

THE THEME OF ACQUISITIVENESS IN BENTHAM'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Allison Dube

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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT IN
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



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Volume 1

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Foreword to the 2016 Reissue

Allison Dube

Reading this work twenty-five years after its initial publication, two of Proust's ideas haunted my thoughts. First, and perhaps most obvious as it relates to memory, "a thing which we have looked at in the past brings back to us, if we see it again, not only the eyes with which we looked at it but all the images with which at the time our eyes were filled."ⁱ One memory of my beginning study of Bentham, one of the times surrounding the book's composition, and one of a feeling that grew during that process may provide background to the original project.

I arrived in London to work on my Ph. D. having modest knowledge of Bentham, based on reading parts of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and what others had written. It seemed that most commentators did not like Bentham, and even those who did found his work lacking in depth. John Stuart Mill had said that Bentham could teach merely the "business part of social arrangements;" and as I had found the Introduction as compelling as a repair manual that assessment rang true. Bentham was not my first choice for study, and the evening my supervisor, Frederick Rosen, directed me to him I left feeling chagrined. I felt like a new student at Political Philosophy High star struck by the cool kids, the inspiring and seductive thinkers in the lunchroom; yet my teacher had pointed to Bentham and said "go talk with him." Who would want to spend time with the kid nobody seemed to like?

Yet as I began to appreciate my eccentric new friend a question formed: could people with such opposing views as Marx and Hayek really both be right to condemn him? What if their own preconceptions had prevented them from seeing something greater than ever dreamt of in their philosophies? I had previously found Hayek's *Law, Legislation and Liberty* disarming in clarity and scope, and this image resonated with many at the time as the Thatcher government strove to align British political life to Hayekian principles. But as a comparison of Hayek and Bentham progressed, it seemed clear that Hayek had misread, even misrepresented Bentham. This was not just a matter of textual interpretation. Keynes had said that even a "defunct economist" could turn people who felt exempt from any intellectual influence into slaves. Nobel laureate Hayek was no defunct economist, his influence was

huge; and clearly he had no desire to turn people into slaves. But the lens of Bentham's writing revealed Hayek to be (as he had proclaimed) an "unrepentant old Whig" in every sense. As my study finished I still felt Hayek's work was disarming: it disarmed anyone from arguing that the results "of human action but not the execution of human design" may as easily be sinister as good, and that these sinister results would constrain people from following a most fundamental human motivation.

This fundamental human inclination, the "main spring" of acquisitiveness, and how Bentham understands and works with it are central themes in this study. Following the steppingstones of his account—from people's definition and pursuit of self-actuated motion, through expectation, to the process of "expansion" and the changeable nature of property—brought back another memory: a constant feeling of surprise at how the better I had understood these and other elements the more comprehensive and interconnected Bentham's system of thought was revealed to be. This recalls a second Proustian insight: that "great works of art do not begin by giving us the best of themselves."ⁱⁱ

My steps—and those of others—in appreciating the "great work" of Bentham's system follows the pattern set by the masterpieces Proust describes. Such works contain "new and strange" elements one may not understand or even recognize. Yet over time these elements that were so novel they may have "become invisible and remained unknown," reveal themselves.ⁱⁱⁱ More, the time one person needs to penetrate a work of such depth "is merely an epitome, a symbol... of the years, the centuries even, that must elapse before the public can begin to cherish a masterpiece that is really new." And the work itself has to "create its own posterity" by fostering the "community of minds" capable of appreciating it.^{iv}

If ever there were a great work especially reluctant to reveal the best of itself, it would have to be the complete set of works that constituted Bentham's corpus. Philip Schofield has summarized the difficulties that have prevented even the most diligent from reading many of Bentham's works at all—from the transcribing of his manuscripts, to poorly edited and myopia-inducing volumes, to funding issues hampering progress on compiling the definitive *Collected Works*.^v Another issue has kept "new and strange" ideas locked within even Bentham's long extant works. In 1844 one of his secretaries, John Colls, proclaimed that Bentham and his followers "must bring their systems to be tried at the bar of [Christian] Scripture, and not subject Scripture to the scrutiny of their worldly wisdom."^{vi} Critics have tried isolated components of Bentham's works by their own preferred modes of Scripture ever since.

Yet the core of Proust's insight remains: over time a great work will reveal more of itself both to the person who cares for it and to the community of minds it helped to spawn. If rewriting this book today, once I had recast it in gender inclusive language, I would illustrate better some themes that seemed novel at the time, but now appear more important and indeed may be more palatable to today's community of minds. Bentham's use of an "expanding"

conception of property is one such theme; the need to foster an equality of understanding among citizens is another (this topic is prominent in my current project, a study of *Chrestomathia*).

The newest generation forming the community of minds today understands the need to make the world habitable not just physically but socially for all. And for these tasks they must first repair the device that will be needed for them: government. A remarkably detailed repair manual for this most important device is part of the great work bequeathed by Bentham, but there are more parts waiting to reveal themselves still.

Notes

- i Marcel Proust, *In Search Of Lost Time*, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kil-martin, rev. D. J. Enright (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), VI, 284.
- ii Proust, II, 141.
- iii Proust, II, 141- 142.
- iv Proust, II, 142 – 143.
- v Philip Schofield, *Bentham: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2009), Chapter Two.
- vi John F. Colls, *Utilitarianism Unmasked* (London: Richard Watts, 1844), 3.

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Introduction

The Need for a Comprehensive Study

Because of their scope, Bentham's works deal with many major problems of political theory and practice. But because of the period of time they span, they are also a commentary on significant developments in these fields, including the American and French Revolutions, and developments (in which Bentham played a great part) preceding the Reform Bill of 1832.

That Bentham has greatly influenced particular areas of inquiry is not generally doubted. Yet his status as a formulator of a consistent and comprehensive system of thought has always been questioned. There is a strong tradition of regarding Bentham as a pedantic pamphleteer, whose comments, when they could be understood, were not substantial. To Marx, he was the "arch-philistine Jeremy Bentham, the insipid pedantic leather tongued oracle of the common place bourgeoise intelligence of the nineteenth century;"¹ Mill felt he explained only the "business" parts of human experience;² and recently, Hayek has assessed parts of Bentham's presentation as "crudely expressed" and "naive."³ But Halevy captures the sentiment even of many kinder interpretations, by opining that the utilitarians were "not so much great inventors as great arrangers of ideas,"⁴ implying that a pragmatic and practical

¹ Capital I. trans. Moore and Aveling, Moscow, 1970, p. 609.

² J.S. Mill, 'Bentham', Mill on Bentham and Coleridge, London, 1950, p. 73.

³ F.A. Hayek, Law, Legislation and Liberty, 3 vols., London, 1982 (hereinafter cited as LLL), ii. 45 and iii. 32.

⁴ E. Halevy, The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism, trans. M. Morris, London, 1972, p. 33.

approach has been achieved at the expense of philosophical originality and depth.

That a comprehensive system in Bentham's writings has not usually been perceived has led many to assume that no such thing exists; and this assumption has contributed to an undervaluing of his position as a philosopher. The last decades have seen great strides made within Bentham studies themselves. But in spite of the superb standards set by the new *Collected Works*, and an expanding body of critical literature, the philosophy sections of many good bookshops still often yield but one, and often no works by Bentham.

One of the reasons for this general undervaluing of Bentham may be that his diverse and often technical writings have tended to inspire specialized, and technical, commentaries. While works such as Twining's on Bentham's theories of evidence, Rosen's on his conceptions of representative democracy, and Postema's on his relationship to the common law are clearly valuable, they, and other studies extant have left a gap in the exposition of Bentham's philosophy as a whole.⁵ This study attempts to build upon the work of such commentators to fill this gap.

Most generally, this study examines Bentham's claim to be the Newton of the moral world. To understand this claim it is necessary that both the method and substance of his thought be investigated; and part of the methodological substantiation of his claim consists in the uncovering of one theme through which some of the diverse elements of his writings may be unified. It is

⁵It could be said that Bentham himself was overtly hesitant about producing a general statement of his philosophy. Harrison notes that the "sense of parts, fragments, uncompleted projects" (left by the very titles of his works, such as A Fragment on Government, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, and A Comment on the Commentaries), "which is already present in the early Bentham, forms a constant theme throughout his life". (R. Harrison, Bentham, London, 1983, p. 16.)

suggested here that the concept of specifically human motion, acquisitiveness, is such a theme, and that its exposition reveals great consistency and comprehensiveness in Bentham's thought.

The attempt to study scientifically human nature and society, implied by Bentham's desire to be the Newton of the moral world, is generally assumed to have begun with Hobbes. The first chapter of this study utilizes C.B. Macpherson's account of possessive individualism, especially in Hobbes, to understand both what the scientific approach to politics would entail and what the principal dangers of such inquiry might be. Two elements in Hobbes's thought are noted, the scientific and the ideological. Whereas Macpherson feels Bentham adopted the ideological component of the theory he identifies, this study's point of departure is the desire to test the potential accord of Bentham's writings with the scientific component. With the aid of Macpherson's account, the concept of human motion, and the importance of its individual self-definition and pursuit is developed.

While the analysis of Hobbes may seem a diversion, it is a necessary one. For it suggests that Hobbes left a confusion in political thought between science and ideology. Comprehension of this problem is necessary to appreciate the degree to which, it will be argued, it was later solved by Bentham. Macpherson helps to show that Hobbes creates this confusion by advocating scientific practice in political science, but, in the final analysis, by prejudging what the data will say, and thus permitting the rule of ideology. It will be suggested that Bentham clears the air through what amounts to a systematic campaign against pre-judgement in all forms. This campaign eventually undermines the status and force of ideological argument to the common man, and brings both method and practice of political science into accord with a genuine scientific approach.

The second chapter examines the transition from Hobbes to Bentham of the two themes relevant to this study-- those of scientific method, and of the concept of human motion-- through Hume and Smith. The works of Hume and Smith are seen to set a number of challenges; and it is argued that Bentham's A Table of the Springs of Action must assume a prominence in his corpus when seen as a response to these challenges. The chapter then accordingly examines his scientific method, and begins a detailed analysis of Bentham's theory of motivation, by concentrating attention upon A Table of the Springs of Action.⁶

Analysis of the Table suggests that the concept of acquisitiveness is a useful leading term under which may be developed a comprehensive understanding of Bentham's philosophy, and identifies several areas which must be examined to grasp fully Bentham's use of the concept. Specifically, these are his accounts of pleasure, interest, expectation, labour, and property. More definitive expositions of these ideas are pursued, and the theoretical coherence of Bentham's system under the concept of acquisitiveness is tested in the third and fourth chapters.

Having to this point found support for the unification of Bentham's system under the concept of acquisitiveness, and hence the theoretical consistency of his system, the following chapters analyze some of Bentham's more practical proposals and statements, with a view to investigating the more practical consistency of Bentham's works: whether his proposals could have the effect he desired. It is argued that a major practical requirement of Bentham's theoretical position is support for individual liberty. The focus of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven is accordingly Bentham's position on individual liberty, which is

⁶This work will at times be cited as the Table in the text of this study.

analyzed through a comparison with the systematic approach to the concept of liberty of F.A. Hayek. These chapters also examine certain criticisms of Bentham which are made or inferred in Hayek's presentation.

Chapter Eight briefly examines a problematic area in political thought, and which many regard as a difficult area for Bentham himself: problems of punishment and poverty. While a full analysis can not be undertaken, it is suggested that the theory of acquisitiveness may shed light on (and support) Bentham's proposals in these areas.

On the basis of the major conclusions drawn in the intervening analysis, the ninth and concluding chapter re-evaluates Macpherson's assessment of Bentham. It is found wanting because Macpherson does not acknowledge three significant developments in Bentham's writings, which distinguish him from a possessive individualist ideologue. These are: a. the ascendancy of science over ideology, b. the ascendancy of security and human spontaneity, and c. the ascendancy of intrinsic over relative valuations of power as concerns human motion. The exposition of these developments concludes the study as a whole.

Chapter 1

The Scientific and Ideological Legacy of Hobbes

In general terms, acquisitiveness is the propensity of men to pursue what they consider necessary or desirable for their own happiness. There has been a rough agreement among most students of human nature on the strength of this motivation: it has seemed either practically overpowering, or so strong as to constantly threaten to be so. Bentham departs from most previous thinkers more on questions of the perceived scope and desirability of acquisitiveness than on its power; for he seems to view a pervasive individual acquisitiveness with complete approval.

Bentham's goal is never in question: the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But unlike many other observers of human nature, he regards acquisitiveness not as an obstacle to the realization of this goal, but as a vehicle. He insists, it will be argued, that pursuit of the greatest happiness comes securely only through individual acquisitiveness. To reach this position, he must accept three hypotheses.

First, he must perceive an ultimate conjunction between self and the most general interest. Secondly, he must believe that the definition and pursuit of individual goals is by nature, on balance conducive to the fulfilment of the most general interest (whether or not individuals perceive this). Consequently, third, he must hold that maximum power and opportunity must always be given to all individuals to define and pursue their goals.

Admittedly, there is not general agreement that Bentham held these three hypotheses. The investigation of whether he did, through the evaluation of his writings on the subject, requires an examination of questions about human nature and society, property, and standards for the political order. This

investigation will be begun by an analysis of one book which deals with these very questions: C.B. Macpherson's The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Macpherson's work is useful in the definition of the parameters of such an investigation, the supply of tools with which to conduct it, and its account of ideas and philosophers which greatly influenced Bentham.

This chapter follows Macpherson's factoring of Hobbes's thought into its major components: one, the attempt through scientific observation to seek scientific explanations of man and society; the other, his adoption of the ideology of possessive individualism. The relationship between these two components is examined. Finally, a precis of Macpherson's position on the extent to which Bentham also adopted this ideology is offered.

Macpherson's account of Hobbes's assimilation of an ideology from his times has not gone unchallenged. But this chapter focuses attention on Hobbes's adoption of scientific method. Since Macpherson was concerned principally with the ideological component of Hobbes's thought, it was not really his object to dwell on the scientific. Because of this there are several aspects, both of the scientific component itself, and of its relation to the ideological, that Macpherson reveals but does not fully develop. In particular, within the scientific component itself lie ever stronger arguments for equality and self-determination of individual purpose than Macpherson's analysis shows. Moreover, a knowledge of these reveals the degree to which Hobbes's ideological assumptions could contravene his scientific assumptions.

Macpherson's analysis of the ideological component of Hobbes's ideas and those of subsequent thinkers culminates in a list of seven assumptions, a creed of the ideology of possessive individualism. This chapter similarly distills an understanding of the basic assumptions of the scientific component of Hobbes's thought. But this will require not one set of assumptions, but two. The

dramatic influence of Galileo, Harvey, and Bacon on Hobbes's desire to adopt scientific methods has been noted by Macpherson and others. But as J.W.N. Watkins writes,

when someone is deeply impressed by thinkers in other fields we can expect their work to influence him in two main ways. First, he will be tempted to take up their basic ideas and extend them beyond their original contexts... the second main way... is by the example of their method.¹

There are two areas, then, with which the scientific component of Hobbes's thought is concerned: the assumptions governing the method itself, and the findings from application of that method. After the first part of the following analysis, a list of the major assumptions governing the scientific method adopted by Hobbes will be suggested. Concluding the second will be a suggested summary of what arguably would have been the major findings of Hobbes's investigation had he strictly adhered to scientific observations without ideological influence.

A. The Scientific Component

In his Introduction to Leviathan, Macpherson follows Hobbes through a scientific method which consists of three stages. The first is the identification of his field of study as a science. The second is the perception of major principles explaining and governing that science. The third is the attempt to understand how men may best live in accord with, and in a sense bring about the fulfilment of these principles. On the first step Macpherson writes that

[Hobbes] was sure that politics could be [made a science]. He believed that he had done it, and that he was the first to have done it. He wrote of the 'infallible rules and the true science of equity and justice', of the duties of rulers and subjects as 'a science built

¹J.W.N. Watkins, 'Philosophy and Politics in Hobbes', Hobbes Studies, ed. K.C. Brown, Oxford, 1965, (hereinafter cited as Hobbes Studies), pp. 242-43.

upon sure and clear principles' and of the way 'to reduce [politics] to the rules and infallibility of reason'....

This was the spirit of Galileo-- bold hypothesis and clearly reasoned deduction from it, to reach propositions that would match and explain the phenomena in question.²

Hobbes's second step was to make the "bold hypothesis", which Macpherson takes from the Short Tract on First Principles: "that everything, including human sensation, is caused by motion, or more accurately by differences in motion".³ Hobbes had, writes Macpherson,

absorbed the implications of Galileo's law of inertia, that simple but profound reversal of assumptions about rest and motion. In the old prevailing view, rest was the natural state of things-- nothing moved until something else moved it. Galileo postulated that motion was the natural state-- things moved unless something else stopped them.⁴

Having made this hypothesis, Hobbes's third step was to apply this law of inertia to men, so that he could produce a system,

which would explain their motions relative to one another, and would then deduce what kind of government they must have to enable them to maintain and maximize their motion.⁵

With this step Hobbes seems to omit what may be called moral questions from his prescriptions for human conduct. Indeed, Macpherson cites this as a reason why his theories were unacceptable until rendered in "the more ambiguous, and more agreeable, doctrine of Locke".⁶

In one sense, Hobbes's approach was not alien from that of previous thinkers. Most theories of politics contain two elements: one is descriptive (an understanding of human nature), the other is prescriptive. The latter of these

²C.B. Macpherson, Introduction to Leviathan, Harmondsworth, 1975, p. 10, noting Behemoth, pp. 70, 159, and Elements of Law, Ep. Ded., p. xvii.

³C.B. Macpherson, Leviathan, op. cit., p. 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁵Ibid., p. 19.

⁶C.B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke, Oxford, 1962, (hereinafter cited as Possessive Individualism), p. 106.

elements flows from the former, no less in the political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas than that of Thomas Hobbes. What makes Hobbes different is the scientific method he employed. Macpherson relates how Hobbes refined more specific hypotheses from his first concerning motion, using Galileo's "resolutive-compositive" method.

The resolutive part was the way to reach the required simple basic propositions; the compositive was the way to build the complex ones from these.... One had to begin, then, by assuming that the observable thing to be explained was the compound effect of some simple unobservable factors, and then search in one's imagination for such factors as would, by that strict logical combination, necessarily produce the result.⁷

Galileo had used this method,

in imagining motions which could not be observed but which, once postulated, could be shown mathematically to be sufficient to account for the complex observed motions he wanted to explain.⁸

Hobbes followed exactly,

resolving political society into the motions of its parts-- individual human beings-- and resolving their motions in turn into imagined or hypothetical simple forces which, compounded, could be shown to explain them.⁹

As Spragens remarks, "men could obtain knowledge of politics by reaching its first principles by resolution; by composition they could then proceed to construct a healthy and viable state".¹⁰

An important part of Hobbes's scientific method might well be described as a scientific discipline. The very wording of the question,

What simple motions or forces could be imagined which, when logically compounded, would provide a causal explanation of the complex phenomenon which was to be explained?

⁷C.B. Macpherson, Leviathan, op. cit., p. 26.

⁸Ibid., p. 27.

⁹Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰T. Spragens, The Irony of Liberal Reason, Chicago, 1981, p. 12.

and the response that motion "could be shown mathematically to be sufficient",¹¹ embody what is now assumed to be necessary to scientific study: a strict adherence to the logical and demonstrable. A "direct kind of knowledge",¹² well described by the term "self-evident" is sought.¹³

These imagined or hypothetical forces had to be ones which would be self-evident to any reasonable inquirer who would take the trouble to look into himself.¹⁴

When something is self-evident, it is demonstrable: "civil philosophy is demonstrable because we make the commonwealth ourselves".¹⁵ And it is with the noting of to whom the theory must be self-evident and demonstrable that this matter of discipline is shown to be crucial. For the answer must be, to everyone: the forces it speaks of must be self-evident to "any reasonable enquirer".

General hypotheses formed by scientific application of the resolute-compositive method can not be explanations using criteria from beyond observable fact, so much as perspicuously perceived keys which help explain the facts. Even if these keys are not observable as such, they must still hypothetically reside wholly in the observable. Things are taken on faith in this realm; but no leap of faith is required. This was the case, as Watkins points out, with the resolute portion of Harvey's theories on circulation: his theory "is an argument for a hypothesis and not a description of an observed system, because the blood-system as such cannot be observed".¹⁶ This scientific

¹¹C.B. Macpherson, Leviathan, op. cit., p. 26.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³A careful examination of the concept of self-evidence is available in F.S. McNeilly's Anatomy of Leviathan, London, 1968, Ch. 4.

¹⁴C.B. Macpherson, Leviathan, op. cit., p.27.

¹⁵Hobbes, Six Lessons, Ep. Ded., p. 184, noted by Macpherson, Leviathan, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁶J.W.N. Watkins, op. cit., p. 243.

discipline, called by one commentator the "mathematical way", "was a way of discovery. But it was also a way of humility, for the mathematical way was a method of self-discipline as well as an instrument for exploring".¹⁷

The fear of error is as much an incentive to this scientific discipline as the desire for truth. And this fear must be abated by constant reference to other reasonable men, who must also be able to perceive the building blocks to a given argument as self-evident. Strauss's analysis perhaps best brings out Hobbes's appreciation that scientific discipline demands constant reference to what must be obvious to all:

Science proceeds 'from most low and humble principles, evident even to the meanest capacity; going on slowly, and with most scrupulous ratiocination'. Science stands in complete contrast to all dogmatic, rhetorical, and allegedly inspired pseudo-knowledge, which catches the eye and may, indeed be 'suddenly' gained.¹⁸

1. Equality of Understanding

The scientific method adopted by Hobbes depends upon scientific discipline; and this discipline in turn depends upon self-evidence and demonstrability of its hypotheses. Moreover, they must be self-evident and demonstrable not just to members of a faith, guild, or any restricted group, but to any reasonable inquirer. This reveals something very important about Hobbes's understanding of equality, which Macpherson points to but does not quite state.

"It is tenable", Macpherson acknowledges, "that the facts of human capacities and needs contain enough data for the deduction of a system of

¹⁷D. Boorstin, The Discoverers, New York, 1983, p. 406.

¹⁸L. Strauss, The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, trans. E. Sinclair, Chicago, 1952, p. 27, noting Hobbes, Elements Pt. 1. Ch. 13, De Cive, Ep. Ded., and Leviathan Ch. 43.

obligation and rights". But this is only possible if such a system is one "which all [men] are capable of accepting as binding". In turn, this is only possible if individuals "are capable of seeing themselves as equal in some respects more important than all the respects in which they are unequal".

A factual equality, which men can see as overriding all their factual inequalities, is thus a prerequisite of deducing, from the facts alone, morally binding obligation.¹⁹

Macpherson discerns two postulates of equality in Hobbes: "equality of ability and equality of expectation of satisfying their wants." On the first, "men are not absolutely equal in ability, but are so equal that the weakest can kill the strongest, and this implies a moral equality".²⁰ On the second, Hobbes postulates an "equality of expectation of want satisfaction":

In Leviathan he presents this as a consequence of the first kind of equality: 'From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends'.²¹

But the importance Hobbes places on self-evidence and demonstrability of his theory infuses it with another assumption of universal equality: an equality of understanding. Just as by the first type of equality the weakest man may kill the strongest, and by the second the weakest may want as much as the strongest, by this postulate, inherent in his very method, the weakest may understand as much as the strongest.

Whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, etc., and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left to another, will be only to

¹⁹Possessive Individualism, p. 83.

²⁰*ibid.*, p. 74.

²¹*ibid.*, p. 75, noting Leviathan, Ch. 13, p. 95.

consider, if he also finds not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other demonstration.²²

Not only is self-evidence (to all) sufficient reason for something; it is the only reason. Hobbes attempts to construct his theory solely with blocs that every man can fathom. This equality of understanding or accessibility, is as intrinsic to Hobbes's theory as is the basic equalities of ability and expectation Macpherson notes. But it in turn exposes another type of equality in Hobbes, which again Macpherson's analysis unearths though does not quite state. This may be called an equality of purpose. Discussion of this encroaches on difficult terrain, but fortunately, Macpherson has cut a fairly clear path.

2. Equality of purpose or justification

The second stage of Hobbes's method was the perception of the major principles explaining his field of study. The third stage was suggested to be the attempt to understand how best men could act to live in accord with, and bring about fulfilment of these principles. But as hypotheses in any field approach scientific certainty, they become not just self-evident when perceived, but self-governing or self-justificatory. Indeed, it is quite common in most fields of study to refer to the accepted major hypotheses as laws that govern. This has immense impact on what have been traditionally called moral questions.

Acid will turn litmus paper red whether this is approved, or called a good thing. Now if Hobbes has truly perceived and stated laws of human behavior reduced to the level of scientific fact, the results must be as certain. If motion is truly the natural state for man, the political system Hobbes designs must "enable them to maintain and maximize their motion".²³ Further, as much as anything

²²Hobbes, Leviathan, Int., pp. 82-83, (noted in Macpherson's introduction, pp. 27-8).

²³C.B. Macpherson, Leviathan, op. cit., p. 19.

can be considered such, this must be a good thing. As Karskens notes, "motion, as a truly metaphysical principle is not only the unum et verum, but also bonum".²⁴

Macpherson acknowledges that Hobbes seems to have committed "what is now said to be a grave logical error, namely, as having tried to deduce moral obligation from empirical postulates of fact".²⁵ But Macpherson deals with this difficulty boldly, questioning first of all,

why should we impose on Hobbes logical cannons which are post-Hobbesian?... The rule that obligation can not be deduced from fact is itself historically questionable.... When Hobbes's historically conditioned assumptions are given adequate recognition there is some reason to think that Hobbes had struck through several layers of philosophical confusion and hit on a relation between fact and obligation which has as good or better a logical standing than the modern rule.²⁶

By avoiding such logical dilemmas at the start, and moving directly to the "purpose for which and the audience to which he was writing", Macpherson says one may be saved from "attributing to [Hobbes] philosophical questions he was not asking, and from searching his work for answers he was not seeking".²⁷ An acknowledgement of what Hobbes was not seeking comes almost inadvertently through Macpherson's account of Hobbes's derivation of an equal right to life from the factual postulates of mechanical materialism.

Previously, as Macpherson explains,

men's capacities and wants were treated as effects of the purposes of Nature or will of God; the latter being treated as the cause of men's capacities and wants, were assumed also to be the source of moral right and obligation. Purpose or Will, brought

²⁴M. Karskens, 'Hobbes's Mechanistic Theory of Science, and its Role in his Anthropology', Thomas Hobbes: His View of Man, ed., J.G. van der Bend, Amsterdam, 1982, p.51.

²⁵Possessive Individualism, p. 13.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 14.

in from outside, was hypostatized as an outside force constantly imposing itself (by way of reason or revelation, or both) on men. Obligations and rights, on this assumption, would not exist were it not for the outside force which imposed them.²⁸

But by following Galileo's reversal of the basic assumption concerning inertia, Hobbes saw "that continuous motion did not require the application of continuous outside force". This enabled him,

to dispense with any postulate of moral purpose imposed from outside, and to assume that moral values, rights, and obligations were entailed in the capacities and needs of equally self-moving mechanisms, and since there is nothing else but motion, the only morality there can be must be deduced from that motion. Morality is what is most conducive to continued motion.²⁹

The source of motion being individuals themselves, unless proof to the contrary could be found, they must have equal right to maintain their motion. But the source of motion must also be the source of standards for it: men must also have equal right to define their motion.

It was Hobbes's refusal to impose moral differences on men's wants, his acceptance of the equal need for continued motion as the sufficient source of rights, that constituted his revolution in moral and political theory. Hobbes was the first to deduce rights and obligations from facts without putting anything fanciful into the facts.³⁰

For Macpherson, this solves the difficulty as to whether the prescriptive portions of Hobbes's work are a moral theory (based upon standards beyond the individual) or a theory of obligation (in which the governing principle is already operative in and perceivable by each individual). The theory being reduced to the level of a science, the former collapses completely into the latter.

But his also puts into light what may be called an equality of purpose. For since all men seek to maximize their motion, and since morality becomes

²⁸ibid., p. 77.

²⁹ibid., p. 78.

³⁰ibid., p. 78.

what is most conducive to this motion, all men are equally justified in attempting to maximize their motion. Strauss emphasizes that this means to Hobbes, not just that the motion of each is equally justified, but that the judgement of each as to the nature of that motion is also equally justified. Strauss states concerning the right to self-preservation:

If everyone has by nature the right to preserve himself, he necessarily has the right to the means required for his self-preservation.

Classical thinkers, assuming the best judge of these means must be the man with practical wisdom, held that

the simply best regime is the absolute rule of the wise and the best practicable regime is the rule of gentlemen. According to Hobbes, however, everyone is by nature the judge of what are the right means to his self-preservation. For, even granting that the wise man is, in principle, a better judge, he is much less concerned with the self-preservation of a given fool than is the fool himself. But if everyone, however foolish, is by nature the judge of what is required for his self-preservation, everything may legitimately be regarded as required for self-preservation: everything is by nature just.³¹

Strauss says elsewhere that with the equality this establishes, "the difference between the wise minority and the unwise majority loses the fundamental importance it had for traditional political philosophy".³²

If each individual is the best judge of what constitutes self-preservation (one species of motion), he should by extension be the best judge of what would constitute for him all types of motion. This seems to establish for Hobbes a complete equality of justification. That the weakest is as justified in seeking to maintain his motion as the strongest, and is assumed to be the best judge as to how to go about it, has immense ramifications.

³¹L. Strauss, 'The Spirit of Hobbes's Political Philosophy', Hobbes Studies, op. cit., p. 16.

³²L. Strauss, The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, op. cit., p. 102.

Motion, for Hobbes, is maintained through the constant seeking of power. Now for Hobbes to be consistent, the source of definition as to which powers are worth seeking (which appetites are worth satisfying, and which aversions are worth avoiding) should be within each individual himself. He can hardly invite every man to look within himself for proof of his theory, but impose upon him standards from outside to judge what he finds there. Just as adherence to scientific discipline demands that standards from beyond not be imposed upon the facts supporting a theory itself, the same discipline should demand that standards from beyond the possible ken of each individual not be imposed upon his own determination and valuation of motion. Macpherson's analysis of Hobbes's adoption of certain ideological assumptions suggests, however, that Hobbes's consistency may fail in this regard.

Hobbes tried to draw his hypotheses entirely from within the realm of fact, perceivable by reason.³³ Not having relied on any influences from beyond this immediate realm of the factual, he does not necessarily have to address such matters. It is worth noting that his or anyone else's speculations about such concerns need not interfere with the dictates of the scientifically derived theory. So long as men agree to rules which flow as logical consequents from Hobbes's scientifically perceived hypotheses, it does not really matter whether

³³The requirement of demonstrability to all other reasonable enquirers, seems to have been an attempt by Hobbes to base his theory in the type of "common sense" that Hannah Arendt would later describe: "the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our common sense which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous". (H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, New York, 1973, pp. 475-76.) This implies that there is an inherent danger in importing data and assumptions from outside the realm of the obvious, and that insistence on confinement within this realm is protection against these potential dangers. (Taken too far, however, this qualification may restrict private judgement itself, as it is suggested below Hobbes did, with equally ill consequences.)

they follow Hobbes's opinion on other concerns, fill in the blanks for themselves, or think nothing of them at all.

This is part of what Macpherson referred to by noting the importance of not needing to attribute to Hobbes questions which he was not asking. It is another way as well, in which the equality of justification inherent in Hobbes's theory is emphasized. All opinions of what lies beyond the realm of fact are equally justified in one sense, in that so long as they do not interfere with the theory's dictates, they are all equally superfluous. After examining Hobbes's account of man's obligation to obey God, David Gauthier, for example, concludes that Hobbes probably realized his account was not satisfactory, though one could have been provided "at no real cost to Hobbes's system":

However, since Hobbes does not require God, and hence any obligation to obey God, in order to establish his moral and political doctrines, we need not find our rather negative conclusions unduly disconcerting.³⁴

3. The Burden of Proof

The discussion of what Hobbes does not need to address highlights a significant aspect of his method, which may be described as a general shifting of the burden of proof. Macpherson reveals examples of this aspect, but does not quite emphasize their collective import. What Hobbes would call speculative philosophy contains proofs of things such as the existence of God. The scientific approach, on the other hand, attempts to deal strictly within the realm of fact. Having taken pains to work within the sphere of the self-evident, demonstrable, and verifiable, the author of an hypothesis has shifted the burden of proof to those who would disprove his theory. As Macpherson says, Hobbes

³⁴D. Gauthier, The Logic of the Leviathan, Oxford, 1969, pp. 198-99.

does not prove that fact entails right, he simply assumes that it does because there is no reason why it should not. There is no reason why any man should conceive himself above others; hence it is self-evident that he should not.³⁵

Hobbes takes the observable, "that every man has wants which he does and must seek to satisfy", as factual: hence,

those consequences of man's natural needs which are not evidently absurd or reprehensible are assumed to be right. The burden of proof is, so to speak, again shifted to the moralists.³⁶

Hobbes well understood this aspect of scientific method. Describing the formation of Hobbes's position on right and obligation, Macpherson notes that Hobbes assumed that "unless the contrary could be shown, one could assume that equal right was entailed in equal need for continued motion".³⁷ Hobbes thought that he had disciplined himself to regard only the factual, and given a perspicuous account of it. Objections to his theory must not only disprove his account, but do so on the same completely factual terms.

Objections based on hypothetical standards or causes brought in from outside the realm of fact, may be stillborn arguments of those not understanding the new scientific ground rules; or, they may be reducible to expressions of personal disapproval of incontestable facts or their implications; or at worst, they may be deliberate ruses to simply confuse the facts to produce a false, and presumably more advantageous reading for the objectors' own purposes.

But the ramifications of this shift in burden of proof extend far deeper than discussion of Hobbes's general theory itself. The equalities of understanding and justification demand that standards from beyond the potential ken of each individual not be imposed upon their own desires. Each individual has the

³⁵Possessive Individualism, p. 75.

³⁶*ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁷*ibid.*, p. 76.

same right to assume the correctness and validity of his own pursuit of motion, except in specific cases where, based upon the facts and nothing but the facts, he can be shown otherwise. And just as this right holds on the personal level, so also may the individual be subject to the same types of invalid challenges and ruses as the theory itself.

This shift in burden of proof supports another aspect of Hobbes's theory. As noted previously, Hobbes was able to move from fact to obligation easier the more scientifically accurate were his observations of fact. But it must be admitted that the degree of difficulty of what he was attempting was not so great as may first appear, because Hobbes had defined the facts only very generally. The main fact is, that the individual will (and should) maximize his own motion. But the individual alone can determine what this motion will involved.

Hobbes is concerned with the motion of men, and their motion relative to each other; but he is well aware that the causes of that motion itself, the "Appetites, and Aversions, Hopes, and Fears" of these men, can only ever be perceived by the men themselves. This generality left in Hobbes's definition makes it easier for him to move from fact to obligation, because he is not (for the most part), telling anyone what they are obliged to do. Instead he argues that they generally have a right to do what they wish. By the very construction of the theory, the burden of proof has shifted to the negative. That is, Hobbes largely limits himself, using completely factual data, to showing the individual only what he is obliged not to do.

This shift in burden of proof reflects Hobbes's original reversal of assumptions about rest and motion, to which Macpherson has drawn attention. Motion being natural and proper, obligations to motion would be for the most part superfluous. Rather, obligation will generally take the form of obstacles to motion.

* * *

To this point, the following appear to be the major tenets of the part of the scientific component of Hobbes's theory which concerns his method.

1. The field under scrutiny, human nature and society, is assumed to be suitable for scientific investigation.

2. This investigation is carried out with strict scientific discipline: that is, both its scope, and its findings, remain within the universally observable, and (potentially) universally self-evident and demonstrable.

3. So based, the investigation proceeds by the resolute-compositive method. This involves two stages:

a. In the first, a general hypothesis is formed which can be perceived both to explain and to govern the field under investigation.

b. In the second, a set of further hypotheses is derived from the first, which best ensures the operation, or fulfilment, of the major hypothesis.

4. To the extent both these stages are carried out scientifically, what traditionally have been seen as moral questions do not arise.

5. As the theory is based on the self-evident and demonstrable, challenges to it must be based upon that same ground. They may involve either a questioning of the reading of the facts themselves, or of the logical arrangement or interpretation of them, but may not be based upon any alleged observation beyond the sphere of fact.

These appear to be ground rules governing Hobbes's method itself. As to the actual ideas, particularly of Galileo and Harvey, that Hobbes incorporated into his scientific theory, the following is a provisional list.

1. The major governing principle of human nature and society is motion.