economics.

Lacaud's Metanarrative

After a couple of days spent on the mountain, among Traven's trio of characters, events transpire which necessitate Lacaud telling his American compatriots the story that comprises his metanarrative. That story recounts what Lacaud knows of the events surrounding a train robbery and massacre recently committed near one of the region's more remote railway stations.

According to Lacaud, not only did the bandits responsible for that train robbery steal money, jewelry, and other property from the train's passengers, they also killed many of the people on board before moving to the engine car at the front of the train and setting fire to all of the cars it was pulling before making their escape by detaching the engine car from the rest of the locomotive, thus riding away from the scene to safety and leaving the rest of the train ablaze and stranded along a desolate portion of railroad track, beyond the reach of easy or timely rescue. In addition, Lacaud tells the others what he knows of the manhunt (still underway at the time that Lacaud tells this story), undertaken

by law enforcement in the aftermath of the train robbery massacre to locate and apprehend the murderous bandits responsible.

From what Lacaud claims to have gathered from the reports that he heard from the local townspeople and newspapers in the nearby village, the approaching strangers that he and the original trio spot approaching in the distance, bear a striking resemblance to those reportedly responsible for the crimes committed aboard the train. Upon realizing this, Lacaud feels compelled to tell the story of the train robbery in order to alert Dobbs, Curtin, and Howard to the threat that the approaching bandits pose, and of the danger that he fears they will all be in once the bandits reach their campsite. Lacaud begins his story as follows:

[O]ne Friday night, more than twenty passengers . . . boarded . . . [a] train at . . . [one of the region's less-frequented] depot[s]. . . . [They] wore huge palm hats pulled rather low on their foreheads, . . . [and] [a]ll had bright-colored woolen blankets tightly wrapped around their bodies, for the night was rather cool; and, as these people usually do, they wore their blankets wrapped around them so high up that their faces were covered up to the nose. . . . Nothing was unusual or strange about the way they wore their hats and their blankets, So no one on the train, neither train-officials nor passengers nor the military convoy paid the slightest attention to these men when they got on [the train]. (Traven 133-134)

Traven writes that

the new-comers distributed themselves slowly over both the second-class cars and the one first-class car. Crowding the train far above its capacity were families with children, women traveling alone, salesmen, merchants, farmers, workers, [and] lower officials. In the first-class car the well-to-do people were reading, talking, playing cards, or trying to sleep. Two Pullman cars occupied by tourists, high officials, and rich merchants were coupled to the first-class car at the end of the train. . . . *The inside of the cars, particularly the second-class cars, made in the uncertain and not too bright light a colorful picture. Whites, mestizos, Indians, men, women, children, clean people and dirty, many women and little girls dressed gaudily in the costumes of their native state, all crowded together.* (Traven 134-135; italics mine)

In the above passage, note that Traven describes the train and its passengers in such a way as to offer up a metaphor that compares the train full of passengers to a civil society (i.e., a commonwealth). The passengers are described as a highly diverse group indeed, ranging widely in terms of their ethnic, socio-economic, and professional backgrounds and appearing to represent many different walks of life. By highlighting the diversity of the train's passengers, Traven's metaphor recalls the diversity of the citizenry typical in most commonwealths.

In addition, there is also a large convoy of soldiers on board the train which is described by Traven in the following passage:

Th[e] [military] convoy consisted of fifty federal soldiers, among them a first lieutenant as commander, a top sergeant, and three cabos or corporals. The lieutenant had gone to the dining-car for his supper, leaving the convoy in [the] charge of the top sergeant. *Some of the soldiers had their rifles between their knees, some . . . laid th[eirs] on the bench against their backs, and others . . . put theirs up in the racks.* (Traven 135; italics mine)

In the above passage, notice that Traven tells us that many of the soldiers place their weapons out of easy reach from their seats – mistakes which ultimately prove quite costly, indeed. For, after setting up this scene, Lacaud begins to tell of the violence that ensues on board shortly after the train leaves the station and is well on its way to its scheduled destination.

All of a sudden and without the faintest warning the [twenty or so late arrivals] . . . opened their blankets, brought out rifles and guns, and began to fire among the crowded and huddled passengers, not minding men, women, children, or babies at the naked breasts of their mothers. *The soldiers had been cornered so perfectly that before they had time even to grasp their rifles and get them up they fell, fatally shot . . . and rolled about the floor. In less than fifteen seconds no soldier was left able to fight. Those who still had life enough to moan or to move received another bullet or were knifed or had their skulls crushed.* Some of the train-officials were [also] dead, [and] some

so wounded that they staggered about or dragged their bodies along the floor.
(Traven 135-136; italics mine)

The fact that the train counts fifty armed soldiers among its passengers when the robbery occurs is important, not only because it indicates that law enforcement is already on the scene at the time that this crime is committed, but because it makes clear that law enforcement is already present on the train *in force* at the time of the attack.

Equally important is the fact that the soldiers who make up the military convoy are the first individuals targeted, assaulted, and killed by the bandits during the attack. Obviously, this was an intentional, strategic move on the part of the bandits. For, with the entire convoy eliminated, the bandits find the rest of the passengers stunned, paralyzed by fear, generally easy to overpower, and unable to make anything more than “faint efforts” (137) to fight back or defend themselves.

The uniform reaction of the passengers to this carnage is especially telling and, in my view, makes this metanarrative’s connection to Hobbes’ political theory particularly evident. Of the effect upon the civilians, Traven writes,

For a few seconds all the people in the passenger cars behaved as if paralyzed. They sat stiff, with eyes wide open, looking at the killers and hearing the shots, as if they perceived something which simply could not be true, which must be a nightmare out of which they might awake any moment and find everything all right. . . . Not women alone, but also men were crying like little children. *Without begging for mercy, they were not even attempting to hide themselves. They seemed to have lost all sense. Many of them made faint efforts to fight, with the hope of ending it sooner.* Their nerves had given way.
(Traven 136-137; italics mine)

Considering that Traven tells us that all of the soldiers are the first to be assaulted and murdered by the bandits, and because Traven also tells us that all of the soldiers are in fact killed within the first fifteen seconds of the attack, it is rather surprising that *none* of

the civilian passengers attempts to take up and use any of the fallen soldiers' firearms to defend themselves from the attackers once all of the soldiers are dead.

I point this out in order to show that, although it might be tempting to assume that the reason for which the civilian passengers make only "faint efforts" to fight back and defend themselves during the attack is because they lack the means with which to do so, that assumption would be incorrect. While it is true that they do not *initially* have such means at their disposal, those means do, in fact, *become* available once the soldiers are killed, precisely *sixteen seconds* after the attack begins. After all, even after the soldiers are dead, their firearms would obviously still remain.¹

That fact that *none* of the civilian passengers attempts to seize any of the fallen soldiers' weapons to use to fight off the bandits makes it clear that it is *not* that the civilian passengers are *unable* to fight back against their attackers, nor is it that they are incapable of defending *their own* lives when under attack, nor that they lacked the means with which to do so. Rather, Traven seems to suggest that the civilian passengers are simply unprepared and unwilling to do so.

Thus, Traven's implication appears to be that people living in a commonwealth can easily become complacent in protecting *themselves* and defending *their own* lives,

¹ Traven tells us that the atrocities committed on the train are carried out by *twenty* bandits, and that the military convoy is made up of *fifty* soldiers. Because of the way that Traven describes those soldiers stowing their firearms throughout the cabin of the passenger car before the train gets underway, I assume that each of those fifty soldiers has at least one firearm in his possession. If that is correct, this means that there are *fifty* military-grade firearms in the passenger car of which the civilian passengers could have availed themselves in trying to fight off the bandits attacking them, once the soldiers have all been eliminated. At the very least, we know (from what Traven tells us in the above-quoted passages) that at least several of the soldiers on the train brought firearms onto the train with them – in which case, those *several* military-grade firearms would have suddenly become available once their original owners (the soldiers who brought them onto the train) had been killed.

liberties, and properties from harm or destruction when under attack, as a direct result of being conditioned to rely increasingly upon the State for that protection.

This is even more evident when we consider the fact that Traven tells us in this portion of the novel that one of the results of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) was that Mexico revised its constitution to include a provision that provided its citizens a constitutionally protected right to own firearms. Traven references this directly in the following passage that appears in Lacaud's metanarrative:

On coming back [from committing their crimes, bandits generally either made sure to] hide their guns, or [they worried little and did] not [bother hiding them at all,] since *the peasants after the revolution were allowed to have guns to fight the big hacendados, the former feudal lords*, who by the revolution lost the greater part of their huge domains, which were parceled out to the peasants; *so the possession of fire-arms alone is no proof that their owner is a bandit.*² (Traven 145; italics mine)

Clearly, Traven means to call attention to the fact that, throughout history, rulers and leaders of governments, peoples, nations, and empires have all employed tactics meant to effectively disarm and disable the masses (the citizenry) they governed from resisting their authority. But, here, it is worth noting that (for that very same reason) Traven also

² This same sort of guarantee was, of course, ratified under the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (1791). In the two centuries after the U.S. Constitution was first passed into law, countries all over the world used it as a model when they eventually revised their own constitutions. Still, according to a 2022 BusinessInsider.com article by Brennan Weiss, James Pasley, and Azmi Haroun, *only nine countries have ever included a provision in their constitutions guaranteeing their citizens the right to keep and bear arms: the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Liberia.* However, *six of those countries* (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Liberia) *have since removed that provision from their nation's constitution.* As of November 2022 (when that article was last updated), *only three countries in the world currently include such a provision guaranteeing their citizens the right to keep and bear arms: the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala.* (Weiss et. al.) Note that, except for the United States, *none* of the countries one might expect to see on those lists actually appears on *either* – with countries including Britain, France, Russia, China, and others noticeably absent from *both*. This is important, not only because it means that *none* of those countries *currently* includes a provision in its nation's constitution guaranteeing its citizens the right to keep and bear arms, but also because it means that *none* of those countries *ever* included such a provision in its nation's constitution. Although this fact might come as a surprise to many people today, in light of the evidence put forth in the present dissertation, I do *not think* that it would have surprised *Traven* in the least.

finds it important to point out instances in which citizens have been granted a written provision in their nation's constitution acknowledging and guaranteeing to its citizens the right to lawfully purchase, own, and keep firearms and ammunition in their possession for their private use and personal protection.

This provides further evidence suggesting a close connection to the work of Thomas Hobbes, for there are a number of parallels to be drawn between some of Hobbes' most basic principles and those that Traven appears to focus on in this section of *Sierra Madre*. I believe that the principles Traven highlights here are most likely inspired by, and modelled closely upon, several of Hobbes' ideas, views, and conceptions put forth most notably in *Leviathan*.

Simply put, Hobbes' notion of self-defense is grounded in an understanding of human nature that views the instinct to preserve one's own life (including doing whatever it takes to avoid being killed, brutalized, or enslaved) as being so strong and natural an impulse that it cannot be turned off. This leads Hobbes to designate the inherent right of every human being to protect him- or herself against harm and violent death when under attack by hostile actors, as the one "Right of Nature" specified in *Leviathan*, which is, according to Hobbes, the only right human beings *can never* legitimately be expected to surrender to *anyone* – including to a sovereign ruler or governing body. The following passage from Hobbes' *Leviathan* includes the philosopher's explanation of the reasoning that led him to arrive at this conclusion:

[T]here be some Rights, which no man can be understood . . . , to have abandoned, or transferred. As first a man cannot lay down the right of resisting them, that assault him by force, to take away his life; because he cannot be understood to ayme thereby, at any Good to himselfe. The same may be sayd of Wounds, and Chayns, and Imprisonment; both because there

is no benefit consequent to such patience; as there is to the patience of suffering another to be wounded, or imprisoned: as also because a man cannot tell, when he seeth men proceed against him by violence, whether they intend his death or not. And lastly the motive, and [the purpose] . . . for which this renouncing, and transferring of Right is introduced, is nothing else but the security of a man's person, in his life, and in the means of so preserving life. (81)

Hobbes also states that

The Right of Nature . . . is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will . . . , for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently of doing anything, which in his own Judgment, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. (79)

Similarly, the following passage from *Leviathan* also appears to have inspired this portion of Traven's novel:

A Law of Nature, . . . is a Precept or general Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive to his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. . . . And because the condition of Man, . . . is a condition of Warre of everyone against everyone; in which case everyone is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies; . . . Consequently, it is a precept, or generall rule of Reason, *That every man ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps and advantages of Warre.* The first branch of which Rule, containeth the first and Fundamentall Law of Nature; . . . The Second, the summe of the Right of Nature; which is, *By all means we can, to defend our selves.* (79-80)

In light of the above passages from Hobbes' *Leviathan*, it is clear that, by perpetrating the heinous crimes aboard the train, the bandits prove themselves to be in violation of Hobbes' First (or Fundamental) Law of Nature which mandates that, in order to avoid war and achieve and sustain peace within a commonwealth, individuals ought always to "seek peace and follow it" whenever, and so long as, others are also so inclined (80).

Consequently, by violating this precept, the bandits responsible for the train robbery and

massacre featured in Lacaud's metanarrative put themselves into a state of war with all of the individuals on the train.

In addition, Traven implies (following Hobbes) that the bandits also put themselves into a state of war with the entire civil society, and thus with that society's government, law enforcement, judicial system, and its many bureaus and agencies, officers and agents. For Hobbes, individuals who (like the bandits in Traven's novel) violate the social contract by harming or threatening to harm other members of that society, in doing so, also put themselves into a state of war with the society as a whole.

We see this in the swift reaction of the government, law enforcement, and emergency responders in the novel once the news of what has happened aboard the train reaches the authorities. Indeed, once it is learned that the rest of the train and its occupants had been unhooked from the engine shortly after being set on fire by the bandits and left to burn somewhere along the track, another train is swiftly converted into an emergency car and dispatched to the scene. Ahead of that, another train is also sent to the site of the wreck in order to clear the track of anything blocking the path of the emergency train that might prevent it from reaching the victims.

It is important to note that both emergency response trains are shot at by bandits posted along the railroad track, as each makes its way to the site of the wreck. However, it is especially important to note the result of the counterattack undertaken by several of the emergency responders who happen to have firearms in their possession at the time and who use those firearms to answer the bandits' gunfire. Traven is quite clear that it is only after the handful of emergency responders return the bandits' gunfire that the bandits abandon their assault on the emergency trains and flee the area. Therefore, it

appears to be due entirely to those individuals' ability and willingness to use their firearms to return the bandits' gunfire to protect themselves and their fellow emergency responders that the emergency trains are safely able to reach the scene of the wreck to assist the survivors.

In light of the above-described elements of Hobbes' conception of the essential nature of the right of all human beings to act in their own self-defense and in ways that serve their ability to secure their own self-preservation, the meaning of Lacaud's metanarrative becomes clearer. The interpretation of this metanarrative and its connection and numerous parallels to ideas put forth by Hobbes, particularly his notions surrounding self-defense and self-preservation, makes for additional evidence in support of my thesis that Hobbes' *Leviathan* is one of the three works that I believe Traven draws from as inspiration for the political philosophy that is ultimately endorsed in *Sierra Madre*.

The Connecting Episode

Next, I turn my focus to the connecting episode that appears in the novel between Lacaud's metanarrative and Howard's. In this middle sequence, we see the bandits featured in Lacaud's metanarrative carry over into the novel's primary plotline, as the four Americans spot several of those same bandits approaching in the distance just before Lacaud begins his story about the train robbery and massacre. The Americans monitor the strangers' slow progress up the mountain throughout Lacaud's telling of his story and, following the conclusion of that story, they strategize about how to respond to the encroaching bandits; they ultimately decide to take up a defensive position in a trench that is hidden and protected behind a row of massive rocks. From this position, the

Americans are able to peer through spaces between the rocks to view the bandits, while the bandits remain unable to see the Americans.

As predicted by Howard, once the bandits arrive at the Americans' campsite, they try a number of tactics and make several unsuccessful attempts to get the Americans to surrender their guns and ammunition, threatening to use violence to take those arms by force, should the Americans refuse to surrender them willingly.

Below, I identify several passages from this connecting portion of Traven's *Sierra Madre*, which I interpret as reflecting a number of Lockean principles. I believe that Traven uses this episode to highlight the essentially Hobbesian nature of much of Locke's political philosophy as well as to call attention to some of Locke's more revolutionary ideas concerning property rights and property creation. I also posit that Traven uses this connecting episode to illustrate that many of those foundational principles found in Hobbes and Locke also inspired America's founders and that, as a result, many of those principles became enshrined in America's founding documents. Moreover, I suggest that, for that reason, those same principles have since become integral components of the American experiment and of the American psyche.

When the bandits finally arrive at the campsite, they are disappointed that they do not immediately see the American the nearby villagers had told them they would find there. They then spread out and begin to inspect the area more thoroughly. That scene continues to unfold as follows:

When [the bandits] . . . were half-way across the camp [unknowingly making their way toward the four miners' defensive fortress in a trench], Curtin shouted: "Stop or I shoot!" The bandits immediately stopped and the man who had discovered Curtin and was only five feet away from the trench raised his arm and said: "All right, all right, . . . I am on my way." Saying this, he

retreated, walking backwards. He made no attempt to reach for his gun.
(Traven 161)

As far as the bandits know, there is only *one* American to be found on the mountain; and, having located that individual, the bandits now begin the process of trying to gain possession of the guns and ammunition that the nearby villagers have suggested the American owns.

After Curtin makes himself known, the bandits attempt to coax him into surrendering his weapons and ammunition, promising to leave him in peace once that property is handed over. Knowing, however, that handing over their weapons would be a fatal mistake, the four Americans have no such intention, and Curtin adamantly refuses to do so. That exchange begins with the leader of the bandits shouting: “[W]e don’t want to do you any harm. No harm at all! Why can’t you be just a little more polite? Or at least more sociable. We mean well. Give us your gun and we’ll leave you in peace” (Traven 162). However, Traven explicitly states that, despite this demand, none of the bandits makes a move toward Curtin’s approximate location amid the rocks, at this point. Curtin then shouts back: “I need my gun myself and I won’t part with it” (Traven 162). Traven writes the rest of this scene as follows:

Curtin waved his gun over the rim of the trench. The man retreated a few steps and again held council with his . . . [fellow bandits]. They had to admit that Curtin held the stronger position. It would cost the life of at least three of them had they tried to overpower . . . [Curtin] by direct attack. None of them wanted to be the victim. *The price for that gun was too high.* (Traven 162; italics mine)

The four Americans are clearly determined to exercise their natural right to self-preservation and self-defense and, therefore, steadfastly refuse to part with their guns and ammunition. As the only tools they have at their disposal with which to defend

themselves, the Americans know that their fate (i.e., their lives, liberty, and property) depends entirely on them maintaining possession of their firearms.

The leader of the bandits then addresses Curtin again:

“Listen, we’d better come now to a quick understanding. . . . Let me have your gun and the ammunition. I don’t wish to have it for nothing. I want to buy it. Here I have a genuine gold watch with genuine gold chain, made in your own country. That watch with the chain is worth at least two hundred pesos. I’ll exchange this watch for your gun. Good business it is for you. You’d better take it.” He produced the watch and swung it on its chain around his head. Curtin answered: “You keep your watch and I’ll keep my gun. Whether you go . . . or not doesn’t matter to me. But you won’t get my gun; of that I’m sure.” (Traven 164)

What is most important to note about this portion of the connecting episode is how very differently the Americans’ encounter with the bandits transpires and ultimately ends compared to that experienced by the victims of the train robbery massacre featured earlier in Lacaud’s metanarrative. I believe that the difference is primarily a function of the very different reactions of the individuals who are targeted by the bandits in each case. While we see the passengers aboard the train are easily overtaken by – and put up little to no physical resistance against – the bandits who attacked them during the train robbery, we see the four Americans, by contrast, promptly begin strategizing their defense as soon as Lacaud’s story makes the bandits’ intentions known.

Additionally, while we see the soldiers on the train quickly overpowered and eliminated within the first fifteen seconds of the train-robbery attack as a result of being caught off-guard with their weapons out of easy reach at the moment the bandits opened fire, and although *none* of the train’s civilian passengers attempts to seize *any* of the fallen soldiers’ firearms to use as means with which to defend *themselves* against the

bandits once the soldiers are dead, we see the *Americans*, by contrast, holding *tightly* to *their* weapons throughout their own encounter with the bandits.

The Americans appear to know instinctively that, without their guns and ammunition, they will be defenseless against further attack and the complete plunder of all they have, including their lives. Traven includes a couple of conversations in which this sentiment is voiced and discussed by the Americans during this connecting episode.

For instance, Curtin and Lacaud each suggest at different points that the bandits might best be dealt with, and the situation de-escalated and successfully resolved, by handing over to the bandits some of the gold the original trio had already extracted from their mine, their thinking being that the bandits would be happy with that sum and would then move on, leaving them unharmed and alone after that. Yet, on both occasions, wise old Howard reminds them that such an outcome would be unlikely and that such a course of action would lead only to their further extortion for more and more gold, ending almost assuredly with the bandits murdering all four of them to make sure they had taken everything that the four had, before moving on.

“No, honey dear, you still misjudge them,” Howard said. “This race has lived for four hundred years under conditions in which it never paid to trust anyone, it never paid to build a good house, it never paid to take your little money to a savings bank or invest it in some decent enterprise. *You can’t expect them to treat you in any other way, considering how they have been treated by the church, by the Spanish authorities, and by their own authorities for four hundred years. If you offer them your gold and your guns, they will take them and promise to let you go. But they won’t let you go. They’ll torture you just the same, to find out if there isn’t more than you offered them. Then they kill you just the same, because you might give them away. They have never known what justice is, so you can’t expect them to know it now.* Nobody has ever shown them loyalty, so how could they show it to you? None has ever kept any promise to them, so they can’t keep any promise they might have made you. They all say an Ave Maria before killing you, and they will cross you and themselves before and after slaying you in the most cruel way. *We*

wouldn't be any different from them if we had had to live for four hundred years under all sorts of tyrannies, superstitions, despotisms, corruptions, and perverted religions.” (Traven 171-172; italics mine)

Clearly, the exercise of power and control over others (and the abuses that naturally follow, including extortion and plunder made possible through acts or threats of violence and other consequences) is best accomplished by outlawing or severely limiting citizens' legal access to tools that can serve as adequate means of self-defense. In the case of Traven's four Americans, the guns and ammunition they own are the only means they have with which to defend themselves – and they know it. Therefore, when the Americans face the bandits, they do so knowing that their lives, liberty, and property depend entirely upon their ability to *remain* in possession of those items. Locke's similar sentiment in the following passage from his *Second Treatise* may be Traven's source:

He that . . . would take away the freedom . . . must necessarily be supposed to have a design to take away every thing else, that freedom being the foundation of all the rest; . . . This makes it lawful for a man to kill a thief, who has not in the least hurt him, nor declared any design upon his life, any farther than, by the use of force, so to get him in his power, as to take away his money, or what he pleases, from him; because using force, where he has no right, to get me into his power, let his pretence be what it will, I have no reason to suppose, that he, who would take away my liberty, would not, when he had me in his power, take away every thing else. *And therefore it is lawful for me to treat him as one who has put himself into a state of war with me, i.e. kill him if I can; for to that hazard does he justly expose himself, whoever introduces a state of war, and is aggressor in it.* (Locke 107-108; italics mine)

As it turns out, the Americans are saved from doing direct battle with the bandits when the federal cavalry arrives, causing the bandits to flee. The Americans' response to this miraculous turn of events is also noteworthy and helps to distinguish this scenario further from the one that took place aboard the train. The responses of the Americans are recorded in the following passage:

Dobbs says: “For once in my life I’m actually grateful that there are still soldiers in the world. . . . [T]hey sure have come at a good time, that’s what I say. . . .” [To this, Lacaud responds:] “You bet.” Lacaud had got his color back and also his speech. Howard laugh[s] again . . . [and says:] “Yeah, and these bandits, I think, have done us still another favor by leaving in such a hurry. Had they stopped here and waited for the soldiers – well, boys, I wouldn’t have liked it too much to have soldiers sneaking about here. Soldiers are all to the good sometimes, but sometimes they can be a real nuisance to a decent feller. They might, if only for fun, start to grill us about what we’re doing up here and they might nose around. I wouldn’t have liked it so very much, would you, partners?” (Traven 174)

It is noteworthy that, although it is the Mexican law enforcement that ultimately causes the bandits to abandon their assault on the Americans and flee, it is the Americans *themselves* who manage to fight off the attacking bandits for days, thus managing to defend themselves and their property long enough to survive until the state militia arrives.

Also important is the fact that, while the Americans are overjoyed when the cavalry finally *does* arrive to rescue them by scaring off the bandits for good, they immediately equivocate this feeling of gratitude with another that finds them almost equally as thankful that the cavalry does not stick around to question them about their mining operation. Such a natural distrust of government can, I think, be interpreted as one of the features that Traven recognizes as important and integral to the American psyche, perhaps as a function of it having been woven into the fabric of the nation’s rebellious origin and founding documents.

For, not only did the Declaration of Independence issued by the American colonists in 1776 include a comprehensive litany of transgressions and usurpations with which they were publicly charging their Sovereign (King George III of Great Britain), but that historical beginning helps us to understand the motivation behind America’s founders crafting the first ten amendments (the Bill of Rights) of the U.S. Constitution to

consist entirely of things that the American people are to be guaranteed that their government cannot lawfully do to, or deny, them.

As one of the texts that inspired much of the U.S. Constitution, the following passage from Book II, Chapter XIX of Locke's *Second Treatise* is especially relevant to this portion of Traven's novel as well, as Traven's Americans prove themselves unwilling to be made to suffer the same sort of tyranny and "long train of abuses" that the bandits had already shown themselves capable of committing during the train robbery and massacre. For, Locke writes,

Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient laws, and all the slips of human frailty, will be borne by the people without mutiny or murmur. *But, in a long train of abuses*, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the people, and they cannot but feel what they lie under, and see whither they are going; it is not to be wondered; that they should then rouse themselves, and endeavour to put the rule into such hands which may secure to them the ends for which government was first erected. (Locke 199, italics mine)

Indeed, in Book II, Chapter VII of his *Second Treatise*, Locke insists that "government has no other end than the preservation of property" (141), and in Chapter VIII he states: "Men being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent" (141). Additionally, Locke goes on to state the following in Chapter IX of his *Second Treatise*:

If man in the state of nature be so free as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom, why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others; for all being kings as much as he, every man is equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the

property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers; and *it is not without reason that he seeks out, and is willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name property.* (154-155, italics mine)

Applying this passage from Locke to the section of *Sierra Madre* we are examining suggests that Traven intends to convey what he finds unique about the American worldview and about the principles that most importantly distinguish the American experiment from other attempts at democracy in modern history.

In addition, Locke's theory of property also helps to shed light on one final exchange that takes place during this connecting episode in Traven's novel. Since the bandits have been run off by the federal cavalry, the four Americans are once again safe; but the original three are more convinced than ever that they should close down their mining operation immediately and leave with their gold before their luck runs out. So, the trio sets about the business of completing the work required to fill in their mine and restore the natural landscape to the condition in which they found it. As this work is underway, Traven writes:

Dobbs cut his hand and yelled angrily: "For what hellish reason of yours do we have to work like hunks in a steel-mill to level this field? Just tell me, old man?" [To which, Howard replies:] "We decided [we would do this] . . . the day we started to work here, didn't we?" [Dobbs then snaps back:] "Yes, we did. But I say it's a waste of time, that's what I think." (Traven 180)

Howard offers the following reasoning for insisting that they take so much time and care in cleaning up the area and restoring the landscape now that they are finished mining there:

The Lord might have said it's only a waste of time to build this earth, if it was He who actually did it. I figure we should be thankful to the mountain which

has rewarded our labor so generously. . . . [W]e shouldn't leave this place as careless picnic parties and dirty motorists so often do. We have wounded this mountain and I think it is our duty to close its wounds. The silent beauty of this place deserves our respect. Besides, I want to think of this place the way we found it and not as it has been while we were taking away its treasures, which this same mountain has guarded for millions of years. I couldn't sleep well thinking I had left the mountain looking like a junk-yard. I'm sorry we can't do this restoration perfectly . . . that we can do no better than show our good intention and our gratitude. If you two guys won't help me, I'll do it all alone, but I shall do it just the same. (Traven 180-181)

The fact that Howard is insistent that this work be done, appears to me to suggest something very similar to Locke's precept that individuals establish legitimate property rights over that which nature has provided by mixing their labor with it. Locke claimed that, by doing so, individuals are able to create private property where none existed before. That is, of course, so long as he or she does not appropriate more than he or she can use or make productive, to ensure that nothing spoils and that nothing is left unproductive in one person's possession that could have been made use of, or been made productive, in someone else's possession. Locke writes:

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. (Locke 111-112)

I believe that Traven means for Howard to communicate something very similar in *Sierra Madre* by insisting that the three properly fill in their mine and restore the landscape to its former glory. By doing so, they are able to ensure that they leave the resource-rich

mountain in almost as good a condition as that in which they had found it, with enough gold left over for others to appropriate *for themselves* – by applying *their own* labor to the task of extracting what they may from the mountain (i.e. from “that which nature hath provided,” to use Locke’s words).

From this, it appears clear that this principle is yet another which Traven views as important and unique about the American worldview and one which he counts among those which most distinguish the American experiment from other attempts at democracy and capitalism in modern history.

Howard’s Metanarrative

Finally, I turn to Howard’s metanarrative, which consists of the story that Howard tells to Dobbs, Curtin, and Lacaud on the final night that the trio spends on the mountain. In the morning, the three original miners (Dobbs, Curtin, and Howard) will begin their long journey back to civilization with their hard-earned gold. Worrying about the trouble he fears they will encounter during their trip, Howard begins his story by asking if the others are familiar with the tale about “the treasure-burdened woman, the most honorable and distinguished doña Catalina Maria de Rodriguez” (Traven 186). In a foreshadowing of what will follow, Howard says “With her it was not the question of how to *get* the gold and silver, but how to get it *home*, where it would have done her the most good”(186; italics mine). “Gold,” after all, Howard opines, “is of no use to anybody as long as it is not where he wants it” (186). Howard also explicitly states that the story he is about to tell is a true one and that its events took place “about the time of the American Revolution” (187). The story begins in “northern Mexico” where there resided “a well-to-

do Indian farmer, who, in fact, was chieftain of the Chiricahua Indians” (187). According to Howard,

[t]he chieftain, who was otherwise so blessed with well-being, had a great sorrow which overshadowed his whole life: His only son and heir was blind. In former times. . . this [child] would have been done away with right after being born. But under the influence of the new religion even the Indians had become more generous in such things, and . . . the [boy], as he was otherwise normal, was allowed to live. The boy was a strong and healthy child, handsome and well formed. He grew not only in size but in intelligence [Yet,] the nearer [the boy] . . . came to manhood the more sorrowful became his father. (Traven 187-188)

This caused the chief to search desperately for a cure for his son’s blindness, appealing first to the Holy Virgin de Guadalupe. This was done based on the advice of a monk who claimed that, for a considerable donation (or, rather, for *several* considerable donations), the chief could “win the grace of the Holy Virgin [who had the power, the monk claimed] to do what no doctor ever could do: give light to the eyes of the chief’s only son” (Traven 188). Of course, this advice *too* came at a price, which the chief was happy to pay, considering how confident the monk appeared to be that the result would be that the Virgin would perform the miracle of curing his son’s blindness.

So, following the monk’s instructions to the letter, the chief departed his village with his wife, his son, and several of his servants, in order to begin the long and tedious journey to the chapel of the Holy Virgin de Guadalupe, where, according to the monk, the Virgin would perform the miracle of curing the boy’s blindness in exchange for their great sacrifice. That sacrifice included, not only the exhausting pilgrimage itself, but also required that sizable donations be made in gold and jewels at each of the several churches that they passed along the way to the chapel of the Virgin. The details of the pilgrimage and the extensive list of rituals and requirements involved serve to portray the Catholic

Church (and Christianity in general) as avaricious, demanding, expensive, cruel, and fraudulent.

Despite the enormous cost in money paid by the chief in donations to the several churches they passed during their journey, and despite the enormous amounts of time, energy, and dignity that the chief, his wife, his son, and his servants, all had to expend and endure in order to complete the pilgrimage, it eventually becomes clear that the Virgin is *not* going to perform the miracle that the chief seeks. Frustrated, the chief decides to abandon the quest. Traven makes clear the cause of the chief's anger: he feels he has been lied to and exploited. Eventually, as the reward he was promised fails to materialize, "the chieftain . . . earnestly [begins] to doubt the power of the Virgin. His own gods had done better under similar circumstances" (Traven 190).

Traven goes on to write the following:

The boy had . . . become so weakened by the long [journey and the ritual] fast[ing], and constant praying [required], . . . that his mother finally asserted herself, took her son out of the church, and, Virgin or no Virgin, [from that moment on] devoted all her time to the boy, saying: "I prefer my boy alive, even if blind, to a boy dead who could see once." The chieftain, being desperate, said now quite openly to the priest that he did not believe any longer in the Virgin and that he would rather go home and have the medicine-men of his tribe treat his eyes once more. [In response,] [t]he fathers [of the chapel] accused him of blasphemy and warned him furthermore that were he not an ignorant Indian, they would take him before the court of the Holy Inquisition and torture him into swearing away his heathen gods and then fine him for his blasphemy until he and all his relatives had nothing left and he would be grateful that he was spared the fate of so many other unbelievers who were burnt alive at the stake. . . . *The chief, however, had lost faith in the power of the goddess, for he was an Indian who belonged to a tribe that always received the rain its medicine-men prayed and danced and chanted for. A goddess that cannot or will not help men when in need and pain is no good for an Indian.* (Traven 190-191; italics mine)

Through this ordeal, the chief comes to believe that, in terms of his *particular* needs, at least, the Holy Virgin of the Catholic Church was useless. So, the chief decides to take his family and return home. However, the chief remains hopeful that there might still be a cure out there somewhere that can restore his son's sight. But, if such a miracle was possible, the chief was now certain that it would be the work, *not* of Catholicism's foremost Saint, but the work of a different type of power altogether.

Hence, on the way back to their village, the chief and his family stop in Mexico City, where the chief seeks a consultation with don Manuel Rodriguez, the "famous Spanish doctor who had become prominent on account of an eye operation [he had successfully] performed on the wife of the prefect of the city" (Traven 192). Here, then, is where we see the chief appeal to a different authority for the miracle he seeks: this time, he turns to medicine and the ocular surgeon in whose specialized skill the chief is willing to put all of his faith, in the hope that *this* authority will yield better results than had the Virgin.

The following passage describes the chief's consultation with the doctor and the arrangement that the two reach regarding payment for the doctor's services:

Having made a careful examination of the boy's eyes, [the doctor] . . . told the chief that he was sure that he could cure the boy – that the boy might regain the full use of his eyes. "The main question," he added, "is what you can pay me." The chief, clad like all his kind, did not look like one who could pay as much as the prefect had. He said that he owned a good farm and cattle. "That is not cash," don Manuel said. "What I need and what I want is cash – money, you know – heaps of it. I wish to go back to Spain to a civilized country. . . . and when I return . . . I wish to return rich, and when I say rich, I mean, of course, very rich. Your farm and your cattle don't interest me. Gold is what I want." . . . To this the chief answered that he could make don Manuel the richest man in New Spain, as Mexico was called in those times, if the doctor would make his son see like other human beings. How could he do that? the doctor asked. The chief said that he knew a very rich gold and silver mine and

that he would show it to him on the day they reached his home and the boy had his eyesight. Don Manuel was not easily convinced, so they made a cruel contract stipulating that don Manuel should have the right without being prosecuted to destroy the boy's sight again if the mine which was to be his did not exist or belonged to somebody else or was exhausted. (Traven 192)

With the terms of their agreement now formalized and documented, the doctor begins his work in order to fulfill his part of that contract. Through Howard's metanarrative, Traven is clear that the doctor is motivated most of all by the wildly large sum which he is to collect as payment from the chief upon successfully completing the ocular surgery on his son. Of this, Traven writes:

Don Manuel worked as he never had worked before. He operated on the boy and treated him for two months, with so much care and attention that he neglected all his other patients, including even men high in office. The fact was that he had become professionally interested in this case, although he did not forget for one hour the reward awaiting him for his labor. When ten weeks had passed, don Manuel called the chief and said that he might come and get his boy. The joy of the father was unbounded when he found that his son could see like a young eagle and was told by don Manuel that the cure would be permanent. (192)

That scene continues as follows:

With the gratitude only an Indian can feel, the chief said to don Manuel: "Now I shall prove to you that my word is as good as yours. The mine I am going to show you and which is now yours is the property of my family. When the Spaniards came to our region my ancestors buried the mine, for they hated the Spaniards who had committed so many cruelties against our race in this country which our gods had given to us. . . . The Spaniards learned from tortured members of our tribe of the existence of this mine [but they could never] make my ancestors reveal the mine[']s [location]. (Traven 193)

The word that has come down to us from my ancestors is this: If your family or your tribe has been rendered a great service which neither the feather-crowned god of our race nor the blood-crowned god of the whites had been able or willing to render, then you shall give the treasure of the mine to that man who served you so well. By your deed, don Manuel, this word has now been fulfilled. You have given eyes to my son and heir, who after me will be chieftain of our tribe. You did what the mother of the god of the whites could not do or would not do in spite of all my sufferings and prayers and

humiliations. *This mine is now rightfully yours. . . . [F]ollow me, and I will show you the location of the mine] . . . [and] as I have promised you, I will make you the richest man in all New Spain.*” (193)

From the above passages, I think it is clear that, in this portion of Howard’s metanarrative, Traven means to illustrate a number of important principles that Adam Smith points out in *Wealth of Nations* (1776), consideration of which help us to better understand and make sense of this part of Howard’s metanarrative.

For example, in Chapter X of *Wealth of Nations*, Smith gives some reasons for which certain occupations fetch a higher salary than do others. Of this, Smith writes:

The five following are the principal circumstances which, . . . make up a small pecuniary gain in some employments, and counter-balance a great one in others: first, the agreeableness or disagreeableness of the employments themselves; secondly, the easiness and cheapness, or the difficulty and expence of learning them; thirdly, the constancy or inconstancy of employment in them; fourthly, the small or great trust which much be reposed in those who exercise them; and fifthly, the probability or improbability of success in them. (Smith 139)

As it relates to the medical services offered by the Spanish doctor, the second, fourth, and fifth of these apply. Smith writes:

Secondly, [t]he wages of labour vary with the easiness and cheapness, or the difficulty and expence of learning the business. When any expensive machine is erected, the extraordinary work to be performed by it before it is worn out, it must be expected, will replace the capital laid out upon it, with at least . . . [its] ordinary profits. A man educated at the expence of much labour and time to any of those employments which require extraordinary dexterity and skill, may be compared to one of those expensive machines. The work which he learns to perform, it must be expected, over and above the usual wages of common labour, will replace to him the whole expence of his education, with at least the ordinary profits of an equally valuable capital. It must do this too in a reasonable time, regard being had to the very uncertain duration of human life, in the same manner as to the more certain duration of the machine. The difference between the wages of skilled labour and those of common [i.e. what we today call “unskilled”] labour, is founded upon this principle. (Smith 141)

Fourthly, [t]he wages of labour vary according to the small or great trust which must be reposed in the workmen. . . . We trust our health to the physician; our fortune and sometimes our life and reputation to the lawyer and attorney. Such confidence could not safely be reposed in people of a very mean or low condition. Their reward must be such, therefore, as may give them that rank in the society which so important a trust requires. [Smith adds to this that, in such professions,] [t]he long time and the great expence which must be laid out in their education, when combined with this circumstance, necessarily enhance still further the price of their labour. (146)

Fifthly, [t]he wages of labour in different employments vary according to the probability or improbability of success in them. The probability that any particular person shall ever be qualified for the employment to which he is educated, is very different in different occupations. . . . In a perfectly fair lottery, those who draw the prizes ought to gain all that is lost by those who draw the blanks. In a profession where twenty fail for one that succeeds, that one ought to gain all that should have been gained by the unsuccessful twenty. (147)

Not only is the Spanish doctor further incentivized by the vast sum that the chief offers to pay him to perform the surgery needed to restore his son's vision, but Traven tells us that he becomes professionally invested in the boy's case, not to mention that he also prioritizes this case above all others, even over those of "high officials" who also seek his medical services. By this, I believe that Traven means to highlight the fact that monetary gain (or, self-interest) drives the doctor to prioritize the chief's son's case, thus proving the pursuit of self-interest as the basis of a much more egalitarian system than others in which "high officials" with great power would automatically receive priority.

Traven also makes it clear that this story is meant to draw a parallel comparison between the performance of *medical* miracles and the performance of *divine* (or, *religious*) miracles. Additionally, the fact that Traven enables the Spanish doctor to perform that miracle which the Catholic Church could not, makes the additional point that, for centuries prior to the American Revolution, the Crown and Church had

maintained a stronghold – *a monopoly*, if you will – over the people in many countries all over the world. Thus, Traven seems to suggest that the free-market model of economics outlined in Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (published in 1776, the year in which the American colonists issued their Declaration of Independence, the document which officially founded the beginning of the American experiment) is a much more egalitarian model. In as much as Smith’s model is the one that America would ultimately follow, as opposed to the old model that had, until then, held most peoples of the world in subordination under aristocracies, monarchies, dictators, and autocratic regimes, this story appears to emphasize that America’s adoption of the Smithian model of free-market capitalism was revolutionary at the time of the American Revolution, in the sense that it went against the grain, as most other countries at that time were still operating under the Old-World, hierarchical, “Great Chain of Being” model.

We see this in the fact that, unfortunately for the Spanish doctor and his wife – the aforementioned “honorable and distinguished doña Catalina Maria de Rodriguez” (Traven 186) – *neither* appears to appreciate the reality that the economic success they experience had only been possible because they were *not* in their native Spain. Yet, despite their meteoric rise in wealth, *both* the Spanish doctor and (later) his wife remain determined to return to their native Spain with the piles of gold and silver they extract from the mine that the chief hands over to the doctor as payment for his son’s successful eye surgery. Moreover, they do this knowing full well that they will have to pay heavy taxes on the shipments of gold they send back to Spain and even acknowledge the many costly donations and contributions they will have to make in gold to the King and Queen

of Spain, church officials, viceroys, and other representatives of the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown before they reach home.

Traven concludes this story-within-the-novel as follows:

[With her hoards of gold in tow, the doctor's wife] reached Mexico City without a single bar of the precious metal lost. Hardly had she reached her destination when the fame of her riches spread all over the city. The news of the arrival of the richest woman in the Spanish empire came even to the ears of the viceroy, the most powerful person in New Spain. Doña Maria was honored with an invitation to a private audience with the viceroy which lasted, as the whole city noted with amazement, more than an hour. Her gratitude knew no limits when this high personage promised that her treasures would be well taken care of in the vaults of the king's own treasury, the safest place in New Spain, safer than the vaults of the Bank of England in those times. Guarded by the whole Spanish colonial army garrisoned in the city and under the personal guarantee of the viceroy himself. In these vaults her treasures could rest until they were transported under the vigilance of special troops of the king to the port of Veracruz to be shipped from there to Spain. Doña Maria, overwhelmed by such generosity, promised the viceroy a gift in cash which even a viceroy of New Spain could verily call most princely. . . . This done, she went to the best hotel in the city to take up quarters fit for a queen. Now, at last, she could sit down to a decent meal . . . [a]fter so many hardships and sorrows. . . . Then, after a most enjoyable supper, she lay down in the finest and softest bed to the sweetest slumber she had had in [so many] long dreary years. . . . But now something happened that doña Maria in all her calculations had never foreseen. Her treasures did not disappear, they were not stolen from the vaults of the king's treasury. Something else disappeared and was never seen again or heard of. And this was: doña Maria herself. . . . But while no one knew anything about doña Maria, everyone in New Spain knew that the riches of doña Maria had not disappeared, but were safely in the possession of one supposed to know better what to do with them than a foolish woman who thought that nobility stands for honesty. (208-210)

What becomes clear is that neither the Spanish doctor, nor his wife, fully appreciate the system of competitive free-market capitalism that enables them to benefit financially from their business dealings with the Indian chief. The Spanish doctor meets his end at the hands of those he hires to help him extract the gold from the mine, who ultimately rebel against him for paying them so little and treating them so badly that they can stand

it no longer. His wife, for her part, does better when she returns to continue working the mine after her husband is killed because, though she does not pay her employees much more than her husband had, it proves to be enough to keep them happy enough to continue working for her. Instead, as Traven tells us in the above-quoted passage, *her* fatal mistake is foolishly believing that “nobility stands for honesty” (210).

Additionally, Traven makes it clear that the chief *similarly* fails to appreciate the fact that it is capitalism that ultimately makes it possible for him to secure the miracle that he had so desired. Indeed, when the Spanish doctor asks the chief why he had opted to give away his family’s entire mine as payment for his son’s surgery (rather than simply paying for the procedure with some of the gold from that mine) the chief’s response is telling:

The chief laughed [and said to the doctor:] “I do not need gold nor do I want silver. I have plenty to eat always. I have a young and beautiful wife, whom I love and who loves and honors me. I have also a strong and healthy boy, who now, thanks to your skill, can see and so is perfect in every way. I have my acres and fields, and I have my cattle. I am chief and judge, and I may say I am a true and honest friend of my tribe, which respects me and obeys my orders, which they know are for their own good. The soil bears rich fruit every year. The cattle bring forth year in, year out. I have a golden sun above me, at night a silver moon, and there is peace in the land. So what could gold mean to me? Gold and silver do not carry any blessing. Does it bring you any blessing? You whites, you kill and rob and cheat and betray for gold. You hate each other for gold, while you never can buy love with gold. Nothing but hatred and envy. You whites spoil the beauty of life for the possession of gold. Gold is pretty and its stays pretty; and therefore we use it to adorn our gods and women. It is a feast for our eyes to look at rings and necklaces and bracelets made out of it. But we always were the master of our gold, never its slaves. We look at it and enjoy it. Since we cannot eat it, gold is of no real value to us. Our people have fought wars, but never for the possession of gold. We fought for land, for rivers, for salt deposits, for lakes, and mostly to defend our ourselves against savage tribes who tried to rob us of our land and its products. (Traven 194)

Although gold provides the vital exchange currency necessary for the chief to get the doctor to agree to perform the surgery needed to restore his son's vision, the above monologue suggests that the chief, *too*, fails to fully appreciate this fact as evidence of the egalitarian nature of capitalism. Traven insinuates that this failure is due to the fact that the chief, himself, enjoys a position of extreme privilege within his own tribe, making it hard for him to appreciate that the true value of the Smithian model of competitive, free-market capitalism practiced in America lies in its fundamentally egalitarian nature, since he *too* operates under the same sort of rigid monarchical caste system as did the Old-World Europeans.

In the voice of the novel's omniscient narrator, Traven even explicitly states that "around the time of the American Revolution" (when the events of this story are said to have taken place), "[t]he power of the Spanish rule in Latin-America was inevitably breaking to pieces" (Traven 208). In that same passage, Traven goes further still, writing the following in this part of *Sierra Madre* as well:

Since this [Spanish rule in Latin American] had been nothing short of dictatorship and tyranny, conditions were as they always and everywhere are when a dictatorship is nearing its inglorious end. Dictatorships do not and cannot allow people to think politically or economically for themselves, and so when a dictatorship is tumbling, people are in no way prepared to meet the changed conditions, and chaos is the result. Here authorities were so hard pressed from all sides and from all quarters that they no longer could cope with the growing unrest all over the country. (Traven 208; italics mine)

During this journey doña Maria lives through a period still more trying than that [which she had endured while working] at the mine. There she could not remember any day when she had felt happy and safe. She had never felt sure of her treasures. Always in fear, always worrying, . . . And during the daytime she was hunted by worries and fears even worse. What had kept her spirits up during th[ose] years was the thought of the future. In imagination she could see herself walking by the side of her [future husband, whom she imagined

would be a] duke to the throne of the king and there curtsyng and having the honor of kissing the heavy ring on the finger of His Most Holy Majesty. (208)

The above passage, and this entire metanarrative in general, appears to make an important distinction between the “Old World” European model of society and governance and the “New World” model manifested in, and epitomized by, America. That distinction places America and its kingless government “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” its casteless social structure, and its free-market capitalist economy that makes upward mobility possible for everyone, in stark contrast to both the Old-World European monarchies – with their rigid caste systems that (in addition to other things) dictated from birth the amount of success an individual could attain in his or her lifetime – and the countless dictatorships, autocracies, and totalitarian societies (past and present) that have dominated much of the historical record.

Together, these two metanarratives and the connecting episode which appears in between them serve the purpose of putting forth the notion that, just as individuals who are legally barred from owning property and who labor to enrich others but are never paid *themselves* for their labor, are slaves, so too are those who are not allowed to own the means with which to defend themselves. Moreover, Traven also appears to use this subset of events in the novel to illustrate that any government that denies its citizens the right to keep and bear the tools necessary to defend themselves, in so doing inherently suggests that its citizen’s bodies and lives are not their own, but rather belong to the State. The logic that leads to this conclusion comes directly from Hobbes, who insists that one always has the right to defend oneself and that seeing to one’s own self-defense is always one’s *own* responsibility, and *not* somebody else’s, and, indeed, that it is so because one’s

right and responsibility to defend something goes hand-in-hand with that thing being one's *own*, and *not* somebody else's.

CONCLUSION

In light of the body of evidence presented above, I believe, in opposition to the conventional view of critics who have written about it, that B. Traven's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is far from being a text that is Marxist, anti-American, and anti-capitalist in nature. Rather, I think that Traven's novel is motivated by a very different political philosophy.

Previous Traven scholars have underappreciated the fact that Traven published most of his literary works (including *Sierra Madre*) first in German in the 1920s and later in English in the 1930s. As his work evolved, and opposing the collectivist and redistributive policies implemented in 1933 by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt as part of his New Deal, I believe that Traven felt an urgent need to translate his fiction – including *Sierra Madre* – from the original German into English for publication in America, in the hope of reaching American readers in time for them to reverse course.

After all, by the mid-1930s, Americans were in the midst of the Great Depression (1929-1945). Yet, they suddenly also faced an unprecedented level of government intervention in, and unprecedented government control over, the private sector of the U.S. economy in the form of FDR's New Deal, which implemented a vast number of new programs that were meant to create jobs and put money back into the hands of Americans – especially those struggling *most* during the depression – but *all* of which were to be funded by American tax dollars at a time when American taxpayers could least afford it.

Judging from the economically Libertarian views that Traven appears to put forward in *Sierra Madre* championing individual liberty, limited government, and other

principles important to the American experiment and enshrined by America's founders in the nation's founding documents, I believe that Traven likely viewed FDR's New Deal as implementing the kind of government-planned economic policies and initiatives characteristic of those undertaken by the centralized-governments of socialist, communist, and fascist states (pre-eminently Russia, China, and Germany).

Comparatively, America had always been a glaring exception, a shining light, and a beacon of hope to those seeking freedom, individual liberty, and economic opportunity. The Enlightenment principles that made this the case were woven into the fabric of America's founding documents, thus providing the foundation of its political system of limited, decentralized, democratic self-government and its economic system of competitive, free-market capitalism. Both are compatible with the political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith that resonate throughout Traven's Depression-era *Sierra Madre* (1927, 1935). My thesis is that, by translating his 1920s works of literary fiction into English in the 1930s, Traven was likely trying to alert Americans to the radical changes that Roosevelt's policies were causing, and which Traven appears to have accurately predicted would forever alter the meaning of "liberalism" in America.

Indeed, historian and Senior Fellow in Economic History at the Council on Foreign Relations, Amity Shlaes, claims that FDR accomplished this, first, by co-opting the term "the forgotten man," changing its original meaning in the process. According to Shlaes, the well-known Yale University Professor of Political and Social Science, William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), first coined the term in 1883. For Sumner, the forgotten man was the American taxpayer of the economic middle class. This sentiment

is expressed as follows in the original “Forgotten Man” address that Sumner delivered in 1883 at Swarthmore College:

As soon as A observes something which seems to him to be wrong, from which X is suffering, A talks it over with B, and A and B then propose to get a law passed to remedy the evil and help X. Their law always proposes to determine what C shall do for X, or in the better case, what A, B, and C shall do for X. . . . What I want to do is look up C. I want to show you what manner of man he is. I call him the Forgotten Man. Perhaps the appellation is not strictly correct. He is the man who never is thought of. He is the victim of the reformer, social speculator and philanthropist, and . . . he deserves . . . [our] notice both for his character and for the many burdens which are laid upon him. . . . He works, he votes, generally he prays – but he *always* pays. (Sumner 2, 27; italics mine)

According to Shlaes, Sumner’s words (above) were then taken and used by FDR’s advisory “Brain Trust” committee to craft a radio address for FDR to deliver from Albany, New York on April 7, 1932. As the Governor of New York at that time, FDR’s radio address was important because it set him up for the presidential race that he would be entering shortly thereafter. In anticipation of that campaign, he used this radio address as an opportunity to lay out and explain his thinking behind the programs and policies that he had already started to implement in the state of New York during his time as governor, and which he planned to implement on a national scale if elected President of the United States.

These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power for plans like those of 1917 that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid. (Roosevelt)¹

¹ It seems that FDR made a habit of redefining terms and concepts established by notable figures. For, though the following example antedates the publication of both the German and English editions of Traven’s *Sierra Madre*, it is interesting to note that FDR does the same thing with famed American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1945 inaugural address as he had done with William Graham Sumner in 1932. In FDR’s fourth inaugural address (delivered January 20, 1945), he makes the following proclamation:

Just like that, FDR changed Sumner’s original “forgotten man” from C to X, and from the American taxpayer of the economic middle class to the Americans who were so “poor” that they paid little to no taxes at all.²

“. . . Today, in this year of war, 1945, we have learned lessons – at a fearful cost – and we shall profit by them. . . . We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away. We have learned that we must live as men, not as ostriches, nor as dogs in the manger. . . . We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community. . . . We have learned the simple truth, as Emerson said, that ‘The only way to have a friend is to be one.’ . . .” (DeGregorio 494-495; quoting Roosevelt’s fourth inaugural address)

Whatever FDR might have meant by invoking the words of Emerson on this occasion, and however much Emerson might very well have thought Fascism and Nazism unacceptable to a free people, it is certain that Emerson would *not* have agreed with FDR’s New Deal policies which became the model for the progressive welfare state. Instead, by the time Emerson delivered his famous 1844 lecture “The Young American,” he was an outspoken advocate of competitive free-market capitalism, and thus would have found FDR’s policies of wealth redistribution unjust and anti-American. For, according to Professor of Early American History Emeritus at the University of Connecticut, Robert A. Gross’ *The Transcendentalists and Their World* (2021):

“The Young American” was more than a paean about farming to a roomful of merchants. Reflecting his . . . appreciation of businessmen, Emerson . . . paid tribute to commerce as a liberating force in the history of humankind. In his perspective, trade was as natural as the invisible hand it obeyed. In accord with Adam Smith, he championed free trade and laissez-faire, and accepted Thomas Malthus’s gloomy prediction that the growth of population would always drive down wages to bare subsistence. . . . [S]uch miseries were transient; ever the optimist, Emerson had no doubt that “love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things,” and that the fit instrument of that progress was the production and exchange of commodities for profit. . . . Trade flourished with liberty; it spurred initiative and rewarded intelligence and merit. It had broken the power of feudalism in Europe and “planted America” on principles of equality and freedom. It promoted and preserved peace. Nothing could resist its ever-expanding reach: “This is the good, and this the evil of trade, that it goes to put everything *into market*, talent, beauty, virtue, and man himself.” So dynamic was commerce, so at odds with aristocracy and privilege, that Emerson predicted . . . “it will abolish slavery.” Under its aegis, government would gradually wither away, as “private adventurers” came to provide public services at lower cost and self-reliant individuals took care of themselves. (Gross 578-579; quoting and commenting on Emerson’s views as expressed in his “The Young American”)

² Note that the makeup of Congress from 1877 until 1883 (the year Sumner delivered his original “Forgotten Man” address at Swarthmore College) saw control by Democrats. According to information that appears in “Appendix A” (section titled “Political Composition of Congress: 1789-2001”) in the sixth edition of William A. DeGregorio’s *The Complete Book of U.S. Presidents* (2005), Congress was controlled by Democrats for decades preceding the American Civil War (1860-1865). Control then shifted to Republicans for the duration of that war and lasted through the end of Reconstruction (1865-1875). Eventually, control shifted back to Democrats, effectively ending Reconstruction. That Democrat control over Congress was still in place when Sumner delivered his original address in 1883. (DeGregorio 791-793)

I believe that Traven would likely have found this redefinition of “the forgotten man” troubling because, much as Sumner did in 1883, he viewed the proper role and scope of government as limited and small, and government interference in economic affairs, redistribution of wealth, and special-interest group legislation as bad business (in the fact that it produced waste and was economically inefficient if not harmful), but also because it was simply not fair (in that it functioned by arbitrarily picking winners and losers, thus destroying competition by creating monopolies, and effectively stealing the fruits of some peoples’ labor in order to redistribute those fruits to others who did not labor for them [thus making slaves of the former]).

Thus, by redefining Sumner’s “forgotten man,” FDR began the process of redefining the classical meaning of the term “liberalism” in America, a change which persists to this day.

Roosevelt won [reelection so many times] because he created a new kind of interest-group politics. . . . [Others] had long practiced interest-group politics on behalf of big business, [but] Roosevelt systematized interest-group politics more generally to include many constituencies – labor, senior citizens, farmers, union workers. The president made groups where only individual citizens or isolated cranks had stood before, ministered to those groups, and was rewarded by votes. Roosevelt’s move was so profound that it changed the English language. Before the 1930s, the word “liberal” stood for the individual; afterward, the phrase increasingly stood for groups. Roosevelt also changed economics forever. Roosevelt happened on an economic theory that validated his politics and moral sense: what we now call Keynesianism. . . . Keynesianism . . . emphasized government spending . . . [which] meant that Washington neglected the producer . . . [and] neglected the question of whether [this]. . . might frighten business into terrified inaction. Supplying generous capital to government made government into a competitor that the private sector could not match. (Shlaes 8-9)

As progressivism continues to enjoy ever-increasing influence over American life, it is no surprise that an ever-increasing number of fields of study have been infused of late with

critical Marxist theory. As I have tried to demonstrate throughout the present dissertation, I believe that this wide application of critical theory has led literary scholars to ascribe a Marxist meaning to literary works, even in cases – such as Traven’s *Sierra Madre* – where the text presents myriad evidence suggesting a very different authorial intention.

There appears to be an abundance of evidence suggesting that Traven believed that it is absolutely essential to have a basic understanding of the individualistic classical liberalism espoused in the respective texts of political philosophers Hobbes, Locke, and Smith to appreciate that many of the same Enlightenment principles championed therein are also enshrined in America’s founding documents. It is my belief that Traven was inspired by those same principles and infused them into his work. Hence, they can be seen resonating throughout *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. As Traven’s novel serves to remind us, we would do well to recall, and more carefully study, those Enlightenment principles, if only to ensure that we are better able to recognize them when they appear in, and help to illuminate, works of literature.

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