The New Leviathan

Part 1: The Rise of the Cogs
By B.J. Edenfield

As I look back over my six year college hiatus from what most people term “the real world”, it becomes clear that the “real world” spoken of is one that terrifies me beyond description. What follows is my best estimation of humanity in such a vile place – the land of Cogs. By way of preface let me state that this place is inescapable. It is something we have done to ourselves, either as a result of blind evolution in a struggle for our survival, or worse, by our own free will. I will begin this journey with a look at the man, whom Karl Marx claimed was the father of us all, Thomas Hobbes.

In Hobbes’ greatest work, The Leviathan, he set forth to describe mankind’s experience without an all encompassing, centralized government. In this state of nature, man lives in “continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short”( 186). In short, mankind is constantly in an ongoing war of man against man. To avoid such an existence, men establish a covenant with one another, agreeing to cast aside their natural right to obtain what they can for their own survival, in favor of an all powerful monarch. This will, in turn, create the concept of citizenship and remove the continual fear of violent death. Furthermore, it would allow humans to cultivate themselves in numerous ways that the state of nature prevented.

I tend to think that Hobbes needs revision. We have the advantage of living four hundred years after Hobbes and I think it is easy to pinpoint several mistakes Hobbes made. For example, the social contract never ended the continual fear of violent death and it never made man’s life any less solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. That said, a description of a New Leviathan is in order.

The social contract Hobbes argued for eventually creates the “citizen” and brings mankind out of the state of nature - if there ever was such a state. Conversely, the New Leviathan has no room for a citizen; rather, it creates what I call the “cog.” Moreover, the too powerful centralized government, which creates and sustains order, is actually a technological society, wherein humans are vessels of efficiency and technique. What were once human citizens concerned with moral and political freedom are now cogs functioning for economic efficiency.

Cogs are commonly viewed as well crafted, detailed parts of a complex piece of machinery. Cogs come in different shapes, sizes, and they are interchangeable if their functions are similar enough. Some may be as minute as the inner workings of a wrist watch, while others are as tall and round as the Roman Coliseum. Some are politicians and deer hunters, while others are convenient store clerks and college professors. For my purposes though the dimensions of any cog are irrelevant - we are all geared with the cognitive schemata of technique and efficiency.

Cogs tend to think of themselves as individuals, mistakenly of course! Descartes argued cogito ergo sum, but I object! It is not the “I” doing the thinking, rather the “It” - the New Leviathan of Technological Society -- that does our thinking. Descartes’ insight must be turned on its head - “It thinks, therefore I am not.” The cogito is an illusion in the technological society. Your cog nature has been tempered and forged since your conception (even the nutrients you receive from your mother in the womb were determined by the workings of other cogs). This is because cogs do not operate on their own or in isolation from other cogs - they are collective.

There are signs that indicate we are all the moving and thinking parts of the New Leviathan. The most obvious place to look for evidence of having been cognized is in the realm of identity. All of us tend to think of ourselves as unique snow flakes fully equipped with
our own tastes, idiosyncrasies, and opinions with little thought as to
the origin of said qualities. We consist of numerous cogs which
call to the overall whole of
cog reality. We take for granted
that we were thrown into existence
at a certain point in time, to
certain settings and
surroundings, which have molded
our consciousness into thinking we
are, when in reality we are not.

Most of us have our existence because efficiency necessitated it.
In former days families had “x”
number of offspring to ensure the
number of births decreased. There are
numerous other examples of how
the New Leviathan’s technological
thinking alters the reproductive rate
of human existence and even the
human desire to reproduce (eg.
birth control, sonograms, political
techniques related to population
control, marketing techniques, tax
incentives, career identities, and
sex education to name but a few).

Another example of identity
efficiency is found in the realm of
sports. During the 2010 NCAA
Men’s Basketball tournament, I
cheered for my beloved Duke
Bluedevils from my living room. I
deluded myself into feeling the
emotions of every shot and botched
call by officials. Yet, upon
awakening from my dream, I
realized that I did not attend Duke,
or did I know a single person on
the team (or student on campus).
Nevertheless, I thought of myself
as a Duke Bluedevil and I know
there are many others who share in
these artificial identities
manufactured for our consumption
by the New Leviathan.

The “identity cog” works best
when apathy has overtaken a
culture. In fact apathy is a cog in
and of itself, holding together
numerous other cogs in the New
Leviathan. For example, some of
us spend our spare time “Keeping
up with the Kardashians” and other
reality television programs rather
than actually discussing the nature
of reality itself. Perhaps reality TV
is reality itself if I am right, which
is a fearful prospect. Nevertheless,
such a mind numbing endeavor as
keeping up with the Kardashian
family is necessary for other cogs
to function in this great new
artificially living machine.

Cogs are also highly visible in
the realm of economics. My own
cog nature notwithstanding, I have
honied my ability to detect
 economically functioning cogs in
the New Leviathan. I know I am
dealing with an economic cog
when someone asks me what I
study in college and I reply,
“Philosophy!” Without fail the next
question out of their mouth is,
“Well what are you going to do
with that? How much money do
you expect to earn with that
degree?” Is annual income in some
way indicative of knowledge
obtained at the university? Only
economic cogs would think so!

The last example I will use is
the cog of politics, which covers a
vast area! Is it any surprise that the
freest country in the world can be
summed up by two political
parties? Granted, there are some
groups that break the mold and
form splinter groups but they have
little hope for success. The
political cog can force any
opinion of how things ought to be
into one of two groups no matter
how much dissonance may result -
another sign of an apathetic society
and New Leviathan thinking! Two
groups are simply more efficient
and the proof is that two groups
dominate the sphere. Cogs like
binary thinking—no or yes, left or
right, off or on, zero or one.

The ramifications of cog theory
are far reaching and as far as a
philosophical discussion on identity
is concerned, it is a foregone
conclusion that the wonderful
snowflake we think we are has
melted and what remains is a
generic, artificial, and mundane
existence. Truth in the New
Leviathan is defined by how
efficient something is and
efficiency decisions override moral
decisions.

At this point there is nothing,
or no one who can control the cogs.
There is no light switch that can be
flipped or a cord which can be
unplugged. There are simply too
many cogs forcing other cogs to
move, which implies (though does
not logically force) a strong view of
technological determinism. In the
words of the western watchman,
Jacques Ellul, “Life in such an
environment has no meaning,” and
I tend to agree(6).

In part two, I will examine
possible reasons for our current
situation and reactions to it. I
will also attempt to point the reader to
an escape route from the
inescapable strangle hold of the
New Leviathan.

Works Cited

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