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NEGATIVE ASSOCIATION

For man by nature chooseth the lesser evil . . .

– Thomas Hobbes[1]

NEGATIVE ASSOCIATION

The term *negative association* refers to the formation of political groups (in-groups) that is based on identification with others who are similarly situated in relation to an external entity, such as another individual or group (out-group).[2] While political groups may form for a variety of positive reasons, for example, on the basis of a common language or religion, or for the pursuit of a common, specific goal, such as the conquest of a certain piece of land, an *essential* part of what brings their members together is their common difference from an outside entity, as in the case of a common enemy. Negative association manifests itself during crucial moments in the life of political groups: at the founding and during crises that threaten the unity and continued existence of the group.[3] There will be periods of time in which negative

[1] *Leviathan*, XIV § 29.

[2] The terms *in-group* and *out-group* were coined by William Graham Sumner, who argues,

> All the members of one group are comrades to each other, and have a common interest against every other group. If we assume a standpoint in one group we may call that one the 'we-group' or the 'in-group'; then every other group is to us an 'others-group' or an 'out-group.' The sentiment which prevails inside the 'we-group,' between its members, is that of peace and cooperation; the sentiment which prevails inside of a group towards all outsiders is that of hostility and war. These two sentiments are perfectly consistent with each other; in fact, they necessarily complement each other ("War", 142).

Cf. Brewer & Brown, "Intergroup Relations," 559.

[3] According to Coser, "Antagonism against a common enemy may be a binding element in two ways. It may either lead to the formation of new groups with distinct boundary lines, ideologies, loyalties and common values, or, stopping short of this, it may result only in instrumental associations in the face of a common threat." Coser adds, "[t]he emergence of

association is the primary cause of individuals' identification with a group. At other times, negative association is manifest only in the background, while it is clearly identifiable positive characteristics that unite the members of a political group. Nevertheless, whether a primary, secondary, or minimally auxiliary cause, negative association is always an element of the process by which individuals form their political identities and identify with political groups.

Differentiation is built into group formation by definition. Unless a group is to be all-inclusive, in which case it would be unnecessary, the declaration of intent to form it amounts to a declaration of difference from those who are not to be included in it, and its continued existence reaffirms that difference. Such differentiation is true of all groups, whether political or not.[4] In some cases, it is only a logical extension of a union based on positive shared traits, as, for example, in the case of a group of philatelists. What brings such individuals together is their appreciation of stamps, and chances are that they think of their group mostly in terms of that appreciation and its consequences, rather than as distinct from those who either hate stamps or are completely indifferent to them. In such a case, differentiation from nonphilatelists is a fact arising from the formation and continuation of their association, but one that is in the background and unlikely to have played any role in the formation of the group or to stand out in the minds of its members afterwards. This way of thinking about the group in question would most likely change, however, if one day the government were to decide to ban stamp collecting, and to confiscate and burn all existing stamps.

Theories of groups usually focus on the purpose for which a group exists, or on the characteristics of a group, such as its size and organization.[5] Both sets of considerations are crucial in understanding a group, and yet there is an important side of each group's story that is mainly implicit in the group's nature and purpose, and which as a result often gets lost, namely the ways in which its relationship to outsiders shapes it and the identities of its members. The theory of negative association holds that this relationship is an essential part of a full understanding of a group for two reasons. First, it complements approaches that focus on the characteristics and goals of a group, by shedding

such associations of otherwise isolated individuals represents a 'minimum' of unification" (*The Functions of Social Conflict*, 140).

[4] See Walzer's discussion of membership and its implications (*Spheres of Justice*, 31–63).

[5] Olson, e.g., finds that studies of collective action focused too much on the former and failed to take the latter into consideration. He presents his account as a corrective to that trend, suggesting, among other things, that group size makes a difference (*The Logic of Collective Action*, 5, 53–65).

new light on their findings. Second, it may provide additional information that is not available through a narrow focus on the group and its goals. The importance of these two functions is obvious: knowing, for instance, that a particular group is trying to seize a piece of land is one thing, but it is quite another to know whom it is trying to take this land from, as well as who the other groups or actors are that may affect the outcome. In fact, more information about outsiders may lead to revisions of hypotheses about the group's motivation. Attempts to determine the causes of particular conflicts are especially good examples of the need for this kind of information.[6] Immediate causes may be easy to identify, but underlying causes are more difficult to locate, and research on the history of the relationship between the parties may lead to the need to revise initial explanations of the sources of a conflict.[7]

In the case of political groups, in particular, the role of outsiders is a crucial element of group identity. While the purpose of all groups is to further the interests of their members in one way or another, political groups are distinguished by the fact that their purposes revolve around the promotion of the interests of the group in relation to (and, more often than not, in opposition to) others, outside the group.[8] Groups are political because they form with reference to (i.e., in anticipation of or in response to) an antagonistic relationship with other entities. This relationship need not be the kind of radical, life-or-death conflict that Schmitt has in mind, although it has the potential

[6] The difficulty of such a determination is captured most famously by Thucydides, in the opening of his history (*The Peloponnesian War*, I, esp. I.23).

[7] See, e.g., Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence.'"

[8] This is a simple consequence of the observation that people join groups for a reason, and that "organizations often perish if they do nothing to further the interests of their members," as Olson suggests (*The Logic of Collective Action*, 6). Interests in this sense are broadly conceived as the motivation behind an individual's decision to join a group and remain a part of it. Thus, they may include a wide variety of things, such as the enjoyment of the company of others, the exchange of information, the shared pursuit of hobbies, improved health benefits, financial gain, and political power. This basic definition of interest thus includes the motives even of those who join groups the purpose of which is other-regarding, such as philanthropic organizations, for example (cf. Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, 6, note 6). In so doing, this basic understanding of interest says nothing about the relative force of motivating factors as compared with the results of the group's efforts. It need not imply, e.g., that people who join philanthropic organizations do so merely because they derive some personal benefit (e.g., satisfaction). The motive for joining such an organization might well be one's belief in the rectitude of helping others, but even in that case, it is assumed that such a person has an interest in promoting that belief and therefore a preference for more rather than less efficient means of doing so.

to escalate into one.[9] Thus, political groups are defined fundamentally by some relationship to others, outsiders, regardless of whether the particular objective of the group is the preservation of something possessed already, as for example in the case of defense, or the acquisition of something else, as in the case of a struggle for workers' rights.[10] By their very being, political groups make a statement with which at least some outside entity disagrees or is expected to do so. Where conflict, or at least the potential for conflict, does not exist, there is no reason for political mobilization.[11]

FEAR

Individuals and groups experience a wide variety of negative feelings towards others, and thus negative association may develop as a result of any of several social emotions, such as common envy, greed, or hatred. As economic, moral, and political theories began to extol the social benefits of such negative, and previously deemed undesirable, characteristics of human nature (in Mandeville's words, the "publick benefits" of "private vices"), negative emotions towards others came to be appreciated as important motivators of human beings and therefore worthy of earnest and serious consideration in the construction of political and social order.[12] Perhaps more notorious than other negative emotions, fear had already been recognized as an important parameter from Thucydides to Machiavelli, reaching preeminence in the political philosophy of Hobbes.[13] This degree of interest is not accidental.

[9] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 25–37. Schmitt's response to such a broader understanding of conflict would be that it *becomes* political once the underlying cause (economic, moral, etc.) leads the parties to a position in which they pose an existential threat to one another.

[10] Efforts to acquire various goods are exacerbated by the degree to which the goods sought are scarce, but as the example of a struggle for higher wages between employers and workers shows, competitions for goods can cause the solidification of groups and escalate into conflicts between "us" and "them" without being zero-sum games.

[11] As Wrong, following Simmel, puts it, in this sense, "conflict is a social relation just as much as cooperation" (*The Problem of Order*, 18); cf. Simmel, "Conflict," 13.

[12] See, e.g., Vico, *The New Science*, §§ 132–33; Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, I: 137–38; Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 14–20; Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 4–5. Rousseau, who is anxious to present as bare a conception of natural man as possible, considers pity natural and universal (*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, 152). In drawing the distinction between *amour de soi-même* and *amour-propre*, Rousseau notes that the latter arises only in society, since it requires the presence of other human beings (*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, note XV, p. 218).

[13] See, e.g., Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, I.23, I.88; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVII; Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, I.15.13, I.17.15, II.3.2; *On the Citizen*, I.2, note 2; *Leviathan*, XIII: 89.

Although any negative social emotion may be the cause of negative association at a particular juncture, it is fear that plays a crucial role in the formation of political groups, if only because security is a prerequisite not merely for the pursuit of positive goals, but also for the leisure required by the full range of possible feelings towards others.[14]

The primacy of self-preservation renders fear of the threat posed by others vital for the formation of alliances, as well as for their subsequent preservation and consolidation, because it provides a way of overcoming barriers to group formation and collective action that are insurmountable by positive means alone.[15] The emergence of a threat calls for the reclassification of existing threats and consequently for the rearrangement of one's priorities. Thus, individuals or small social groups, such as families, who are concerned with their self-preservation but are nevertheless unable to address the demands of an overwhelming threat on their own, are forced to seek the assistance of others, including those with whom they share no positive unifying characteristic, and even those towards whom they are apprehensive or hostile, but whom they have come to see as a lesser threat, as a result of this reprioritization. The potential for the sudden and radical transformation of others from enemies to allies and vice versa is one of the most important aspects of something akin to what Wolin refers to as "the economy of violence," something that might be called the *political economy of fear*, in which the changing intensity of threats and the consequent fluidity of groups along the friend–enemy continuum bring about the realignment of individuals and groups.[16]

[14] In studying the role of emotions in ethnic violence and discrimination, Petersen distinguishes between fear, hatred, and resentment, and attempts to determine the role of each in ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe (*Understanding Ethnic Violence*). Although he is correct in emphasizing the role of these emotions as motives for collective action and the need for distinctions between them, the distinctions that he draws are not sufficiently clear. Petersen predicts that when fear is the predominant emotion, "[*t*]*he target of ethnic violence will be the group that is the biggest threat*," whereas when there is resentment, "[*t*]*he predicted ethnic target will be the group perceived as farthest up the ethnic status hierarchy that can be most surely subordinated through violence*" (*ibid*., 25). As they stand, these predictions are unequal, because fear has a more specific content (threat to security) than resentment. Knowing the source of resentment in each case makes a big difference, and in many cases resentment may be tied very closely to concerns for safety. Moreover, although a narrow understanding of fear might only count immediate threats to physical safety, very often the prospect of severe economic hardship and abject poverty has a similar effect. In such cases, it would be hard to know precisely where fear ends and resentment begins, and vice versa. See, e.g., Inglehart et al., "Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq."

[15] Montesquieu, e.g., wonders, "[w]ho can fail to see that natural defense is of a higher order than all precepts?" (*The Spirit of the Laws*, XXVI.7).

[16] See Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 197–200. Cf. Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, III.65; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.1, I.46; Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, Pref. § 10.

Fear is an emotion so familiar that for Aron "it needs no definition," and yet its very familiarity is often a barrier to a satisfactory, systematic understanding of it.[17] People use the word *fear* to describe their reaction to very different stimuli in a wide variety of contexts. This is because certain physical and emotional consequences of these various experiences are the same or at least very similar.[18] Nevertheless, the nature of the stimulus, the perceived duration of the threat, the possible existence of prior traumatic experiences with similar stimuli, and several other factors determine the precise nature of each state generally thought of as fearful, so that one can distinguish, with a greater or lesser degree of consistency and precision, between states of anxiety, stress, fright, panic, posttraumatic stress disorder, phobias, and other fear-related categories.[19] In political history and thought, the words *fear*, *panic*, and *terror* are frequent, but further explanation is rare.[20] One important exception is Hobbes, who defines *fear* generally as "[*a*]*version*, with opinion of *hurt* from the object," but explains that he means thereby "*any anticipation of future evil* [. . .] *not only flight, but also distrust, suspicion, precaution and provision against fear*."[21]

The behavior that Hobbes describes in the latter definition is of two kinds. Both are strictly speaking "*aversion*, with opinion of *hurt* from the object," but

[17] Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, 1: 20. Aron considers fear "a primal and, so to speak, subpolitical emotion" (*ibid.*, 20–21). Shklar argues, "[o]f fear it can be said without qualification that it is universal as it is physiological" ("The Liberalism of Fear," 29). Cf. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 11–12; Mannoni, *La peur*, 15; Rachman, *The Meanings of Fear*, 11.

[18] Despite a wide variety of definitions of fear and anxiety, there seems to be general agreement on the presence (fear) or absence (anxiety) of a specific object as the defining characteristic of each state. On the relationship between fear and anxiety, see Öhman, "Fear and Anxiety," 574, 588; May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 190–93, 203; Mannoni, *La peur*, 43–48; Rachman, *The Meanings of Fear*, 13. For a different perspective, see Mowrer, "A Stimulus-Response Analysis of Anxiety and Its Role as a Reinforcing Agent." On the importance of physical reactions as signals of fear, see Öhman, "Fear and Anxiety," 589–90.

[19] See Mannoni, *La peur*, 40–48.

[20] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, *panic* refers to a state of fear that is "sudden, wild, or unreasoning," and *terror* to "intense fear, fright, or dread." In general, *terror* became a term of interest in politics after the French Revolution, although occasional earlier references appear. Consistent fear – especially of external enemies – on the other hand, is described in some of the earliest political histories, including Thucydides', as well as various histories of Rome, for which *metus Gallicus* (fear of Gaul) and *metus Punicus* (fear of Carthage) were a widely accepted part of political life (cf. Bellen, *Metus Gallicus, metus Punicus*; Kneppe, *Metus temporum*, 54–57; Chapter 2 in this volume).

[21] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, VI § 16; *On the Citizen*, I.2, note 2. The latter work will be referred to by its original and translated titles interchangeably. All references are to the Tuck and Silverthorne edition, unless otherwise indicated.

one is quick, whereas the other is longer term, though different from what psychologists describe as anxiety, since it has a specific object.[22] Reaction to the sudden sight and sound of a snake in one's path is an example of the former, whereas a general uneasiness on the eve of a likely invasion is a case of the latter.[23] Experience with similar situations of either kind tells us that there is a difference between them, yet there are also significant similarities, not the least of which is the general tendency towards avoidance.[24] Although that tendency manifests itself in different ways, depending on the proximity, imminence, and magnitude of the threat, it nevertheless forms the common core that ties all fearful reactions together. It does so all the more when that which is to be avoided is death.

The brain perceives external stimuli in two ways: through "the low road and the high road."[25] The former course is "quick and dirty"; it allows for a swift reaction to the stimulus perceived, which in dangerous situations may make a difference.[26] The "high road," on the other hand, produces a more discriminating response to external stimuli, but takes more time. In LeDoux's example, a hiker sees a curved object in his path. The low road will lead him to treat it like a snake, whereas the high road will determine that it is a snake or a stick. LeDoux explains,

> If it is a snake, the amygdala is ahead of the game. From the point of view of survival, it is better to respond to potentially dangerous events as though they were in fact the real thing than to fail to respond. The cost of treating a stick as a snake is less, in the long run, than the cost of treating a snake as a stick.[27]

The economizing quality of the low road has a parallel in the more thoughtful behavior that, depending on the circumstances, one might call prudential. Uncertainty about the possibility of harm in the future leads human beings to adopt the safety precautions that Hobbes lists in his expanded definition, even though these are not necessary most of the time. A number of considerations lead to this kind of behavior. First, as Hobbes points out, one

[22] See Mowrer, "A Stimulus-Response Analysis of Anxiety and Its Role as a Reinforcing Agent."
[23] LeDoux uses the example of the snake to illustrate the way in which such a stimulus is processed by the brain (*The Emotional Brain*, 163–65, 166).
[24] According to Rachman, "[a] mountain of laboratory evidence demonstrates a direct connection between fear and avoidance in animals" (*Fear and Courage*, 268).
[25] LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 161–68.
[26] On the "low road," a stimulus goes directly from the sensory thalamus to the amygdala (LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 161–65).
[27] LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 165.

need not assume that all men are evil. However, because "we cannot tell the good and the bad apart, [. . .] even if there were fewer evil men than good men, good, decent people would still be saddled with the constant need to watch, distrust, anticipate and get the better of others, and to protect themselves by all possible means."[28] Second, the lessons that we take away from fearful situations are manifold. The encounter with the snake may lead to a general fear of snakes, but may also lead to a fear of the woods. This effect, known as "contextual conditioning," means that something associated with a previous reaction to a fearful stimulus may in turn become a fearful stimulus in the future.[29] These aspects of fear explain in part why it is such a complicated state of mind. Some of its mechanisms are clearly liabilities; they have a paralyzing effect. On the other hand, onetime liabilities may turn into benefits, since fear at the right time and for the right reasons is essential for survival. This salutary effect is not limited to the individual, but rather plays a crucial role in the formation and preservation of political associations.

GROUP FORMATION

At the start of his history of Britain, Milton observes, "[t]he beginning of Nations, those excepted of whom sacred Books have spok'n, is to this day unknown."[30] A quick survey of writings that touch on the subject of the origin of societies, both studies of particular nations and studies of the history of the nation or the state in general, reveals the extent and seriousness of the problem.[31] The historical record is generally insufficient, in that the earliest testimony of organized political groups comes at a stage that is already relatively advanced and thus removed from the period of interest.[32] This absence of earlier records is no doubt explained by the circumstances to which Hobbes ascribes the absence of philosophy, namely the lack of leisure that is required for the contemplation and recording of a sequence of events.[33]

[28] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, Pref. § 12.
[29] LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 167. Rachman thus distinguishes between a "core" fear (such as fear for one's health) and "secondary and conditional" fears (such as the fear of not having access to medicine or a hospital), and argues that there is a possibility that the person suffering from the former "will also learn to fear the secondary cues, by a process of conditioning" (*Fear and Courage*, 109).
[30] Milton, *The History of Britain*, 1.
[31] See, e.g., Fried, "The State, the Chicken, and the Egg; or, What Came First?," 35–46.
[32] See Oppenheimer, *The State*, 14.
[33] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVI § 6.

Nevertheless, political theories look to the founding of nations and states for answers to the question of motivation for political mobilization. Where method is concerned, accounts of the formation of the first political groups belong to one of two categories that are sometimes hard to distinguish. The first consists of conjectural accounts based on very little, if any, historical evidence. Rousseau's account of the first stage of the state of nature, in the Second Discourse, is an example of this kind.[34] The second type purports to have its foundation exclusively in the historical record, although, as the more sober surveys of historical anthropology reveal, the dearth of evidence means that at one point or another these accounts too will have to resort to conjecture.[35] Ferguson's account of the rise of civil society belongs to this second type.[36]

One of the main problems that accounts of either kind face is that they have to explain the rise of political groups in a group vacuum, that is, in an environment in which no political group has taken shape. Answering the question regarding the origins of the first group is in many ways more difficult than explaining the rise of subsequent ones. For some, however, this problem never arises. Such accounts consider groups to be the natural unit of social analysis, and therefore regard the political group as the result of an agglomeration of natural groups such as families and clans.[37] In many ways, the choice between the solitary individual and the small group as the irreducible unit of social analysis determines the character and direction of a political theory, and yet the striking differences between the two points of origin tend to obscure some important elements that they have in common.[38] Both individualist and group accounts eventually agree that their respective fundamental units of analysis will sooner or later become incapable of providing for their own survival and security, and that as a result larger aggregations will have to form, in some cases even prior to the emergence of the state.[39] Thus, for example, the individualist accounts of the

[34] Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, Part I.

[35] See, e.g., Rousseau, "The State of War" § 22. As Service notes, "[m]any important theories and debates connected with the origin of the repressive state have been handicapped because it is so difficult to account convincingly for its appearance out of the matrix of egalitarian primitive society" (*Origins of the State and Civilization*, 15).

[36] Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 9.

[37] See, e.g., Aristotle, *Politica*, 1252b9–27; Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 9.

[38] "Individualist" accounts are sometimes referred to as "atomistic," but this characterization is problematic because it may give the false impression of selfishness.

[39] See Hume, "Of Political Society". Ehrenreich describes this as the "Defense Hypothesis" (*Blood Rites*, 52–57).

social contract theorists all allow for the formation of temporary associations in the state of nature for the achievement of goals that are out of reach for solitary individuals.[40] On the other side, Aristotle declares famously that self-sufficiency through cooperation is the objective of the coming together of small groups in the form of the city.[41] Anthropologists tend to accept small groups such as immediate and extended families as the foundations of more complex groups, since the helplessness of the infant and its dependence on at least one adult – usually the mother – provides reasonable evidence for the emergence and formation of small, basic groups.[42] Even small groups, however, quickly reach a point at which they require the assistance of others for the attainment of goals that are beyond their reach, so the fundamental question of the motivation behind cooperation returns.

A further remarkable similarity between individualist and group accounts is that regardless of their starting point, explanations of the rise of the political association sooner or later speak of the initiation of conflict between individuals or small groups. In some cases, the source of conflict is clear, but in many it is not. Following Simmel, Coser takes conflict as an essential

[40] Contrary to conventional wisdom, this is true even of Hobbes, who argues, "if you add also how difficult it is, with few men and little equipment, to take precautions against enemies who attack with the intention to overwhelm and subdue, it cannot be denied that men's natural state, before they came together into society, was War" (*On the Citizen*, I.12); cf. *The Elements of Law*, II.1.2; *Leviathan*, XV § 5. In the Second Treatise, Locke speaks of "friends" and allies in the state of nature (*Two Treatises of Government*, II, § 13, § 16), which he describes as a state "of Peace, Good Will, Mutual Assistance, and Preservation" (*ibid.*, II, § 19), and draws a sharp distinction between the dissolution of government and the dissolution of society (*ibid.*, II, § 211). Despite claiming that "being unable to do without another" is "a situation which [. . .] does not obtain in the state of nature" (*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, I § 50), Rousseau devotes the opening of Part II of the Second Discourse to an account of how the formerly solitary individuals that inhabited the state of nature had to band together to obtain the essentials for survival and protect themselves from natural disasters and other "difficulties" (161; cf. *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, II §§ 1–24, esp. §§ 11–15).

[41] In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues, "[n]ow all forms of community are like parts of the political community; for men journey together with a view to some particular advantage, and to provide something that they need for the purposes of life; and it is for the sake of advantage that the political community too seems to have come together originally and to endure" (1160a9–12; cf. *Politica*, 1152b27–1253a4).

[42] See, e.g., Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization*, 3. Even Rousseau, who exaggerates man's natural independence, has to admit that children remain with their mothers until they can fend for themselves: "as soon as they had the strength to forage on their own, [children] left even the mother" (*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, I § 25; cf. *ibid.*, II § 2). In his account, families do end up under the same roof and thereby form the foundations of larger societies, but this is in response to the demands of nature, rather than to any positive social bond among the individual members (*ibid.*, II §§ 1–15).