

‘We Do Not Sow’: The Economics and Politics of *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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Introduction

The wonderful thing about engrossing fantasy worlds is that they can seem more familiar to us than real ones. In fact, this very trait is what makes the fantasy genre one of the most effective for communicating lessons about human life and society. As C.S. Lewis put it,

At all ages, if [fantasy] is used well by the author and meets the right reader, it has the same power: to generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies. But at its best it can do more; it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of ‘commenting on life,’ can add to it. (Lewis 1956)

Readers of George R.R. Martin’s fantasy epic *A Song of Ice and Fire* will surely agree. Spanning five books, with two more yet to be published, the series establishes and explores a world of immense depth and richness, not the least part of which is its human detail. For Martin, just as for J.R.R. Tolkien, the conventions of fantasy are less important than how people react to them (Kaveney 2000). In fact, Martin agrees with William Faulkner that the “human heart in conflict with itself” is a central theme for worthwhile writing in any genre (Farley 2011). This focus on the human element is what makes his story appear timeless and universal.

At a time when book series of enormous scope and detail are ubiquitous, Martin’s world provides far more than conventional swords-and-sorcery fiction: it also offers a searching account of economic and political relations in human society. The saga uses its fantasy setting to

explore numerous social problems and to dramatize important questions about power, conflict, and the state. However, in contrast to novels like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Atlas Shrugged*, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is not dystopian or overtly didactic; instead, the underlying themes are just that—underlying. This in no way reduces the power of the narrative, and if anything, enhances it. The story is personal and human, capturing first the reader’s imagination and empathy, and then, more subtly, her intellect. In this sense it brings Lewis’s remark about the power of fantasy to life.

The aim of this essay is to consider the economic and political implications of Martin’s fantastic but realistic epic. It is impossible in a short chapter to mention every point of interest in the series, which is currently almost four times the length of *Atlas Shrugged*. Instead, we explore only a small number of ideas about political economy, society, and the state that underlie the central story and provide much of its structure.¹ The discussion will be intelligible to those who have read Martin’s books or watched their television adaptation *Game of Thrones*, but also, we hope, for readers altogether unfamiliar with the series (although naturally, many characters and personal or political relationships cannot be explained in detail). For those who have not read the books, we hope our essay will provide the impetus to take them up.

“We Do Not Sow”: The Origin and Growth of States

Before exploring the story in more detail, we should mention the broader geopolitical context in which it takes place. The narrative conjures an enormous world consisting of two major continents and a number of smaller islands. These spaces are populated by numerous cultures that vary widely in terms of social norms, forms of government, and levels of economic development.

For example, on the continent of Westeros—where the bulk of the story takes place—societies are similar to medieval European states, especially feudal monarchies (Vallier 2014). In fact, Martin seems to use the fantasy setting to reimagine Europe’s past. Westeros borrows heavily from England during War of the Roses (c. 1455-1487), and Westerosi conflicts contain numerous parallels to those between the houses of Lancaster and York that arose from the social and financial turmoil following the Hundred Years’ War. Just like these historical powers, the seven major kingdoms of Westeros are each ruled by a great House seeking to further its own ambitions, while nominally pledging fealty to the king.

The eastern continent, on the other hand, is populated by a mixture of nomadic tribes and aristocratic city-states—similar to 12th-century Venice, Genoa, and Milan—dubbed “free cities.” This is a misnomer though, as all of the free cities (except for Braavos) actively engage in slave ownership and trade. More importantly, nowhere in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is there a region resembling an industrial economy, much less one with a significant degree of economic and social freedom. As a result, the books generally depict a world of poverty and stagnation ruled by institutions hostile to economic development, usually command economies of some sort.

By contrasting different social groups within an overarching narrative about political power, Martin’s world illustrates key ideas about its (and our) institutions, especially regarding the organization and control of society. As the first volume—titled *A Game of Thrones*—indicates, the series is fundamentally about power and the dangers of wielding it. However, “it does not celebrate power and the powerful but challenges and interrogates them” (Carpenter 2012). Questions about the nature of political power and the relations between rulers and ruled thus provide the background for much of the storyline. The narrative points naturally then to the institution of the state, which represents the greatest concentration of power in society. Much of

the story deals directly or indirectly with states and their relation to society at large, especially their economic interactions.

To explore these themes, we first draw on Franz Oppenheimer's famous distinction between the *economic* and the *political* means of acquiring property and organizing society. Simply put, the economic means consists in peaceful cooperation and trade, while the political involves the forcible redistribution of wealth (Oppenheimer 1926, 24-27). States represent the *organization of the political means*, and when considered in light of Oppenheimer's dichotomy, are economically no different from organized groups of bandits.²

Martin hints at this very point throughout the novels, but the insight shines through with special beauty in a conversation between two characters, the smuggler Davos Seaworth and his acquaintance, the pirate Salladhör Saan. The pirate is renowned as "a smuggler... as well as a trader, a banker, a notorious pirate, and the self-styled Prince of the Narrow Sea." Pondering this dubious résumé, Davos concludes, "*When a pirate grows rich enough, they make him a prince*" (Martin 2011b, 138). This brief comment bears a striking similarity to a passage from St. Augustine's *City of God*:

It was a pertinent and true answer which was made to Alexander the Great by a pirate whom he had seized. When the king asked him what he meant by infesting the sea, the pirate defiantly replied: "The same as you do when you infest the whole world; but because I do it with a little ship I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are an emperor." (Augustine 1998, 146)³

Both anecdotes suggest the difference between plunder and public finance is a matter of degree, not of kind. In practice, the distinction usually rests on a rhetorical trick that masks the

pirate's self-interest with the politician's proclaimed public interest. But in terms of their economic effects, plunder and government activity both reduce welfare and hinder social cooperation.

Ideas about the foundations of political power appear throughout the novels, so we now consider further examples from two different societies: the Dothraki tribes and the Ironmen of House Greyjoy. The Dothraki horselords are probably the simplest of Martin's societies in terms of their technological and economic development. The Dothraki are comprised of a series of independent tribes, each formed around a single leader who unites his group by dint of martial prowess.⁴ They are essentially nomadic, although they do regard the region of Vaes Dothrak as kind of capital city and spiritual home to which they bring the spoils of war. However, they do not engage in trade, use money, or accumulate capital, obtaining whatever wealth they have either through conquest or as bribes from potential targets. In fact, the only permanent structures in the city of Vaes Dothrak are constructed by foreign slaves using plundered materials (Martin 2011a, 374-75, 377-78). In Oppenheimer's terms, Dothraki society is based entirely on the political means. Importantly though, these means are not organized, and there is no Dothraki state as such.

At the same time, the lack of Dothraki economic and political development can be attributed to their refusal to engage in the division of labor, and consequently to adopt a medium of exchange. For human societies to survive and thrive, they require liberty, property, and sound money: "Abolish all, or even one, of these institutions and human society disintegrates amid a congeries of isolated household economies and predatory tribes" (Salerno 1990, 50). This observation accurately characterizes the Dothraki—their tribes are basically examples of military socialism, and because successful war making is virtually their only goal, they fail to encourage

either further political development or economic progress. In other words, the Dothraki “roving bandits” have not yet become “stationary bandits.” With no institutions to encourage economic growth, they lack a consistent source of surplus to use as the basis for a permanent state. The step toward the kind of systematic, long-term redistribution of wealth characteristic of modern forms of government is one the Dothraki are either unable or unwilling to take. This results in political stasis, where militaristic values prevent the emergence of market activity.

A further stage of political development is evident in the Iron Islands. The population of this area, known as the “Ironmen,” is a society of Viking-like warriors ruled by House Greyjoy. Geographically separated from the more developed parts of Westeros, they are nonetheless a more close-knit society than the Dothraki. Yet the Ironmen find themselves increasingly out of place in a realm where piracy and rebellion are ruthlessly suppressed—and replaced—by a central monarch. In addition, they scorn social cooperation, especially market exchange, which they derisively refer to as “paying the gold price.” Wealth is only admirable if it is acquired through violence and plunder, which the Ironmen call “paying the iron price” (2011b, 166-67). In such a society, where cooperation is penalized and violence rewarded, it is unsurprising that talent and productive capacity are directed almost entirely toward the latter (Baumol 1990).

Instead of participating in the division of labor and exchange, the Ironmen dream of returning their anachronistic culture to a past age where simple, brutal strength was sufficient to overawe their neighbors and provide the plunder needed to support their parasitic way of life. Their overtly predatory form of social organization is thus another powerful depiction of the political means, which are summarized perfectly in the Greyjoy family words: “We Do Not Sow” (Martin 2011a, 796). That is, rather than sow and thereby reap a just reward, the Ironmen choose instead to pillage the fruits of what others have sown.⁵

The Game of Thrones is a Game of Coins

However, in more developed states, as economic relations become more complex, simple violence and plunder are replaced by organized, formal systems of government and public finance. Large parts of Martin's novels involve the struggle to rule the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, and the wartime setting allows numerous characters to ponder the economic state of the realm. In particular, the series excels in dramatizing the political logic that drives states to war and economic disaster. The narrative thus adds a literary spin to economic theory, which tells us that the essential characteristics of states make them prone to economic and social conflict, war making, and imperialism (Salerno 2008). More specifically, government intervention tends to waste or destroy resources, creating domestic economic problems. War and conquest are then used as means to acquire new resources and distract the populace from the effects of poor economic policy. What's more, this process tends to perpetuate itself, as governments rarely learn hard lessons about the limits of their power, and frequently struggle to avoid the consequences of bad decisions by making even worse ones. Thus, conflict breeds conflict.

Yet wars are costly, and require a consistent (actually, increasing) stream of resources in order to finance. The problem of war is therefore inextricably linked with the practice of public finance. Importantly, this fact helps explain why states take the form of geographically-defined economic monopolies. Charles Tilly, for instance, argues that the nation state emerged when it became necessary for rulers to concentrate and exploit private wealth on a scale large enough to pay for increasingly expensive military campaigns (Tilly 1990). To that end, states establish exclusive privileges over taxation, borrowing, and money creation, which constitute their major revenue sources. Each of these policies is exploited to finance war, and as we shall see, because

they become difficult to justify publicly, states increasingly resort to less visible forms of finance such as inflation.

We witness this drama of public finance play out through the eyes of one of series' main characters, Tyrion Lannister, who briefly takes on the role of Master of Coin (i.e. finance minister) to the Seven Kingdoms. Tyrion's plans, as well as those of his predecessor Lord Petyr Baelish—another central character—shed light on the crown's financial habits, and implicitly, those of real-world governments. The bulk of the crown's financial schemes are actually set in motion by Baelish, also known as "Littlefinger," who is the quintessential political entrepreneur. He controls a large network of crown businesses, keeping the finances of the realm afloat while increasing his own wealth and power. Tyrion, acting as narrator, paints a vivid portrait of Littlefinger:

King Robert had been a prodigious spender. A man like Petyr Baelish, who had a gift for rubbing two golden dragons together to breed a third, was invaluable to [the crown].

Littlefinger's rise had been arrow-swift. Within three years of his coming to court, he was master of coin and a member of the small council, and today the crown's revenues were ten times what they had been under his beleaguered predecessor... though the crown's debts had grown vast as well. A master juggler was Petyr Baelish...

He did not simply collect the gold and lock it in a treasure vault, no. He paid the king's debts in promises, and put the king's gold to work. He bought wagons, shops, ships, houses. He bought grain when it was plentiful and sold bread when it was scarce. He bought wool from the north and linen from the south and lace from Lys, stored it, moved

it, dyed it, sold it. The golden dragons bred and multiplied, and Littlefinger lent them out and brought them home with hatchlings. (Martin 2011b, 247-48)

Littlefinger's remarkable political power is acquired without force of arms, revealing the truth in Tyrion's warning that, "A coin is as dangerous as a sword in the wrong hands" (Martin 2011c, 264), which might as well be the motto of the many characters that play the game of thrones. More importantly, Baelish also reveals how, in the context of government administration, petty corruption thrives and evolves into a grander network of political dealings. Just as in the real world, control of the state treasury enables the subversion of the economic and legal system:

[I]n the process, [Baelish] moved his own men into place. The Keepers of the Keys were his, all four. The King's Counter and the King's Scales were men he'd named. The officers in charge of all three mints. Harbormasters, tax farmers, customs sergeants, wool factors, toll collectors, pursers, wine factors; nine of every ten belonged to Littlefinger. (Martin 2011b, 248)

There is an analogy here between monetary theory and political theory. In economic terms, money is never neutral—the effects of new money creation ripple outward, beginning with the first receivers of new money, who usually enjoy close connections with money producers such as central banks. Likewise, power over money production is never neutral either, because it also creates a complex web of political exchanges and dependencies, as Littlefinger's experience illustrates. It is no surprise then that when the northern region of Westeros rises in rebellion, its lords quickly set about negotiating for the privilege of coining new money (Martin 2011b, 226). We now explore how the different forms of public finance work in practice.

Taxation

When the reader is introduced to Westeros, before the outbreak of war, the crown is already heavily in debt, and its financial situation only deteriorates over the course of five novels. The crown's first remedy to its troubles is taxation, the most basic tool of public finance. But to meet the rising costs of war, new and creative taxes have to be introduced. One such is a tax on prostitution in the capital (Martin 2011c, 526), King's Landing, which is even disguised as a means to "improve the morals of the city"! A shrewder idea is to tax refugees fleeing from war to the safety of the capital:

It was no secret that King Robert had left the crown vastly in debt... "Lord Littlefinger always finds a way, my lord. He has imposed a tax on those wishing to enter the city."

"Yes, that would work," Tyrion said, thinking, *Clever. Clever and cruel*. Tens of thousands had fled the fighting for the supposed safety of King's Landing. He had seen them on the kingsroad, troupes of mothers and children and anxious fathers who had gazed on his horses and wagons with covetous eyes. Once they reached the city they would doubtless pay over all they had to put those high comforting walls between them and the war. (Martin 2011b, 57-58)

Once the major fighting subsides, other taxes emerge, such as a license to sell within King's Landing (Martin 2011d, 272). However, facing continued political strife, these imposts prove to be only half-measures. Because taxes are relatively direct and obvious to those obliged to pay them, they are also politically unpopular. Even the nobility of Westeros are prepared to resist further demands on their incomes, and it is suggested that, "half the lords in the realm could not tell taxation from tyranny and would bolt to the nearest usurper in a heartbeat if it

would save them a clipped copper” (Martin 2012, 481). The solution then is to find subtler means of obtaining funds, either through borrowing to postpone immediate taxation, or by hiding taxation with inflation.

Borrowing

Finding its treasuries increasingly difficult to replenish, the crown also relies on borrowing. In fact, at the outset of the story, King Robert has already established a habit of overspending that his creditors are only too happy to oblige. The most important of the domestic financiers is House Lannister.⁶ However, as Robert dies and the realm descends into chaos, the Lannisters become increasingly unwilling or unable to lend gold to the crown, and the royal treasury turns to foreign banks in order to finance the war effort.⁷ The ensuing relationship between the crown and its creditors helps highlight two important ideas: first, borrowing is only a temporary solution to fiscal problems, and second, financial assistance comes at a price, namely, political influence.

The first point is relatively straightforward: debts must be repaid with interest, and borrowing therefore involves a tradeoff between present and future consumption, as well as between higher taxes now and higher taxes later. However, this lesson is rarely if ever learned by governments, and the fictional rulers of Westeros are no exception. The narrative returns frequently to the problem of the crown’s heavy borrowing and the increasing pressure it faces to make good on its obligations. Predictably, as the size of its debts increases, the prospect of repayment diminishes. As already mentioned, the tax base of Westeros declines considerably over the course of the series, leaving little means for the treasury to escape the debt spiral (except

possibly inflation; however, Westeros' use of metallic currency and the high standards of foreign lenders do place some limitations on this means of finance).

When they begin to believe the Lannister government cannot pay its debts, its creditors naturally turn to those who will: the crown's political enemies. This leads to the second point: those who control the purse strings of the realm thereby acquire political power. The most obvious case is House Lannister, whose patriarch, Tywin Lannister, uses his role as financier to become Hand of the King—and effective ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. After his death, the crown turns increasingly to the Iron Bank of Braavos for additional funds. Yet the Iron Bank eventually starts to doubt the willingness or ability of its debtors to repay their loans, and offers its services to usurpers with better reputations for fair dealing. Thus, although it is a foreign institution, the Iron Bank becomes a key political player in Westeros, and its support may prove decisive in the final volumes of the series.

Inflation

Last but not least is the inflationary expansion of the money supply. When it becomes difficult to pay in coin, people on all sides of the war begin using paper promises of repayment instead. These promises are rightly regarded as worthless, and are generally used only by the strong as an excuse for stealing resources from the weak (Martin 2011b, 139, 378; 2011c, 185, 541; 2011d, 85). But the widespread practice hints, perhaps, at a process of inflation through the use of money substitutes, e.g. treasury certificates not covered by resources in the vaults.

Inflation as such is never explicitly discussed by the narrators or other characters, but the story does include several references to the practice of “coin clipping” in Westeros (Martin 2011b, 241; 2012, 481). What is more, there are also hints that Lord Baelish, known as a “wizard

of coin” (Martin 2011c, 259), is behind the inflationary scheme. Consider further the above remark that Littlefinger’s “golden dragons bred and multiplied, and [he] lent them out and brought them home with hatchlings.” The “hatchlings” appear at first glance to be the profit and interest Lord Baelish earns through his political ventures.

However, Martin also indicates Baelish is clipping coins. For instance, “rubbing two golden dragons together to breed a third” may be symbolic of the historical practice of “sweating” coins to whittle down their metallic content. And the fact that Littlefinger controls the official counts, scales, and mints places him in an ideal position to alter the coinage as he sees fit. One character even remarks “Gold... Littlefinger mints the stuff from goldenrod, I vow” (Martin 2011d, 273). Tyrion Lannister is more explicit, claiming that the royal family’s gold “is dug from the ground,” while “Littlefinger’s gold is made from thin air, with a snap of his fingers” (Martin 2011c, 264). There are strong implications then that Littlefinger is debasing the coinage in order to artificially increase the money supply and sustain the public debt.

“Ours is the Fury”: The Rhetoric of Power in Westeros

Political institutions in Westeros do not then inspire much hope for good governance or the transition to a developed market economy. Indeed, how could they, given that ideas about liberty and commerce are almost completely lacking in the Seven Kingdoms? This absence of any market ideology—much less a liberal one—deserves some additional explanation. To better understand the economic stasis, let us consider some of the distinctly illiberal ideas prominent in Westeros and how they support existing political organizations, while also preventing the emergence of market institutions.

Although there are many ways to think about this problem, we focus on the importance of rhetoric, which is frequently emphasized in Martin's saga. Throughout the story, it becomes clear that the ways people speak about institutions are just as important in shaping society as the institutions themselves. Language helps form ideology, and if language is heavily biased against liberal ideas, it is likely institutions will be too.⁸ In particular, the rhetoric of power can tell us a good deal about the kind of political values people hold, and whether they are likely to change. With this in mind, we turn to the ideological prejudice against liberal ideas and institutions that is revealed through the rhetoric of the ruling class of Westeros.

The most obvious forms of rhetoric used in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are the "words" of the noble houses of Westeros. These words are "family mottoes, touchstones, [and] prayers of sorts" (Martin 2011a, 21). They are invoked as sources of counsel and comfort, and although each mantra is specific to a certain family, they often conceal universal insights about the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. As mentioned above, the words of some houses, such as the Greyjoys, clearly reflect the primacy of the political over the economic means. Others, though not as explicit, are filled with allusions to political power and military might. Importantly, they rarely refer to peace and cooperation, let alone trade and commerce. House Targaryen promises its enemies "Fire and Blood," and the Baratheons boast "Ours is the Fury" (Martin 2011a, 783-801). Still others are filled with contempt and disdain, especially for the "small folk," as the commoners are called. Words like "I Have no Rival," "Above the Rest," and "Touch Me Not" clearly distinguish rulers from ruled, reinforce caste distinctions between the nobility and the rest of the realm, and highlight the perpetual contest between noble families for political control (McCaffrey 2013). The rhetoric of the nobles often reflects an ideology of violence and plunder that leaves no room for fundamental changes to the existing social order, or even marginal

political improvements. The distinctly illiberal and vicious outlook of the nobility can be summed up in the common Valyrian saying “Valar Morghulis,” or, “all men must die.”

However, despite the bleak political outlook, there is some hopeful rhetoric in Westeros. It should not come as a surprise that the most apolitical words are found in the houses furthest from the capital city and its game of thrones. The words of the relatively isolated House Stark, for instance, warn that “Winter is Coming.” This saying stresses the need to be patient, careful, and above all, prepared. In other words, lasting achievements require deferring gratification so as to survive difficult times—the worldview of capitalists and entrepreneurs more than politicians. It is no wonder then that the Starks are looked down on by other noble houses: they quietly but firmly remind the Seven Kingdoms that there are greater powers in the world than thrones. Taken literally, these powers are the forces of nature embodied in the inevitable return of winter. Metaphorically, the more significant forces—and perhaps harder ones to escape—are the laws of economics and their political consequences. In the words of Ludwig von Mises,

Princes and democratic majorities are drunk with power. They must reluctantly admit that they are subject to the laws of nature. But they reject the very notion of economic law. Are they not the supreme legislators? Don't they have the power to crush every opponent? No war lord is prone to acknowledge any limits other than those imposed on him by a superior armed force... In fact, economic history is a long record of government policies that failed because they were designed with a bold disregard for the laws of economics. (Mises 1998, 67)

Mises' observation nicely summarizes the root cause of the economic and social turmoil of Westeros, and its desperate need for liberal ideas. It also explains why any words (or peoples)

supporting limitations on power are doomed to obscurity; after all, “Ours is the Fury” is a more attractive mantra to a warrior noble than, for example, the words of House Wydman: “Right Conquers Might” (McCaffrey 2013).

Happily though, “all men must die” is not the only philosophy in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. As the story progresses, it is revealed that this saying is only the first part of an exchange: “All men must die” is countered with “Valar dohaeris,” or, “all men must serve.” These words represent the hope of Westeros, and indeed, of any world. If the philosophy of the nobility is that “all men must die,” the philosophy of liberalism is that all human beings have a role to play in improving the lives of others. This is the essence of human cooperation and the division of labor, two sides of the same coin that represent the foundation of human society. Although the phrase is used in a very different way by the characters in the story, “all men must serve” captures the spirit of the marketplace, where each individual benefits by promoting the interests of others.

Unfortunately, if the words of the great houses of Westeros are any indication, serious progress is unlikely to occur unless it is forced on the established nobility via radical change in the political landscape. However, the as-yet-unpublished volumes of the series hold the promise of just such a social transformation. In the real world too, a change in ideology—from war and destruction to peace and free enterprise—is required for healthy economic and social progress.

Mormont Shrugged

A Song of Ice and Fire often reads like a cautionary tale about the dangers of power. It hints at universal problems of government, but also warns of more specific hazards to human society. In concluding our study of Martin’s fantasy world and its social and political implications, we realize, not without a touch of irony, that there is no shortage of similarities

with our own world. The Seven Kingdoms are being consumed by endless warfare, increasing taxes, government debt, and reckless money creation, problems all-too-familiar in the 21st century, notwithstanding the prevalence of governments ostensibly superior to those of Westeros.

Yet while playing the game of thrones is complex and treacherous, the needs of society are deceptively simple. The truth is that peace, cooperation, and the freedom to prosper are vital conditions for human flourishing. At the same time, politics and the game of thrones have little in common with the liberal ideal of human progress. The characters and lives of George R.R. Martin's novels chronicle this all-too-human struggle between peace and war, good and evil, and progress and destruction, a struggle that lies at the heart of the entire series. This point is made eloquently in a conversation between the aspiring queen Daenerys Targaryen and her companion, the world-weary knight Ser Jorah Mormont. Daenerys believes the common people of the Seven Kingdoms are praying for a great and enlightened ruler to free them through force of arms (Martin 2011a, 226). Mormont's reply is telling:

“The common people pray for rain, healthy children, and a summer that never ends,” Ser Jorah told her. “It is no matter to them if the high lords play their game of thrones, so long as they are left in peace.” He gave a shrug. “They never are.”

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¹ Many of the ideas in this essay were first presented in a series of public writings (McCaffrey and Dorobăț 2013a, 2013b; McCaffrey 2013).

² This categorization is by no means unique to Oppenheimer. For instance, Frédéric Bastiat expressed a similar view in his classic *The Law* (2007, 5-8, 13-15).

³ Augustine’s remark is preceded by a discussion of what are essentially the political means:

Justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is governed by the authority of a ruler; it is bound together by a pact of association; and the loot is divided according to an agreed law. If, by the constant addition of desperate men, this scourge grows to such a size that it acquires territory, establishes a seat of government, occupies cities and subjugates peoples, it assumes the name of kingdom more openly. For this name is now manifestly conferred upon it not by the removal of greed, but by the addition of impunity. (Augustine 1998, 145-46)

⁴ Prior to the events of the books, the Dothraki were a strictly male-dominated society.

⁵ The Greyjoy philosophy has so far proved disastrous for the Ironmen. In an attempt to control the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, they have sacrificed several leaders and largely exhausted their resources, all while making little in the way of strategic gains. This bleak outlook obliges them to venture far from their home region in search of dragons, which they believe will guarantee victory over their enemies. The lengths they go to preserve their way of life only show the folly of refusing to engage in economic cooperation.

⁶ Tyrion Lannister, who eventually becomes Master of Coin, is a member of this wealthy family. His appointment to public office hints at the network of personal and economic relationships—the “revolving door”—between governments and their economic partners.

⁷ The fact that the head of House Lannister, Tywin, refuses either to forgive the crown’s massive debts or lend additional funds is odd, given that after King Robert’s death, Tywin’s grandchildren ascend to the throne, and his daughter becomes queen regent. In this situation, it would be natural for him to throw further financial support behind the crown, but he does not. One possible explanation is that the Lannisters’ legendary supply of gold may be running dry. Whether this is the case or not, we can hope that Tywin’s seemingly inconsistent behavior will be resolved in future books.

⁸ The most significant historical example of the influence of rhetoric is the industrial revolution. Some scholars argue that changes in the rhetoric of business and innovation were the primary causes of this unprecedented surge in economic development; in other words, when rhetoric improved—allowing and reflecting ideological changes—institutions followed suit (McCloskey 2010).