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Review of C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, 1962: Clarendon Press), *Political Quarterly* 35 no. 4 (October 1964), 444–68

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THE APPEARANCE of no fewer than six important studies of Hobbes in recent years can scarcely be an accident. The long and painful internal crisis of liberal democracy, and the wars against it, physical and ideological, by the forces of both the right and the left, have naturally revived interest in the 'tough-minded' political thinkers – Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hume, Hegel, Maistre, and above all, of course, Marx and the 'hard' rather than the 'soft' among his

disciples. It is therefore not surprising that the toughest and most uncompromising of all political theorists should lately have come in for a measure of interest greater than that to which he owed to his usual role in the stock histories of political ideas – as the father of modern absolutism and a brilliant and devastating thinker, ruined, however, by adherence to a fallacious psychology and an obsolete materialism. The obvious similarities between the Leviathan and modern dictatorships have given his doctrines a disagreeable degree of plausibility; his logic and his epistemology are direct forerunners of modern positivism; hence the tendency to disparage Hobbes's premisses and analyses as exaggerations, due to the exceptional violence of his times, is out of fashion.

It is the more interesting, therefore, to find that Professor Macpherson in his remarkable study swims against his contemporary stream. For him, Hobbes is the forerunner neither of Fascism nor of positivism, but the most original and forceful spokesman of a specific stage of Western social history, which he calls Possessive Individualism, or the market society – more familiar to us as the era of the rising bourgeoisie. Macpherson believes that the study of the assumptions of this type of society, which, in his view, still underlie liberal beliefs in our own day, can cast light upon their growing inadequacy.

His central thesis is bold, original, coherent and important; the exposition is clear, learned and often brilliant. The author has not convinced me of the validity of his main position; but I should like, nevertheless, to emphasise that his book is an intellectual achievement of the first order, and a challenge to the current interpretations **[445]** of Hobbes and of English political ideas in the seventeenth century.

He offers new interpretations of Hobbes, of the programmes of the Levellers and of Harrington, and of Locke's conception of political rights. To begin with Hobbes: for Macpherson the heart of Hobbes's doctrine is *homo homini lupus*,[1] and it generates, he believes, a new notion of society, one of individuals ceaselessly

[1] ['Man is a wolf to a man.']

competing for power, a condition of perpetual warfare between owners of property (which includes their own persons), which succeeded the older social structure in which men were conceived in social terms as creatures pursuing common aims, created for purposes which imposed upon them obligations towards one another and to the community, [obligations] conceived[2] as being inherent in their very essence as human beings. This doctrine in itself is not new: the notion of the rise of an acquisitive society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, radically different from the functional community of the Middle Ages, is at least as old as Weber and Tawney, if not Saint-Simon and Marx.

What is novel is Macpherson's view that Hobbes is the spokesman of the bourgeoisie, that his model of man and society are founded upon his correct observation of the new commercial society that he saw rising round him in England, and that many of the difficulties and paradoxes which have hitherto appeared merely as blemishes in an otherwise logically coherent doctrine can be most easily explained by attributing his psychology and sociology not, as hitherto, to the rise of the influence of the new physics or the religious wars of the time, but to changes in the forces and the relations of production.

Marx is seldom mentioned in these pages. Nevertheless, the intellectual power and unity of Macpherson's thesis is increased by his unswerving application of Marxist methods of analysis: in particular by his insistence on interpreting all his authors – Hobbes, the Levellers, Harrington, Locke – in terms of the new social and economic situation in terms of which, whether they were conscious of this or not, they thought; more precisely, in terms of the situation of the social class to which they themselves belonged (and for which they spoke) in its relations to other classes, above and below it, with which it was in conflict.

[2] [A characterristic Berlinian ambiguity. What is the antecedent of 'conceived'? Grammatically, it could be 'aims', 'purposes', 'obligations' or 'community'. It would have clarified the sense to repeat the antecedent (here done conjecturally) before 'conceived'.]

This intellectual weapon, both ineffective and discredited owing to stupid or mechanical use of it by party hacks, Professor Macpherson wields with force, skill and brilliant effect; in his hands it becomes genuinely formidable. He does not seek to meet the commonest objections to Hobbes's views so much as to show that some of **[446]** them, e.g., that his psychological views are too crude and unplausible, or that his claim to derive his politics from physics is not made good, or that his materialism is, in any case, untenable, may melt away if Hobbes is historically interpreted. And he believes that the same plain historical method may do as much for Locke and Harrington.

Indeed, he raps Professor Warrender[3] lightly over the knuckles for supposing that one must first seek to establish the meaning of a philosopher's views, and only then consider their historical roots, context and significance. No sane man will quarrel with the thesis that knowledge of the historical framework is essential to the full grasp of an author's ideas; that to analyse Hobbes's propositions as if they were uttered by a modern behaviourist or authoritarian would – and often has – cast darkness on the issue; that much English writing on political philosophers has tended to be crudely and unhistorically anachronistic. But one truism deserves another. When Macpherson offers the view that the writers of the past will yield their ideas only to those who understand the historical outlook of which they are the expression, he is surely carried too far by his zeal. The vitality of the classics springs from some quality that transcends their times, and the validity of their views can scarcely be exclusively due to their expression of a given class structure, even if the two are in fact connected. Such historicism, pushed to its logical extreme, entails the proposition that the thought of the past literally becomes unintelligible when the world in which it was conceived has withered away.

This was, of course, Spengler's notorious paradox. Macpherson does not, needless to say, say or imply as much as this; but his

[3] [See Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford, 1957).]

argument sails dangerously near it. If Hobbes did not speak even to those who know little history and fascinate them into further enquiry, political philosophers would today take little interest in the historical context of his writings. With thinkers who really speak only for, and out of, their own *Kulturkreis*, philosophers as such have little concern: historical scholars and antiquaries (rightly) preserve and annotate worthy writers like Hotman, Botero, Thomasius,[4] thinkers important in their day, by whom the class structure of their societies is conveyed perhaps more faithfully than by the men of genius – Spinoza or Hume. But even if we conceded that Hobbes and Locke make sense only to those who understand the social circumstances in terms of which they wrote, did these philosophers in fact see and think what Macpherson wishes to persuade us that they saw and **[447]** thought? How illuminating is his own use of the historical method?

To return to Hobbes once more: Macpherson rightly declares (22) that Hobbes's conception of the state of nature is a logical and not a historical notion. He observes acutely that Hobbes's lawless – 'masterless'[5] – men are not primitives realistically described, but constructed figures – something like Weber's ideal types – required by social analysis. But he seems on shakier ground when he specifies that Hobbes's state of nature is simply a hypothesis about how civilised men, as they occurred in Hobbes's world in the seventeenth century, would behave if there were no law or sovereignty to restrain them. 'To get to the state of nature, Hobbes has set aside law, but not the socially acquired behaviour and desires of men' (ibid.). Hobbes is said to be interested not in the genesis but in the contemporary condition of society: his point being that without Leviathan most men would inevitably lead – or return to – lives described as 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and

[4] [François Hotman, Giovanni Botero, Christian Thomasius.]

[5] [Hobbes's term ('masterlesse'), used in chapters 18 (128) and 21 (149) of *Leviathan*, and by Macpherson (147) of the Levellers. Page references to *Leviathan* use Richard Tuck's edition (Cambridge, 1996).]

short'[6] and so on. According to this view, Hobbes's men in the state of nature are the men of his own culture let loose – historically conditioned men, not Red Indians. They are logical constructions – elements in a sociological model used to point out a contemporary moral. Why are Hobbes's natural men wolves to one another? Because, Macpherson is convinced, the society that Hobbes saw around him in England in the seventeenth century exhibited precisely these anti-social characteristics: because, as Hobbes points out, despite the existence of courts and legal sanctions and policemen, men do still lock their chests and their doors, and journey armed, and fear servants and strangers and other men; because, in other words, the walls between the state of nature and civil society are thinner than in theory they are held to be – a thesis not dissimilar to that of Mr William Golding's celebrated novel *Lord of the Flies*.

Macpherson feels sure that Hobbes was not interested in the noble savage as such – whether, for example, he existed and how he lived – for he was talking exclusively about his own contemporaries, and wished to distinguish between how, in fact, they behaved, and how near they came to lapsing into savage and lawless behaviour, from which Leviathan alone restrained them. In other words, Hobbes's wholly natural men, on this view, are constructed by 'successive degrees of abstraction from civilised society' (23), i.e. by subtracting those dispositions which habit or fear induce in men in **[448]** modern society; moreover, these men are, and could only be, citizens of England in the first half of the seventeenth century – inhabitants of the world that Hobbes knew and understood best; furthermore, these men live in a world in which status has broken down and has been replaced by 'the market', at first the simple market, then what the author calls 'a possessive market society' (61 etc.), the criterion of which is that in it a man owes nothing to society, his energy and skill being treated as a commodity which, like other commodities, he and he alone owns and is free to sell or give away. Hobbes's men in a state

[6] *Leviathan*, chapter 13, 89.

of nature turn out to be the grasping bourgeois of the early phase of European capitalism, men who would be constantly at each other's throats if they were not restrained by a central power whose authority they recognise and force other members of their society to recognise.

There is certainly much in this account that is original, illuminating and valid. Thus, for example, the notion that Hobbes was engaged in constructing a scientific model – an ideal type the application of which to reality would enable anyone to deduce actual human behaviour, provided that allowance was made for this or that set of actual conditions – this aspect of Hobbes's method has perhaps not been sufficiently emphasised by historians of political thought. In this regard, Hobbes was highly original: he rightly discarded some of the misconceptions about scientific method of his patron Bacon, with which his own have at times been confounded, and followed Galileo, the true father of scientific method as it is still practised in both the natural and social sciences. Macpherson does not, if anything, make quite enough of this: for he is anxious to stress Hobbes's consciousness of social facts at the expense of his fascination by abstract models and the new scientific method as such. But his description of the method whereby Hobbes constructed and applied his model – his grasp of what a model is, and of its value to an investigator – and, in particular, his pages on Hobbes's analysis of the struggle for power on the part of his idealised men, are masterly throughout, and head and shoulders above most other accounts of these matters.

But, again, his passionate historicism seems to me to carry him too far. Even though Hobbes's state of nature may have been arrived at by abstraction (23), it does not follow that what is logically obtained cannot also be, and be thought of, as historically real; interest in actual primitives, Indians in the East and West, travellers' accounts of savages noble and ignoble, was widespread in Hobbes's day; and he does, after all, speak of American Indians as **[449]** living in a state of nature. This may not refute Macpherson's thesis, but it renders it a good deal less plausible. Nor does it follow that the characteristics of men in the state of

nature – even if they are obtained by peeling off 'civilised' characteristics from men in civil society – are not also present as much in primitives as in sophisticated men.

In order to explain and justify his view of what men are, can be, and can be made to be, in society, Hobbes seeks to establish the characteristics of men as such: this is done by stripping off the differences of time and place. This gives us, in Macpherson's apt and clever phrase, 'automated', machine-like men in a state of war: but the desire for commodious living, peace and so forth need not, *pace* Macpherson, characterise only civilised men who are not secure, but may equally dominate uncivilised ones. Macpherson (29) enumerates what Hobbes's man 'in the full brutish state of nature' 'would lack, and would compellingly feel the lack of', namely 'all the goods of civilised living: property, industry, commerce, the sciences, arts and letters, as well as security for his life'. From this he deduces that Hobbes's natural man is simply the civilised man of the seventeenth century, minus only sovereignty, law enforcement etc.; for no real savage, presumably, would 'compellingly feel the lack of' all those blessings of whose possibility he would not be conscious. But all Hobbes says, in a passage honourably quoted on the same page by Macpherson, is that 'The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their industry to obtain them.'[7] To equate the savage's image of 'commodious living' with fully developed civilised living, and his desire for peace and a less brutish and poverty-stricken life with 'a compelling feeling of the lack of' industry, commerce, sciences, arts, letters etc. – of which the savage is likely to have no conception – is Macpherson's own bold and gratuitious move; there is no warrant for it in Hobbes.

Yet this particular argument of Macpherson's for supposing the natural man to be simply a seventeenth-century Englishman, but one freed from legal sanctions, rests on this queer identification. It may be that in actual fact Hobbes's men are not timeless creatures,

[7] ibid., chapter 13, 90.

that the characteristics of which he speaks were uniquely present, or at least particularly prominent, in England in the seventeenth century. But Hobbes, no less than Machiavelli or Hooker or other political theorists of that time, supposed himself to be speaking of men in all times and places; what is arresting in his view is not his treatment of specifically seventeenth-century English characteristics. **[450]** It seems to me that Macpherson is here either guilty of a truism – natural man is civilised man minus civilisation: a man endowed with universal human cravings, in particular desire for glory, power, riches, fear of violent death, endless greed, etc.; this interpretation would scarcely be news to us now – or else he is dogmatic: Hobbes's natural man has passions which real primitives and savages would not necessarily have, and these desires are purely seventeenth-century desires, those of the rising bourgeoisie; this needs proof, which is not here provided.

'Hobbes tells us himself', says Macpherson (30), 'that the psychological analysis is of contemporary man: "whoso-ever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think*, *opine*, *reason*, *hope*, *feare*, &c […]; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions" ',[8] and the reader of *Leviathan* is then invited to perform the experiment upon himself, to confirm this. What is there to indicate that 'civilised man' is here being distinguished from men as such, human society everywhere, at all times? The ordinary reader would surely take the author to be stating a universal truth about all men, and to be adducing universal introspective experience as evidence. This is how philosophers usually argued before the advent of historical self-consciousness – Locke, Voltaire, Helvétius, Rousseau: which of them did not speak in this fashion? Then why not Hobbes also?

This is but one instance of the length to which Macpherson's extreme historicism carries him. Again, Hobbes's use of the notion of power: Macpherson thinks that the crucial concept of 'perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth

[8] ibid., introduction, 10.

onely in Death'[9] must be power over other men, and nothing else. Why? Because in the course of chapter 10 of *Leviathan* it is described as 'eminence'[10] of a man's ability, i.e. over that of others; and in the *Elements*[11] as 'the excess of the power of one above that of another'. Of course, where there are others, power will include, or even mainly consist in, dominion over, or elimination of, rivals: but this does not tend to show that by power Hobbes did not mean simply and always 'present means, to obtain some future apparent Good'[12] (whatever they may be), which is Hobbes's basic notion. Robinson Crusoe, even without Man Friday, could presumably suffer just as much from 'restlesse desire of Power', which would stimulate him to dominate his non-human environment; at least there is nothing in Hobbes's text to suggest that his notion of power, even 'acquired power' – riches, reputation, good fortune, etc. – is **[451]** specially connected with the market society; even though it fits it well. This does seem a piece of special pleading, brilliantly though it is executed.

So, too, is the assertion that Hobbes's assumption that the power of every man is opposed to the power of every other man appears 'to be a social, not a physiological, postulate' (40). Why should it be social? It could be physiological: as in the case of animals. 'Nature red in tooth and claw' is not primarily a social doctrine. But even if it is 'social', it need be so only in a trivial sense: it involves a minimum of two persons, in sufficient physical proximity to one another, trying to obtain things – say, roots, or caves to sleep in – of which there is a scarcity. This postulate does not involve the notion of a social order more developed than the state of nature. The proposition that the alienated, ferociously acquisitive animals who prowl, in Marx's vision, in the capitalist jungle are the only possible source of Hobbes's notion of the state

[9] ibid., chapter 11, 70.

[10] 62.

[11] Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, part 1, chapter 8, section 4: p. 34 in the edition by Ferdinard Tönnies (London, 1889).

[12] *Leviathan*, chapter 10, 62.

of nature, because England in the seventeenth century had become precisely such a jungle, at any rate as contrasted with the less fragmented and acquisitive community of an earlier day, seems a violent exaggeration. Of course Macpherson is right to stress the influence of the market society upon Hobbes's notion of social power ('The *Value*, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his Price'[13] and determined by the buyer, etc.), but again he goes much too far. 'The power of men associated to transform nature is neglected [by Hobbes]', he affirms (37). Is it? If in the state of nature there is 'no industry, no culture of the earth, no navigation, no commodious building, no arts, no letters, no society' (23), surely it was not wholly unassociated individuals who created these?

Macpherson's analysis of Hobbes's account of power, even though it is, in places, overdrawn, is an admirable achievement; but not even all his learning and ingenuity will finally convince the moderately well-informed reader that Hobbes's psychology or sociology could have been derived solely from the observation of the rise to power of the English bourgeoisie. The traditional view, of which Macpherson evidently thinks little, is that Hobbes's materialism derives, on the one hand, from the scientific revolution inaugurated by Kepler and Galileo – in particular, Galileo's resolutive-compositive method, of which Macpherson gives an excellent analysis; and, on the other, from his psychological axiom that what men most fear and seek to avoid is violent death; with the corollary that no man is so weak that he cannot, at least by **[452]** banding together with others, kill men much more powerful than himself.

According to this view, Hobbes's obsession with violence and insecurity is, at least in part, derived from the fact that his entire life was spent in a world in which men seemed to kill easily for the sake of principle, a world involved in a succession of religious wars which had begun long before his birth, a world of societies filled with fanatics at both religious extremes, Ultamontane Catholic bigots, violent, exalted Calvinists and Puritans and Anabaptists,

[13] ibid., 63.

men who held the value of life as nothing compared to the supreme end for which it was right to lay it down. Henry III and Henry IV, William the Silent and Buckingham were men of power; yet they could not save themselves from religiously inspired assassins; and they were merely the most prominent among the victims. Was this not enough, it might be asked, to suggest to a naturally timid and rational man (as it had to the far more irrational Bodin) that the imperfect civil authority of existing societies must be tightened, and set on a firmer intellectual basis, if rational men were to have the opportunity of saving their lives and their reason, and of living the most 'commodious' lives that human nature afforded? Is not this sufficient to account for the best-known of Hobbes's assumptions? Or to begin at the other end: is it truly the case that England in Hobbes's youth was a market society already so free from medieval survivals and the older hierarchical world that its power-seeking men, whose restless desires ceased only in death, formed, in the Marxist sense, a competitive captalist society, rather than a less neatly classifiable social whole, pregnant with the new bourgeois order, but still heavy with the landed and hierarchical past? One world had come to an end, but its successor's most predatory traits – which would emerge clearly before the end of the century – were still inchoate.

If a really characteristic spokesman of the ascending bourgeoisie is to be sought for, perhaps Grotius, despite his doctrines of sociability and his a priorism – Grotius, who goes far beyond Hobbes and allows both individuals and entire societies the right of selling themselves into slavery – is a better spokesman for Macpherson's unbridled market society. Indeed, Hobbes's 'Mortall God',[14] even though he is expected to permit the maximum liberty compatible with the preservation of security, interferes with individual freedom, including the freedom to alienate one's skill and labour power, or, at least, retains the power of doing so, more effectively than Grotius's sovereign. The avidly acquisitive man in a wholly competitive **[453]** society would surely find Grotius's

[14] ibid., chapter 18, 120.

brand of individualism a truer expression of his needs than Hobbes's permanent possibility of total repression at the hands of a sovereign of unlimited power against whom there is no redress.

In some sense Macpherson sees this himself – indeed it would be surprising if this had not occurred to so clear and sharp a thinker – and he asks himself how it was that, if Hobbes's assessment of society (being a quasi-Marxist analysis, although Macpherson does not call it that) was correct, and if the Leviathan was the logically valid consequence of this reasoning, this system of government was nevertheless not adopted anywhere at any time, and remained a frightening theoretical construct, a mere caution for posterity. To this he answers: Hobbes was acute enough to realise that, if the market society was to function properly, someone would have to hold the ring for it, and Leviathan was invented to preserve those minimum conditions of security that would enable possessive individualism to develop its full economic effectiveness; in other words, if the exploited were to be held down for the exploiters to batten on, this called for a coercive power; but Hobbes had not realised that the sheer class solidarity of the men of property would itself be sufficient to weld it into a kind of collective Leviathan, and this would obviate the need for the more mechanically conceived sovereign, whether embodied in an individual prince or an oligarchy or a republic.[15] Macpherson's Hobbes understood that an outlook embodying, say, Aristotelian or medieval ideas of justice orf status or social responsibility was incompatible with the

[15] [This sentence is a revision of Berlin's original, which is very hard to follow because of a series of sometimes ambiguously governed occurences of 'that'. Here is that original: 'His answer is that Hobbes was acute enough to realise that, if the market society was to function properly, someone would have to hold the ring for it; and that Leviathan was invented to preserve those minimum conditions of security that would enable possessive individualism to develop its full economic effectiveness; in other words, that if the exploited were to be held down for the exploiters to batten on, this called for a coercive power; but that Hobbes had not realised that the sheer class solidarity of the men of property would itself be sufficient to weld it into a kind of collective Levitathan; and that this would obviate the need for the more mechanically conceived sovereign, whether embodied in an individual prince or an oligarchy or a republic.']

transformation demanded by a developed market society, but had not grasped that the agent of this transformation could – and would – be a socio-economic class and not an artificially constructed authority.

This kind of argument seems to me unconvincing on two grounds: it proves too much; and it is opposed to Hobbes's deepest belief. [It proves] too much, because it could equally well be used in the case of any thinker who believed that only unquestioning obedience to authority would prevent men from mutual extermination. Plato (in the *Laws*), Critias, the Old Oligarch, Seneca, Machiavelli, Maistre – every thinker who conceives of men in social terms and is aware of the thinness of the walls between the minimum of civilised life and barbarism, and is therefore ready to sacrifice a great deal for security, provided that such a thinker does not actually speak out against an economic free-for-all – could by this method be interpreted as the voice of a liberal–capitalist society, unaware only of the fact that it is a class that acts as the organising agent of **[454]** history, which removes the urgent need for individual despotism, however enlightened.

It goes against Hobbes's deepest belief, because the very notion of class solidarity is not compatible with the *homo homini lupus* doctrine. This, for better or for worse, is at the heart of Hobbes's psychology: if some men can peacefully cooperate to hold others down – out of rational self-interest – why cannot all men, guided by the same considerations, cooperate to achieve a maximum degree of security, freedom, happiness and so on? This is the classical doctrine of the social contract as propounded by, for example. Epicurus. Hobbes speaks as if, given the opportunity, any man will trample over any other man, unless deterred by sanctions; this does not make for the kind of internal solidarity that is an essential attribute of classes. Each member of a Hobbesian commonwealth knows that if he does not hang together with the others he may hang separately; but this awareness is not the concrescence of interests, habits, outlook, above all the relationship to the forces of production, with all the 'ideological' and other interconnections that go with this crucial relationship,

that constitute a class in Marx's or Tawney's or Sombart's sense. To ask Hobbes to substitute classes for individuals – because classes cannot be restrained from rending one another, while individuals may be, since rational considerations can be effective with individuals but not with classes – may or may not be a valid position; but it would undermine the basic psychological premisses on which Hobbes's entire theory rests. This is not a modification. It is an attack on Hobbes's view.

Macpherson appears to be asserting two things which (in my view, mistakenly) he identifies. The first is that Hobbes's model of men and of civil society is in fact drawn from men as he saw them, i.e. from the seventeenth-century Englishmen who lived at a time when teleology, functionalism, social purpose were collapsing, while individualism, the atomisation of society, bourgeois values, etc. were rising fast. This, no matter whether or how far Hobbes was aware of it, seems to me largely true and important, but needs qualification. The second is that the state of nature and all the arguments which Hobbes bases upon this notion are compatible only with, or are embodiments only of, the possessive individualism which Hobbes is alleged to have before his eyes. Yet, apart from what I have urged above, Hobbes drew upon Thucydides as richly as upon social observation for his data, and indeed for some of his general opinions too; the concept of the wild state of nature is after all older than Hobbes – the myth of Protagoras rests on it **[455]** too; the egoistic brutes who live in it are not confined to the seventeenth century.

Just as Mr Warrender seems to me usefully to exaggerate – but still exaggerate greatly – the survival in Hobbes of the traditional doctrines of natural law, so Macpherson surely makes too much of Hobbes's consciousness of seventeenth-century capitalist individualism. That Hobbes often thought in these terms is certainly plausible; every political philosophy revolves round some central notion of the nature of man, and Hobbes's notion was doubtless affected by those who sought to profit by the civil war, just as his idea of justice, like Hume's, is commercial and capitalist to a degree. I am no historian; nevertheless, to represent England in

Hobbes's day as a largely laissez-faire economy seems even to me an overstatement. Macpherson's attempt to represent all the laws that were in restraint of laissez-faire as so much evidence of how powerful laissez-faire must have been – straining at the leash – seems almost disingenuous. Were medieval laws in constraint of free trade also evidence of a violent passion for unbridled economic individualism panting to be set free? Hobbes, says Macpherson, 'could not have hoped to show his readers the necessity of a sovereign from a hypothetical state of nature alone, without having shown the necessary behaviour of men in society' (70). Why not? Why must men in a state of nature 'correspond' to men in society – i.e. 'civilised man with only the restraint of law removed' (29)? Why should men's nature not be transformed by society? And did not Hobbes himself emphasise the educational policies of Leviathan, intended to change men, and make them more docile? Certainly there are passages (e.g. in *Philosophical Rudiments*)[16] where he suggests, in words worthy of Spinoza, that reason and not terror could liberate men from greed, lust for power, and similar passions. These questions are scarcely raised in Macpherson's learned, eloquent and most skilfully composed argument.

One of the great issues raised by Hobbes's critics is, of course, his alleged derivation of obligation from fact, and, by implication, his failure to perceive the logical gap between 'is' and 'ought'. This is a commonplace of modern attacks on Hobbes. Such critics say that whatever 'obligation' means it cannot mean self-interest; that there is a fundamental distinction between duty, however conceived, and prudential calculation. Macpherson declines to accept this, as well he might. He points out that these charges derive from a distinction drawn by Kant, and that a naturalistic ethics need not entail this unbridgeable chasm. But his argument **[456]** at this point is so obscure that I cannot follow it.

I have no doubt that a case can be made for Hobbes against his Kantian critics. It is arguable, for example, that all earlier ethical

[16] *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. William Molesworth (London, 1839–45), vol. 2, iv [is this the right page?].

doctrines, at any rate in the West, including the Christian, rest on the view that men cannot help seeking what they think to be to their true interest, that moral error derives only from failure to identify this true interest. This is the basis of the moral systems for which duty consists in performing those acts which are aimed at fulfilling the commands uttered by the creator to the creature; or those which lead to the fulfilment of my nature according to the divine plan; or those which promote happiness or harmony or accord with cosmic reason; so that duty and the highest prudence necessarily coincide.

But Macpherson slurs over this issue. Hobbes does not obtain that defence at his hands to which he, with all naturalists and utilitarians – as well as theological and metaphysical thinkers of a pre- and anti-Kantian kind – are surely entitled. Macpherson's pages on this topic seem curiously confused and unconvincing. He seems to wish to derive values from facts by arguing from Hobbes's observation that all men are equally insecure (since the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest), which (whether for Hobbes or in fact is not clear) entails the right to the equality of treatment required by the 'market society'. I wish I could begin to understand Macpherson's argument: he is so clear and intelligent in the rest of his book that I am ready to believe that it is I who am at fault; perhaps what is being said is original and important; Macpherson obviously attaches great importance to it; and Mr Christopher Hill, in his account of Macpherson's book, describes it as a 'beautiful argument'.[17] I am less fortunate, for after repeated efforts I still cannot make head or tail of it. I literally do not understand what is being said.

Even stranger than the argument from equal liability to murder is Macpherson's claim that in deriving the notions of rightness and obligation from the facts, Hobbes was 'taking a radically new position' (76). He speaks of his 'leap in political theory' (77). What is this leap? The proposition that there is no logical bridge between

[17] 'Possessive Individualism' (a review of Macpherson's book), *Past and Present* no. 24 (April 1963), 86–9 at 87.

'is' and 'ought' – between fact and value – would have been neither acceptable nor, perhaps, wholly intelligible to the majority of Greek, or to medieval, thinkers. Their concept of what counted as a fact differed from that of the empiricists, in that their views were teleological or theist and their politics presupposed a non-empiricist metaphysics or theology. No doubt empiricists did introduce a new view of facts, and of goals as 'immanent' in them **[457]** and not, to use Macpherson's phrase, 'brought in from outside' (76, 77); but this 'new position' is already to be found among sixteenth-century humanists in Italy, certainly in Machiavelli. As for the 'leap in political theory as radical as Galileo's formulation of the law of uniform motion was in natural science' (77), by which Macpherson appears to mean no more than the denial or disregard of the 'supposed purposes of Nature or will of God' (ibid.), this had been successfully achieved at least as early as Epicurus and his followers from Lucretius to Gassendi, an unfashionable but never wholly forgotten tradition of which Hobbes was hardly unaware.

No doubt Hobbes's formulation of this position is clearer and historically more influential than that of his predecessors; and in philosophy to say things clearly and forcefully is at times as good as, or even in part identical with, originality. Nevertheless, Macpherson's statement seems to me yet another example of this author's bold, exciting, always interesting, but excessively exaggerated generalisations. Still more paradoxical is the proposition that Hobbes's doctrine of the insecurity of individuals is simply a translation into political terms of the 'market economy' of his day. Something analogous happens in his discussion of Hobbes's notion of justice: this, too, is held to be derived from the operations of the market; yet Hobbes asserts that laws are commands, not 'facts' plus prudential calculation; and he does sometimes, however inconsistently, speak of iniquitous laws, a tendency on which Mr Warrender founds much of his argument. Macpherson says nothing of this, as indeed he ignores one of Hobbes's truest claims to originality – of his view of language as a form of action. One of the 'leaps' Hobbes did accomplish was his theory of

language, which came to play so vital a part in Romanticism, Marxism, pragmatism, Freudian psychology, and, not least, in modern linguistic analysis.

To recapitulate: much of Macpherson's thesis on Hobbes is contained in four propositions, two of which, to say the least, do not seem self-evident. Let me give them in his order.

(*a*) That 'the difference between moral and prudential obligation becomes insignificant as soon as reliance on some transcendental will or purpose is rejected' (87). If, as many philosophers and ordinary men, including atheists, empiricists or at any rate anti-teleologists would argue, 'morally right' is not reducible to 'beneficial', this proposition would be false; and Macpherson does nothing to render it more plausible than it was left by, say, Bentham or Hegel.

[458] (*b*) That obligation binding on rational individuals is rendered possible 'if men see themselves, or can be expected to come to see themselves, as equal in some respect more vital than all their inequalities' (ibid.). This is true but almost trivial: the concept of moral rules presupposes the recognition of some essential human characteristics in virtue of which the rules are binding on all men. This truth is present in the thought of almost every moralist who has ever uttered, whatever inequalities or hierarchical notions he may otherwise have entertained. Macpherson means, I think, not 'possible' but 'possible only', which is much more doubtful.

(*c*) That Hobbes grasped this truth. Indeed he did, as who has not? But perhaps I misunderstand Macpherson. He is too illuminating a writer to dispense truisms.

(*d*) That it is 'the equal subservience of all men to the determination of the market' (ibid.) that is the basis for his deduction of obligation binding on all rational men. This is the heart of Macpherson's belief, and will seem unplausible to anyone who reads Hobbes without Macpherson's preconceptions. For a man obsessed (as he is here represented as being) by economic considerations, Hobbes said too little about the subject – although what he did say about 'the market' is, as always, sharp and interesting. The breakdown of the status society and its gradual

supersession by an atomised and competitive one was doubtless before his eyes, but it is a far cry from this to supposing that it was, above all, capitalists fighting for profits and trampling, in their aggressive and brutal greed, on what was there to trample, rather than Protestants and Catholics, ranting sectarians, fanatical assassins, men filled with violent religious or ancestral or professional pride – 'the Seditious roaring of a troubled Nation'[18] – that was the central pattern before his eyes and imagination.

For Hobbes, competition, diffidence and glory were the principal causes of quarrels among men.[19] Macpherson thinks this is derived from observation of market society. But, then, did Thrasymachus and Callicles live in a market society? If the answer is that they did, does this not extend the concept so far as to render it useless? How far does it stretch? To Persia and Egypt after the conquest of Alexander? To Russia under Peter the Great? That, when *Gemeinschaft*[20] breaks down, the resultant fragmentation creates a need for a central source of discipline, however mechanical, is the old, traditional interpretation of Hobbes's 'intellectual background'; the proposition that such fragmentation is an attribute solely of a market society, and that it is this that Hobbes most faithfully reflects, is Macpherson's piece of special pleading. **[459]** He conducts it with dazzling virtuosity: his intellectual power is an asset to his subject; yet the emergence of Hobbes as a direct ancestor of Professor Hayek gives one pause. For Macpherson the market society, and it alone, accounts for the basic principle of Hobbes's morality: it alone creates that special equality that can be made, and was by Hobbes made, the basis of 'obligation binding on rational men' (90) – the empirical substitute for the older a priori or teleological ground of obligation.

But why should we accept this? Why should we ignore the elements of natural law that are present both in Marxism and in empiricism, founded on observation of the behaviour of human

[18] *Leviathan*, chapter 8, 55.

[19] ibid., chapter 13, 88.

[20] 'Community'.

beings at most times and in most places, and not obviously connected with 'market society', but quite sufficient as a link between 'is' and 'ought'? Macpherson is so deeply convinced that Hobbes must have seen what, if Macpherson's own theory of history is valid, must have been happening in the seventeenth century that he cannot allow any validity to the more conventional and certainly more influential interpretation of Hobbes's doctrine – that traditional interpretation which has over the centuries moved men to horror, admiration and violent opposition. This passionate one-sidedness gives an arresting quality to the argument: and, indeed, the book is throughout a splendid tour de force.

In the course of developing his thesis, the author makes many suggestive points. One of the most interesting of these is that Hobbes's type of sovereignty is more needed by 'market men' (105), who cannot operate save in a peaceful system administered by a rational central power, than by those whose values are 'War, plunder, and rapine' (104) – the ideals, Macpherson tells us, of an earlier time. But equally he might have said that religious or civil wars call for Hobbes's remedies more than tradition-bound societies (this would have been a much duller observation: yet it may be that, as Professor C. I. Lewis once remarked, there is no a priori reason for supposing that the truth, when it is discovered, will necessarily prove interesting: it will be enough if it is true).[21] As for the proposition that all conflict is due to changes in the productive system, and that Hobbes reflected such a moment, that, perhaps, is best left to historians to argue. Macpherson goes so much further in this respect than Weber or Tawney, and ignores alternative explanations so ruthlessly, that his account of Hobbes is scarcely likely to become the orthodoxy even of those historians who are deeply influenced by Marxism, but not blinded by it.

[21] 'If the truth should be complex and somewhat disillusioning, it would still not be a merit to substitute for it some more dramatic and comforting simplicity.' C. I. Lewis, *Mind and the World-Order: Outline of a Theory of Knowledge* (New York, 1929), 339.

Macpherson offers a new thesis on the Levellers: original **[460]** and, if it is valid, of the first importance, and in any case interesting. As in the case of Hobbes, Macpherson tends to juxtapose views uttered at different times and in differing circumstances, and to present as a coherent unity what may perhaps have been dissimilar views of various persons, or dissimilar views of the same persons at different times. But, even allowing for this, his richly documented thesis must upset previous views. It consists in the discovery that even the Levellers – the most radical element in the English Revolution – were not ready to extend the franchise either to paupers, or – this is the crucial point – to servants, i.e. any man who served another. This means that, so far from pressing for complete manhood suffrage, they were in principle opposed to it, at any rate until economic equality had been attained; so that the maximum limit to which they were prepared to widen the franchise would have seemed exceedingly illiberal to later democrats. 'If we can see now that a community of fully competing economic enterprisers is a contradiction in terms,' says Macpherson, 'we cannot expect them to have seen it then' (157). This, if true (and the present reviewer must admit to falling far short of the standard of historical knowledge expected by Macpherson), makes the Levellers almost market-society brothers to Hobbes; and would compel much rewriting of seventeenth-century social and intellectual history. In his illuminating chapter on Harrington, Macpherson, not unexpectedly, greatly prefers the views of Mr Hill and Professor Peacock to those of Professor Trevor-Roper.

If Macpherson's treatment of Hobbes is at times over-ingenious and compels admiration for the author's skill rather than his views, in examining Locke's assumptions he is on firmer ground. 'Locke's astonishing achievement was to base the property right on natural right and natural law, and then to remove all the natural law limits from the property right' (199).

How was this done? Macpherson points out the heavy emphasis that Locke laid on the invention of money. He argues convincingly that Locke distinguished three stages: a state of nature without money, one with money and contracts, and the full political state.

Natural law allowed men a right only to so much land as would leave 'enough, and as good' for others.[22] But a money economy (together with an additional argument which Macpherson gleans from the fourth edition of the *Two Treatises*) prevents the rotting of accumulated resources, since gold lasts for ever; and also increases productivity of land to such a degree that even the landless 'day Labourer'[23] gets more absolutely – however much less relatively – than he would get **[461]** in the natural 'enough, and as good' natural law economy. Money prevents spoiling, and it increases productivity; this, for Locke, overcomes the traditional objections, based on natural law, to unlimited private accumulation. Macpherson discovers in Locke's state of nature a market in labour power; labour is for Locke an alienable commodity, but he is still medieval enough to think that human life itself cannot be alienated. In this he is alleged to be less consistent than Hobbes (220), who said, 'The *Value*, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his Price',[24] or Marx, who said that if labour is alienated, then so are life and liberty. But life was just as inalienable for Hobbes: a man cannot, according to him, rationally be expected to yield it up.

On the other hand, Macpherson seems to me to be right when he says that Locke travelled from the position that my title to a property is derived from the fact that I mix my labour with the raw material to the notion that not only my own labour, but 'the Turfs my Servant has cut'[25] still make the land mine; and from there to unlimited ownership of anything that can be turned into unspoilable money. And Locke certainly also holds that labour is a commodity: that is, that I can sell my work – and my ability to work – for a wage determined by the market. Whether this is to be regarded as a sufficient symptom of developed capitalism seems not so clear. The Greeks and the Romans (apart from one or two

[22] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, book 2, chapter 5, sections 27, 33 (subsequent references thus: TT 2. 5. 27, 33). Quotations are from the text in the editon by Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1960).

[23] TT 2. 5. 41.

[24] *Leviathan*, chapter 10, 63.

[25] TT 2. 5. 28.

philosophical schools – which did not include the Stoics) placed no barriers upon capital acquisition, and yet it surely dilutes the term too much to speak of these societies as characteristically capitalist.

Having established by clear and cogent argument Locke's claims to be regarded as the spokesman of unlimited capitalist appropriation, Macpherson falls once again into exaggeration. He represents Locke as loading his political scales against the poor – which is true – and trying to save natural law by viewing them as being, pro tanto, not wholly rational: and adds that this view of the poor would be taken for granted by Locke's readers.[26] He admits that Locke nowhere explicitly says that there are two kinds of rights – one for men of property, one for those without – or that only property gives rights, yet he believes that this is one of Locke's 'assumptions' (220), which to him is as good as an assertion. He infers from the proposition that property will become unequal as accumulation increases that a fundamental right not to be subject **[462]** to the jurisdiction of another will be so unequal as between owners and non-owners that it will be different in kind and not in degree; because Locke recognises that the propertyless will depend for their very livelihood on those who have property, there will for him be unequal rights.

This may well be true in fact: inequality of power may lead to real inequality of rights or the perversion of even-handed justice. But what solid evidence is there that Locke thought this? In a state of nature, Locke declares, each man is his own judge; in theory all rights are equal, and so long as there is no actual slavery this remains true. The fact that most modern readers would consider economic dependence of wage-earning workers upon their masters to be a kind of slavery (that is to say, more than a mere metaphor

[26] Thus Hobbes is a ravening wolf who looks like one. Locke is a capitalist wolf in medieval, natural-law, sheep's clothing. This puts Macpherson into paradoxical proximity to Dr Leo Strauss and his followers: if Hobbes and Locke turn out to be bedfellows, so are those who (from very opposite corners) so regard them.

for oppression of a non-slave-owning type) has no tendency to show that Locke thought that this was the case in the state of nature. The consequences of losing that 'full proprietorship of his own person' (231) which Locke thinks the basis of equal natural rights is not something about which he speculates; perhaps he should have recognised its likelihood under capitalism, but he does not. To say that he disguised the de facto situation by de jure considerations is not to interpret Locke but to attempt (perhaps quite justly) to expose him – a very different procedure.

Macpherson's central thesis is that Locke, having quietly got rid of the natural law restraints upon unlimited accumulation with which he began (because money does not spoil, and because ten acres well cultivated yield more than a thousand in a wild waste, so that enclosures may actually improve the life of a landless labourer and make him richer than an Indian king),[27] then proceeds to establish 'implicit[ly]' differential natural rights (230, 234, 248, 261). Only rational men have full natural rights (234); but, according to Macpherson, those who labour but do not appropriate and are landless, without being actually 'depraved' (226, 232), are not, for Locke, wholly rational; and the rest of Locke's argument is then held to proceed on the assumption that the beings endowed with full natural rights – those whose consent is needed for the purpose of setting up governments among men, those whose natural rights may not be infringed, whose majorities legislate and determine what shall be done – are not all the members of a society, but only those who are fully rational, rationality being defined in terms of capacity for, or success in, the accumulation of property.

This will surely not do. Locke nowhere says this; nor does Macpherson maintain that he does; only that this is 'an implicit **[463]** assumption' (232, 248) of his position and will alone explain some of the contradictions or apparent contradictions of his system. It may be conceded that the general thrust of Locke's argument is towards a democracy of property-owners; that he takes as little interest in landless men and the poorer section of the

[27] TT 2. 5. 37, 41.

community as, say, Winstanley did in servants and beggars. Nevertheless, Locke would have had every reason to protest at this startling piece of psychological analysis of his hidden motives. Even if it is valid, Locke was not conscious of such assumptions, and a political theory stands or falls by what it says and omits to say, rather than by what may have conditioned its author to perpetrate particular errors and obscurities.

The concept of a natural right, for Locke, is not bound up exclusively with property in the modern sense of the word. All students of Locke know by now that 'property' for him means sometimes (*a*) what belongs to a man as such – 'life, liberty, and estate'[28] – at other times (*b*) what we should mean by it – i.e. possessions, what can be bought and sold; but it is impossible to show that when Locke meant (*b*) what we should mean by it – i.e., possessions, what can be bought and sold; but it is impossible to show that when Locke meant (*b*) by 'property', he meant nothing but (*b*). Macpherson says: 'The property for the protection of which men oblige themselves to civil society is sometimes[29] stated to be life, liberty, and estate, and sometimes[30] it is clearly only goods or land' (247–8). Whence it follows for him that the poor 'are rightfully both in and not in civil society' (248). This is not to elucidate, but to torture, Locke's text. Locke does not, so far as I know, define property as 'only' goods and land, and the late George Paul, who used to insist on this point in his lectures, seems to me clearly right. Since Macpherson bases his theory that Locke intended explicitly to exclude the propertyless from full participation in the state on these passages, the point is a crucial one for his entire thesis.

One of the ends of society is for Locke the preservation of property, in the sense of goods, and one of the justifications for rebellion is insecurity of property in this sense. But, at the same time, Locke states quite clearly in the second treatise that all men

[28] TT 2. 7. 87.
[29] e.g. TT 2. 9. 123, 131; 10. 137.
[30] e.g. TT 2. 11. 138–40; 16. 193.

can know natural law save lunatics and idiots;[31] they may choose to ignore it or disobey it, but they know it; and it includes the right to life and liberty as well as property – men cannot forfeit these to society save through the commission of crimes. Nothing is said about the fact that only accumulators are fully able to see these truths. Foreigners are not full members of the society; Macpherson draws a parallel between poor men and foreigners as **[464]** men in, but not full members of, the state; but this is too strained; the allegiance of foreigners is elsewhere and the analogy between them and labourers does not work. Locke's labourers, unlike Marx's, have a country. When Locke speaks of the enjoyment of property, he speaks not merely of landholdings, but of a week's lodging or the use of the highway,[32] which labourers certainly have as much as anyone else.

Macpherson, believing as he does that Locke identifies rational men with property-owners, then takes Locke to assume that civil society or the state consists in the management of affairs for the benefit of these property-owners; in contrast with true democracy, which consists in the management of society for the benefit of all its members – a utopia, so long as unavoidable conflict between the exploiters and the exploited renders the notion of a common interest self-contradictory. Locke's passionate attacks upon absolute government, which are unqualified, then have to be represented by Macpherson as the protection not of the whole society, but of property-owners only, against usurpation of power by an individual, say James II. But if in a market society the bourgeoisie is already in the saddle and riding on the backs of the proletariat, it seems odd to defend the ruling group against dangers that *ex hypothesi* the social structure has rendered impossible. It may not be incorrect to say that Locke is in fact identified with men of property, that he looked on them as endowed with such political virtues as judgement and solidity, as Aristotle and Hume also did; and that he wishes to found the state on them. It may be said also

[31] TT 2. 6. 60.

[32] TT 2. 8. 119.

that he has insufficient sympathy for the poor – there are some brutal passages which may be quoted against him – and perhaps Marxists rightly maintain that his entire position is utopian: that a less biased thinker would have realised that the interests of the rich and poor do not coincide, that there is no common interest in class-divided societies; and that like other liberals he rationalised this away, and saw a coincidence of interests where there was none, because this suited his class. But this is not the same as saying that Locke said, or even assumed, that labourers are not to be included among the wholly rational, and have a set of rights different from the inferior to men in general. Yet this is what Macpherson's position seems to me to amount to. To support his extraordinary position, Macpherson (224) cites Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, where he says: 'The bulk of Mankind have not leisure for Learning and Logick, and superfine distinctions of the Schools. Where the hand is used to the Plough, **[465]** and the spade, the head is seldom elevated to sublime Notions, or exercised in mysterious reasoning. 'Tis well if Men of that rank (to say nothing of the other Sex) can comprehend plain propositions' etc.[33] Macpherson equates 'mysterious reasoning' and 'superfine distinctions' with reason – reason as such – the possession of which entitles us to call men rational, and the absence of which disqualifies them from having a say in creating and controlling civil society.[34] Special pleading can scarcely go further.

If anything, Locke's tone is that of a man half-sighing for a simpler, earlier, conflict-free, perhaps imaginary, almost idyllic society, not for the devil-take-the-hindmost mentality of a world of unbridled laissez-faire. Macpherson speaks, as he has every right

[33] [John Locke], *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* (London, 1695), 302.

[34] At 197, note 1, Macpherson quotes Locke's 'common reason and equity' as 'reason and common equity'. This is a very trivial lapse. But to apply to him, a little unfairly, the method he applies to Locke, it may indicate the trend of his own thought: he wants 'reason'; 'common reason' may seem less general. [In fact, Locke writes of '*reason* and common Equity' in the section Macpherson refers to: TT 2. 2. 8. This is a puzzling mistake by IB.]

to do, of the confusion in Locke between two states of nature: the 'pleasant' and the 'unpleasant', as he calls them (242). In one, Locke speaks of peace, good will and mutual assistance, and so on; the other he calls 'very unsafe, very unsecure',[35] in which the enjoyment of individual rights is 'very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the Invasion of others', 'full of fears and continual dangers'.[36]

This is due not to the degenerate and wicked few, but to a liability on the part of the many not to follow the laws of reason. He explains this by saying that Locke held two contradictory concepts simultaneously. (*a*) That of 'equal undifferentiated beings' (243), men as conceived by Christian and natural law, e.g. by the judicious Hooker: free men, equal to one another, with equal ability to shift for themselves. Hence Locke's anti-paternalism, his opposition to any view, such as Filmer's,[37] which would justify the management of men as children by a sovereign upon whom they must look as a father. This is the concept of a market society modified by vestigial remnants of natural law. (*b*) That of two classes differentiated by level of rationality, determined by capacity for accumulation.

Not only is there no evidence for this, but anti-paternalism as such does not depend upon adherence to a market society. Kant[38] is passionately anti-paternalist – exploitation of one man by another is to him the worst of vices – but even more unfriendly to the notion of men and their faculties as commodities for sale. These positions are commonly held to be harmonious if not mutually entailed. **[466]** Does either imply a support for market society? Why is one not allowed to say that Locke, in talking about the state of nature, was simply repeating the Christian Fathers and Seneca, for whom peace and equality reigned in a state of nature until sin and the Fall broke it all, and made men covetous and

35 TT 2. 9. 123.

36 ibid.

37 And perhaps William Petyt's: although the passage quoted by Macpherson (228–9) seems capable of another interpretation.

38 Especially in his essay 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?' (1784).

aggressive? This was the traditional view, to which Locke, not very consistent-ly, it is true, added the discomforts and insecurities of such a life, which made it worth men's while to compact with one another in order to create civil society. Macpherson says that the Christian view of man is of a 'mixture of appetite and reason' (241); why should not what Macpherson calls the two views in Locke's account be an attempt to meet both these characteristics, together with the usual mythology about the innocence of the state of nature?

To demonstrate that only property-owners are full and rational members of society, Macpherson quotes Locke on the fact that every man must submit his possessions to the community: but this surely does not mean 'only those who have property to submit can be full members'. If I have no property, I submit potential property, or just my begging bowl. I am not allowed to keep my property outside the bounds of state authority; but this does not imply that rights directly depend upon submitting some kind of possessions as if in payment for them – a doctrine of 'No possessions, no rights.' Macpherson interprets the notorious notion of tacit consent simply as a method of subjecting the passive non-possessors to the active possessors: if this is generalised, which society, save that of Rousseau's ideal rustics, would escape this fate?

But Macpherson is severely consistent. When he comes to the problem of the incompatibility of majority rule with indefeasible natural rights of the individual that may not be set aside by any man or institution, Macpherson argues that if the majority are by definition all property-owners, there can be no danger to individual property, and no man will then be taxed safe by his own consent; for both he and his representatives, bound by class solidarity, will be equally anxious to preserve the rights of property. But Locke does say 'every Man, by [tacitly] consenting with others to make one Body Politick […], puts himself under an Obligation […], to submit to the determination of the *majority*' etc.[39] That is to say, he

[39] TT 2. 8. 97.

equates the 'tacit' consent of the many with the actual consent of the few (their representatives). This may be an improper use of the word 'consent', and even a dangerous one, but it seems more in harmony with Locke's normal usage than Macpherson's belief that the conception of government as the committee of **[467]** the ruling class is not merely a realistic account of the facts but the central notion of Locke's (implicit? or unconscious?) outlook.

To defend, as I am attempting to do, traditional interpretations against new and interesting and brilliantly constructed ones is a tedious business: but this last is perhaps the least plausible thesis in a good and important book. Thus Macpherson supposes that it is only the rational property-owners who realise that submission to the decision of the majority is a rational step: since without it there will be no adequate protection of property. But why should this be confined to property, and not include life and liberty too? Everything except religious freedom, on which Locke is very uncompromising? It is this utilitarian proposition that lies at the base of the routine democratic theory of majority rule. It may be full of flaws, majorities may be tyrannous, the notion of human rights may be left insuffciently articulated or protected; but it is difficult to see how, e.g., a Communist society would dispense with it. If it is not to be governed by a majority, then by whom? Only by a Jacobin unanimity: is it this that Locke failed to perceive?

For Macpherson, Locke is the prophet of what Mussolini was later to call plutodemocracies (or was it demoplutocracies?),[40] and, indeed, he plainly attaches great importance to ownership of property, far greater than to wealth as such. But there is no less present in him the notion that an individual's rights – not merely property rights, but rights to life and elementary liberties – are in danger from all governments as such. When these governments represent genuine majorities in a classless society, this danger is regarded as non-existent – logically ruled out – by Marxists; but on other assumptions, Christian, for example, or Freudian, the danger is not so easily spirited away. And Macpherson himself, although

[40] [It was the latter, though the former is also used in the literature.]

he does not allow that such passions as greed or ambition may not be due solely to the market society, and find other, no less destructive, channels even when it has been abolished, does ask in his last pages whether 'liberal institutions and values' (276) can be preserved in a society where men are truly equal at last.

It seems unhistorical not to allow that Locke may have been troubled by similar problems. For Macpherson, the individuals whose rights Locke wishes to defend are the pike, not the carp, the owners, not the owned. 'A market society generates class differentiation in effective rights and rationality, yet requires for its justification a postulate of equal natural rights and rationality. Locke recognised the differentiation in his own society, and read it **[468]** back into natural society' (269). This is Locke's alleged contradiction. But why did the market society require equal rights for its justification? Why not unequal rights based on differences in capacity to acquire? Why should society conceived as a Joint Stock Company need the assumption of equal rights? Equal rights to trade, perhaps, to accumulation; but not necessarily equality under the law in other respects.

Thrasymachus would have recognised the need for equal opportunity for the strong and the weak, so that the strong might organise and dominate the weak. This may be unjust or morally repulsive, but it is an assumption that in other contexts, and for a variety of reasons, other thinkers – Burke, for example, or Maistre – made very firmly. Certainly there is an incompatibility between the unbridled freedom of the individual and the notion of equal rights, and no solution of this dilemma has thus far proved either morally or practically satisfactory. This is an insight with which Locke may be credited, but it is a conclusion far tamer than anything which Macpherson wishes to advance. He accuses Locke of reading back the characteristics of civilised society into natural society; but perhaps it is Macpherson who is reading back nineteenth-century conflicts into the seventeenth century.

In this over-long review, largely devoted to specific criticisms, I have, despite acknowledging Macpherson's philosophical and literary gifts, perhaps not made it sufficiently clear that the book is

singularly rich in ideas, with most of which I have been unable to deal; and I should like to say again that it is a work of exceptional originality, imagination and intellectual power, from which, despite all my disagreements – and I cannot accept its central theses – I have profited greatly and which I greatly admire. It is a superb piece of work. The sensation of suddenly feeling that one is sailing in intellectually first-class waters is wonderfully exhilarating. I should like to salute a work which by its critical standards and the quality of its writing has lifted the history of political ideas treated from a Marxist point of view to a level seldom attained in the West, at any rate in our time.

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