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The Treatment of Thomas Hobbes in Twentieth Century Political Thought.

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The treatment of Thomas Hobbes in twentieth-century political thought

Cole, David Randolph, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1989

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THE TREATMENT OF THOMAS HOBBES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLITICAL THOUGHT

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by

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B. A., Louisiana State University, 1980
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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the political upheavals of the twentieth century, political theorists have rediscovered the unsentimental teachings of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was a philosopher of order during a period of disorder—the English Civil War. He taught that sovereignty ought to be absolute and unchallengeable, so that order might be preserved. In particular, the sovereign ought to have the power to approve or disapprove political and religious teachings— in effect, to establish an unchallengeable "civil theology." Hobbesian sovereignty might preserve order, but it would also cut off political discussion and debate in summary fashion. In the twentieth century, political theorists have suspected that ideologies such as those of free-market capitalism, secularism, or the liberal-democratic welfare state might be among the components of a contemporary "civil theology." This dissertation will examine the thought of Hobbes, but will focus special attention on those political theorists for whom he has held the most fascination in the twentieth century. The interpretations offered by Leo Strauss, Michael Oakeshott, and C. B. Macpherson, all of whom have written extensively on Hobbes, will be examined in detail. The brief but perceptive contributions offered by Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin will be considered, as will the interpretation of Thomas Spragens, a political theorist of the postwar
generation who has attempted to synthesize some of the main currents in twentieth-century philosophical and political thought.

To an extent, the thought of all six of the thinkers considered here bears upon the question of which doctrine— that of laissez-faire capitalism or of the liberal-democratic welfare state—most closely resembles a sinister "neo-Hobbesian" dogma which threatens to circumscribe political debate. This issue will be the subject of some concluding remarks, which will draw upon the contributions of the six twentieth-century thinkers while invoking the contrast between Hobbes and Aristotle as a central theme.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The recent commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of Hobbes's birth provides an appropriate occasion for an examination of the treatment of the author of *Leviathan* in contemporary political thought. Hobbes's presence in twentieth-century political theory is ubiquitous; almost every major thinker comments on him to some extent. He was a thinker who attempted to bring order out of disorder; contemporary disorders, ranging from the totalitarian disasters of our century to the anomie of urban civilization, have led reflective people back to his thought.

Hobbes's stark, unsentimental political thought has attracted the attention of a number of commentators in the post-World War II era; despite the ready availability of the materials, neither the treatments of Hobbes offered by these thinkers nor the broader implications of these treatments have been treated systematically heretofore. Hannah Arendt critiqued Hobbes in a brief section of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as did Eric Voegelin in *The New Science of Politics*. More extensive treatments are offered by Leo Strauss (in *Natural Right and History, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, and elsewhere), Michael Oakeshott (including his introduction to *Leviathan* and the essay "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes"), and C. B. Macpherson (especially in *The Political Theory of Possessive*
Individualism). More recently, Thomas Spragens has offered a critique of "scientistic" or "technocratic" tendencies in modern politics in works such as The Irony of Liberal Reason; the culpability of Hobbes for such developments is considered in Spragens's The Politics of Motion.

It seems plausible to suggest that twentieth-century history has made Hobbes's political thought salient. The scenes of street fighting in prewar Germany between Nazi and Communist partisans, precursors of much worse things to come, bring to mind both the Hobbesian "war of all against all" and the near-anarchical situation of the English Civil War which eventually confronted Hobbes. For severe political upheavals, Hobbes prescribed a severe solution: the institution of a sovereign power to which no opposition would be allowed. This new kind of sovereign would dictate a "civil theology" for society; to allow dissent from this "civil theology" would only introduce discord. This feature of Hobbes's theory--its attribution to the sovereign of authority to judge of the admissibility of doctrines and opinions, political, religious, or otherwise--represents the central theme of this study. Some contemporary observers note the growth of the modern state and wonder whether it has not taken on a Hobbesian character already. Direct political coercion is not necessary for a state to take on such a Hobbesian character, according to several of the thinkers to be considered; such a "neo-Hobbesianism" could
be the result of the uncritical acceptance of a "conventional wisdom" which becomes a background assumption underlying all political discussion. Which modern political tendency represents such a new "civil theology"? Is capitalism the new dogma from which no dissent is tolerated? Or, is the new dogma not capitalism but rather "secular humanism" or the doctrines of welfare-state liberalism? These are among the considerations that explain the fascination Hobbes has held for interpreters of the modern political predicament.

In addition to the intrinsic value of a consideration of Hobbes's fascinating albeit sobering political thought, his example provides a convenient connecting theme for the study of a set of issues that have concerned the postwar thinkers discussed herein. Besides the aforementioned theme of the Hobbesian sovereign as political censor, a subsidiary theme for this work will be the contrast between Hobbes and Aristotle. The gap between these two thinkers provides a convenient evaluative criterion. This contrast is relevant to the somewhat related questions of the legitimacy of the range of activities of the contemporary state and of the centrality of the political to human nature.

An initial concern will be a consideration of the life and teachings of Hobbes himself. His attraction to a metaphysics patterned after a mechanical, Galilean physical science, and the influence of this mechanistic tendency on
his political thought (an issue that has been the subject of lively debate among scholars) will be considered. A connecting thread can be detected, joining a mechanistic metaphysics to a materialistic account of sensation, implying the Hobbesian "state of nature" in which human beings collide with each other like molecules in a test tube unless they make a covenant with a sovereign protector. The technical minutiae of Hobbes's doctrine are not, however, as central to this study as is the historical setting in which Hobbes found himself. As his career developed contemporaneously with a period of political upheaval in England, Hobbes developed a low regard for popular government, an aversion which was reinforced by the rantings of the sectarian extremists which grew louder with the approach of civil war. His low opinion of democracy may have resulted from his early translation of Thucydides' histories, in which a decadent demos hastened the decline of Athens.

Leo Strauss will be the first twentieth-century thinker whose reflections on Hobbes will be considered. Strauss views Hobbes as something of a culprit; he sees Hobbes, along with Machiavelli, as the originator of the modern doctrine of natural right, which represents a retrogression from classic natural right. Modern natural right begins with the individual and his passions, and proceeds to affirm the rights of the individual against the state and against
his fellows; classic natural right begins with the state and the citizen's duty to it, along with the state's role in inculcating virtuous habits in the citizenry. Modern natural right is reductionistic and egalitarian, while classic natural right acknowledges the natural distinctions to be found among men. Strauss acknowledges that Hobbes's thought tended to justify a bourgeois ethic of capitalistic acquisition; nevertheless, he sees the Hobbesian theory as of a piece with the socialist and welfare-state tendencies of the twentieth century. Hobbesian thought, together with modern liberalism and socialism, is seen as leading to the establishment of a "universal and homogeneous state," dedicated to the enlightenment and prosperity of all, which affirms an equal entitlement as a matter of right (rather than the right of the superior to rule the inferior), and which takes on a Hobbesian character as it homogenizes away all cultural distinctiveness and particularity.

Of all the twentieth-century thinkers, Michael Oakeshott probably takes the most favorable view of Hobbes. Oakeshott thinks that Hobbes has captured the problematical character of man's existence as a social being. The Hobbesian solution to the political problem carries special significance for Oakeshott as a thinker who argues that the scope of political activity ought to be kept strictly limited. Central to Oakeshott's thought is the notion of civitas or civil association as a political ideal.
According to this conception, the state exists only to stipulate conditions to be observed by individuals (as well as groups below the level of the state) in their pursuit of whatever ends they choose. Opposed to the conception of societas or civitas is that of universitas, in which the state enlists all its subjects in the pursuit of a single substantive purpose. Oakeshott is attracted to the Hobbesian doctrine of sovereignty because, whatever its shortcomings, it would at least prevent political "busybodies" from enrolling everyone in their favorite projects; everyone minds his own business in the Hobbesian state. Hobbes therefore offers, if not a version of "secular salvation," at least a "second-best deliverance" from the human predicament with respect to politics.

C. B. Macpherson implicates Hobbes in his critique of "possessive market society." Macpherson sees the thought of Hobbes, along with that of Locke, as a component in the self-justificatory process of our "possessive individualist" society. Macpherson concedes a tentative validity to Hobbes, but he emphasizes that some of Hobbes's assumptions do not hold for man in general, but instead are appropriate only within possessive market society. For Hobbes's theory to operate, social assumptions, not just metaphysical or psychological ones, are required. Consider, for instance, Hobbes's conception of power as a "zero-sum game," in which power is a matter of order or rank, and one man's power
implies a reduction in the power of others. This assumption is valid for possessive market society, but it would not hold for the traditional society that preceded it, argues Macpherson. Neither would it hold for the genuine participatory democracy for which Macpherson holds out hope. Such a participatory democracy would better reflect the whole of man's natural capacities, he claims. He sees hope for the emergence of a more full-fledged democracy in the ideologies of some of the "Third World" nations.

Concise but perceptive critiques of Hobbes have been offered by both Arendt and Voegelin. For Arendt, the crisis of modernity consists in large part of the atrophy of the political; the thought of Hobbes is held to represent the culmination of this development. In the Hobbesian state, acquiescence in the commands of the sovereign exhausts the political realm; wide-ranging political discussion and engagement throughout society would be superfluous or worse. From Arendt's perspective, the extent to which a thinker represents an antidote to the crisis of modernity depends on his affirmation or denial of the Aristotelian dictum that man is a political animal. For Voegelin, on the other hand, civilizational crisis is not so much political as it is spiritual. A central concern for Voegelin is the relation between religion and politics in the Hobbesian state. Although Hobbes takes considerable pains to emphasize that his doctrine is not inconsistent with the existence of a
Christian commonwealth, he holds that the sovereign must be the final arbiter of the admissibility of religious teachings; the superiority of sources outside the political realm, such as revelation, is denied. Hobbes has tried to obscure the fact that his political doctrine must claim a validity superior to that of Christianity; this prompts Voegelin to categorize the doctrine as yet another symptom of "modern gnosticism."

The final twentieth-century thinker to be considered is Thomas Spragens, who has attempted to interpret and synthesize a wide range of intellectual developments in fields ranging from political theory to philosophy of science to the natural sciences themselves. Spragens has criticized a tendency toward a "scientistic" or "technocratic" practice of politics, in which rulers or their appointees view the citizenry as a collection of experimental subjects to be manipulated. The thinking of Hobbes, whom Spragens has treated at length in his *The Politics of Motion*, must be held culpable for contributing to such "technocratic" tendencies, he argues. Furthermore, Spragens compares the "end-less," purposeless universe of Hobbes unfavorably to an Aristotelian world-view which sees all beings, including participants in politics, as directed toward an end in their activities.

Are the activities of the contemporary state legitimate, and is the realm of politics central to human
nature? As was suggested above, such questions have been highly contested by postwar political theorists. The Aristotelian purposiveness described by Spragens would seem to suggest affirmative answers to these queries. It would seem to be a fair conclusion that Macpherson and Arendt would give qualified affirmative answers as well, while Strauss, Oakeshott, and Voegelin would each answer with a qualified negative. The point of view to be pursued here is that insufficient attention has been given to the "neo-Hobbesian" character of the laissez-faire ideology, to which Strauss would appear at least to give aid and comfort with his critique of the "universal and homogeneous state." For example, some attention is devoted below to the affinity felt for Hobbes (and even for the ancient Sophists) as well as the hostility to both Plato and Aristotle professed by some of those who have taken the lead in a movement to revive the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century (see chapter 8 below, especially 288-92). Nevertheless, it is to be conceded that the left-leaning "vanguard" politics contemplated by Macpherson (and criticized trenchantly by Spragens) may take on the character of the sinister drive to build the "universal and homogeneous state" described by Strauss.
CHAPTER 2: ERECTING LEVIATHAN--THE THOUGHT OF THOMAS HOBBES IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

With his proposal for an absolutist sovereign, Thomas Hobbes presented a stark and unsentimental solution to the problem of political upheaval and disorder. The parallels between the political divisions within seventeenth-century England and the global ideological upheavals of more recent times have fascinated twentieth-century political theorists; several thinkers have taken Hobbes's views as a motif. A recurring tendency has been the identification of one political doctrine or another as a pernicious "neo-Hobbesianism," an attempt to install certain crucial background assumptions as a "conventional wisdom" that effectively becomes removed from political debate. Tendencies ranging from capitalism to secularism have been treated as having attained the status of "neo-Hobbesianisms."

Leo Strauss identified Hobbes, along with his predecessor Machiavelli, as the initiator of the modern break with the classical political tradition; he argued that Hobbes had lowered the sights of political philosophy by placing right prior to law and passion prior to reason. Strauss claimed that, by positing an equal natural right prior to obligation, Hobbes had opened the way for the building of a tyrannical "universal and homogeneous state" that would be premised on the satisfaction of men's
"passions," their physical wants and needs. C. B. Macpherson devotes about half of his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* to Hobbes; he believes that Hobbes's conception of power and his view of the individual as the owner of his capacity to labor represent ideological assumptions favorable to the development of modern capitalism. He holds that such Hobbesian conceptions have contributed to the passive "consumer society" of modernity, in which the capacities for activity required for genuine participatory democracy have atrophied.

If the political disputes attendant to the English Civil War represented a precursor to the ideological upheavals of the twentieth century, then Hobbes's thought can be taken to suggest a solution to current difficulties. However, recent theorists often have taken Hobbes's proposals more as a symptom of modernity than as a solution to modern difficulties. Eric Voegelin pointed out that Hobbes's scheme would require a pervasive censorship; while other peaceable civilizational pursuits would be allowed, there would be no freedom of political debate, and public discussion would be strictly regulated.¹ For Hannah Arendt, who emphasized the centrality of the capacity for speech and discussion to the nature of man in works such as *The Human Condition*, modern upheavals are analyzed as consequences of

the atrophy of the political; the Hobbesian proposal amounts to a proposal to aggravate this very atrophy.

Throughout his career, Hobbes's thought developed in a context of intellectual and political upheaval. Under such influences, he developed a political philosophy which included an insistence on the absolute nature of political authority. Since men are passionate creatures whose desires for the objects of their passions overwhelm their desire for peace, they must, to avoid annihilating each other, make a covenant to establish an absolute sovereign whose determinations may not be resisted. The powers of this sovereign are to include the power to regulate the admissibility of political and religious doctrines. It was this absolutism which several twentieth-century political theorists have seen as threatening the integrity of the political.

Dissenting from this view of Hobbes's thought is Michael Oakeshott, who has commented on Hobbes in several books and essays, including an introduction to Leviathan. Oakeshott's view is that politics ought to be a strictly limited activity, concerned with enforcing the rule of law among persons who prefer to choose their own pursuits rather than having overarching purposes imposed from without. According to Oakeshott, Hobbes is a salutary thinker because he believes in keeping politics from getting out of control.
Oakeshott identifies Hobbes as the philosopher of "Will and Artifice"; he accepts Hobbes's account of politics as an artificial construction, an exacting undertaking to be pursued within the confines of carefully specified constraints. Thomas Spragens, the youngest of the political theorists to be considered herein, objects to this Hobbesian artificiality. In his monograph on Hobbes, The Politics of Motion, he compares an "end-less" Hobbesian metaphysics unfavorably to an Aristotelian conception of purposeful human striving (politics included) within a universe in which beings naturally seek the fulfillment of their purposes or ends. He interprets the purposelessness of the Hobbesian universe as part of a reductionistic tendency in politics and philosophy which he has criticized in works such as The Irony of Liberal Reason.

**Hobbes: His Life and Career**

"Fear and I were born twins," Hobbes would say, referring to the fact of his premature birth upon his mother's hearing of the approach of the Spanish Armada. Indeed, vestiges of his life experiences, including political events and intellectual encounters, are infused into Hobbes's thought.²

Born in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, in 1588, Hobbes entered Magdalen Hall, Oxford, at age fourteen. Peters notes that he appears to have been bored by his Aristotelian tutors, although he was a proficient student. This is the first indication of a persistent aversion to Aristotelian thought, including scholasticism, which he saw as providing an intellectual pretext for "seditious" doctrines that threatened civil authority. He came of age at a time when the traditional philosophical, political, and religious wisdom of the past, especially that of Aristotle, was coming to be questioned.

William Cavendish, Earl of Devonshire, hired Hobbes as tutor to his young son in 1608. The position gave Hobbes the opportunity to travel in cosmopolitan European circles; it was the beginning of a lifetime of polemical, philosophical, and literary activity. Trips to continental Europe would be crucial events in Hobbes's career. Peters notes that he had "encountered the growing dissatisfaction with the Aristotelian system of thought when he visited the continent in 1610." Here he encountered reports of the work of Kepler and Galileo, and his contempt for Aristotelianism was confirmed. Peters remarks further that Hobbes's anti-Aristotelianism probably was reinforced by his acquaintance with Francis Bacon, a pioneer in the inductive method of modern science, from Bacon's retirement in 1621 until his death in 1626.
Hobbes's first scholarly endeavor was a translation of Thucydides' history into English, published in 1628. His career as a philosopher did not begin until his second Continental journey, which commenced the following year. It was during this trip that Hobbes became intrigued with Euclidean geometry as a paradigm for all knowledge, scientific as well as philosophical. It was on his third Continental trip (1634-1637) that Hobbes made a pilgrimage to Italy to visit Galileo. His encounter with Galileo prompted the development of a complete conceptual scheme. The idea of motion as first cause would provide the paradigm under which both natural and moral philosophy could be subsumed. His philosophical interests always went beyond the political. His first philosophical work, the Little Treatise, provided a mechanistic explanation of sensation. Jones contends that Galilean natural philosophy and the experience of the English Civil War are the two decisive influences on Hobbes's thought.  

Upon his return to England, Hobbes found the country in a state of political turmoil, prompting him to shift his attention to political philosophy. His first political work, Elements of Law, was published in manuscript form in 1640. Hobbes's political thought emphasized the absolute authority of the sovereign; ironically, throughout his

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career he had to consider whether his life was in danger because his doctrines might be offensive to the regime. In 1640, after the seating of the Long Parliament, he fled to Paris in fear for his life. There he completed several philosophical works under the patronage of the Abbé Mersenne, including the Latin version of De Cive, which represented an expansion of the second part of Elements of Law.

With an increasing number of Royalist émigrés present in Paris, Hobbes soon found himself drawn into political controversy again. By 1651 he felt it safe to return to England, having already prepared Leviathan, a forceful statement of his political views, for publication. Skinner notes that all of Hobbes's major political works appeared in English in rapid succession from 1650 to 1651: Elements of Law was published for the first time, in two sections which appeared three months apart, in 1650, followed the next year by an English translation of De Cive (under the title Philosophical Rudiments) and Leviathan.4

Hobbes lived out the remainder of his life in England, remaining active as a scholar until his death in 1679 in Hardwick, Derbyshire. The final decades of his career were not without controversy. Warrender notes that the critical

reaction to Hobbes was ambivalent; there was a tendency to condemn his theories while following them in practice, and he was always hounded by an army of opponents. Both Oxford and the Vatican prohibited his books. Hill notes that Hobbes withheld publication of Behemoth, his account of the history of the English Civil War, because he was afraid that the bishops would have him burned. A pirated edition appeared upon the lifting of censorship in 1679; the official version was published only posthumously, in 1682. Hobbes's views potentially were as offensive to Anglican divines as to Presbyterians or "Papists."  

**Hobbes and Thucydides**

It was noted above that Hobbes inaugurated his scholarly career with a translation into English of Thucydides' history. It was his view that the purpose of history was to instruct, as he observed in a brief note "To the Readers," inserted at the outset of the translation: "For the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future: there is not extant any other (merely human) that doth more naturally and fully perform it, than

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this of my author." For Hobbes, Thucydides' account of the turmoils of the Greek democracy represented a confirmation of his own reservations about democratic government and a warning of the upheaval which England was to experience during the seventeenth century. Schlatter argues that Hobbes's encounter with Thucydides was responsible for the crystallization of an attitude toward politics that would manifest itself through all his political works. "In his autobiography Hobbes tells us that from his first encounter with the classics Thucydides had been his favorite author because Thucydides had taught him that democracy was absurd and that one man is wiser than a multitude," he observes. Thucydides disliked democracy; Hobbes, in Behemoth, cited democratic theory as one of the causes of the English Civil War.

Thucydides' history deals with the Great Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.). This war marked the temporary end of Athenian democracy and the permanent end of Athenian imperial preponderance. The belligerent policy of the demagogic ruler Alcibiades, in pursuit of imperial domination over Sparta in the Peloponnese, contributed to the downfall of Athens. Under his leadership the Athenians

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became notorious for atrocities such as the slaughter of the city of Melos. An overambitious expedition against Sicily led to Athenian military humiliation. Soon after the expedition departed, Alcibiades defected to Sparta; subsequently the Athenian fleet and army were nearly destroyed, the city was reduced to near-starvation, and the Spartan naval commander Lysander dictated humiliating terms.

"So that, though overcome by three the greatest things, honour, fear, and profit [emphasis added], we have both accepted the dominion delivered us and refuse again to surrender it, we have therein done nothing to be wondered at nor beside the manner of men." So spoke the Athenian ambassadors to the Lacedaemonians in Book I of Thucydides' history, in just one of several passages of which echoes can be heard within the political philosophy of Hobbes. The great theorist of absolutism appears to have borrowed many of his notions about political man from this account of the Great Peloponnesian War. For instance, in a continuation of the passage above, the Athenian ambassadors note that they, the Athenians, had "been reputed contentious" by the Corinthians. In fact, however, such men as the Corinthians, "if they lose anything which they think they should not, either by sentence or by the power of our government, they are not thankful for the much they retain but take in worse part the little they forego, than if at first, laying law aside, we had openly taken their goods by violence. For in
this kind also they themselves cannot deny, but the weaker must give way to the stronger [emphasis added]."

As the above remark reveals, Hobbes took a starkly unsentimental view of claims of natural right. In his thought, statements about good and evil had no objective validity other than as statements of the preferences of the speaker; natural right was simply the right of the conqueror. Thucydides presented a dramatization of such a view in book 5 of the history, in the so-called Melian Dialogue. With Athenian forces bearing down on the city of Melos, the Athenian commanders met with the Melian magistrates in an attempt to obtain a surrender. The Melians pleaded that theirs was a neutral city that had no quarrel with Athens, but the Athenians would have none of it. "But out of those things which we both of us really do think, let us go through with that which is feasible; both you and we knowing, that in human disputation justice is then only agreed on when the necessity is equal; whereas they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get." The Athenians' views on honor and justice were similar to those that Hobbes would put forward in various works; men "hold

for honourable that which pleaseth, and for just that which profiteth.®

As has been remarked, one of the strongest influences of Thucydides upon Hobbes was his dismissive opinion of democracy. Thucydides provided a lively account of the tendencies of the multitude in council in book 3 of the history, in a speech which he attributed to Cleon, a predecessor of Alcibiades as Athenian ruler, in an appearance before the Athenian assembly. The reversal of a prior decision to destroy the conquered city of Mytilene irritated Cleon, and he upbraided the gathering.

You are excellent men for one to deceive with a speech of a new strain, but backward to follow any tried advice; slaves to strange things, contemners of things usual. You would every one chiefly give the best advice, but if you cannot, then you will contradict those that do. You would not be thought to come after with your opinion; but rather if any thing be acutely spoken, to applaud it first, and to appear ready apprehenders of what is spoken, even before it be out; but slow to preconceive the sequel of the same. You would hear, as one may say, somewhat else than what our life is conversant in; and yet you sufficiently understand not that that is before your eyes. And to speak plainly, overcome with the delight of the ear, you are rather like unto spectators sitting to hear the contentions of sophisters, than to men that deliberate of the state of a commonwealth.

®Hobbes, English Works 9:99-104. See also Rudiments (English Works 4:32): "Every man, for his own part, calleth that which pleaseth, and is delightful to himself, good; and that evil which displeaseth him"; see also Leviathan (English Works 3:41): "But whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good: and the object of his hate and aversion, evil; and of his contempt, vile and inconsiderable."
These were points well taken by a theorist who would go on to argue in Leviathan "that a monarch cannot disagree with himself, out of envy, or interest; but an assembly may; and that to such a height, as may produce a civil war."\(^9\)

Hobbes took the case of the Sicilian expedition as a paradigmatic example of the dissolution into which a democratic regime could fall easily. Thucydides noted at the outset of book 8 that when news of the defeat came, the Athenians "were mightily offended with the orators that furthered the voyage: as if they themselves had never decreed it." The demagogic rhetoric of the ambitious Alcibiades had swayed them into approving the foolhardy expedition. Hobbes feared that this episode in ancient Greek history might represent a precursor of the tumultuous period that England appeared to be entering. Fools and demagogues were coming to the fore as the nation was becoming divided over questions of religious orthodoxy and constitutional legitimacy.\(^10\)

**The Contemporary Context: The English Civil War**

The upheavals of seventeenth-century England would prompt Hobbes to publish his reflections on politics. The

\(^9\)Hobbes, *English Works* 8:302-03, 3:175. See also *Rudiments* (*English Works* 2:133): "Wherefore some Nero or Caligula reigning, no men can undeservedly suffer but such as are known to him, namely, courtiers. . . . But in a popular dominion there may be as many Neros as there are oratours who sooth the people."

religious and ideological divisions of the English Civil War, while not pursued with the violence that would attend more recent revolutions, may be seen as harbingers of the catastrophes of the twentieth century's "Age of Ideology." The period was one of fundamental change in English life. If a total democratic revolution was not accomplished, there was at least a revolution in thought that was a prerequisite for subsequent democratization. According to Hill, the alteration amounted to a civilizational change, in which England went from being a medieval to a modern state. Over the course of the period, claims of Divine Right lost their power. Politics became a rational pursuit, discussed in terms of utility and common sense. Astrology and alchemy, held in high repute even by educated men at the beginning of the century, had fallen into disrepute by the end. A scientific, atomistic world-view gained ground during the period at the expense of a theistic, hierarchical view. The changes manifested themselves in all aspects of intellectual life, including politics, economics, religion, literature, and the arts. According to Morrill, the role played by religious divisions in the upheavals of the period prompted a "depoliticized" attitude toward religion by the end of the century. The religious content of English civilization was diluted, so that people were less eager to apply religious claims directly to the political realm. The result was a
move in the direction of a secularized society in which religion was "unthreatening."11

In the controversies that divided seventeenth-century England, religious, political, and economic matters were intertwined. "This impossibility of shutting off 'religious', 'constitutional', and 'economic' causes of the Civil War corresponds to the complexity of life in seventeenth-century England, and to the confusion in the minds of men who lived in it," notes Hill. The immediate precipitant of the conflict was a dispute over the taxes levied by Charles I in order to finance an expensive foreign policy; some scholars interpret the dispute as a clash of conflicting economic interests, in which a rising merchant class objected to being compelled to finance the King's ambitions. However, questions of fiscal and military policy were overlaid with a controversy over constitutional legitimacy. Were certain levies to be legitimated on the basis of royal prerogative, or had Parliament the right of approval over any proposed charges? Furthermore, all these matters took on a religious coloration. The Crown's foreign entanglements, along with certain activities at court, raised suspicions that the King and his supporters and courtiers were "closet Papists." There developed a tendency

for divisions on political and constitutional matters to run along religious lines.\textsuperscript{12}

In religion, a tendency toward sectarian fragmentation marked the period. Unable to count on the support of all economic and social classes, the Crown had to grant a measure of religious toleration as a matter of political necessity. Toleration could be a matter of degree; members of a sect or denomination might be allowed to practice their religion openly while being denied the right to hold office or participate in politics. The matter of a religious settlement, of exactly what beliefs would be tolerated or admitted into public life, became a central political issue. Several sects had political claims to make. Hobbes cited Papists, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, and members of "divers other sects" as being among the "seducers" of the people. The preaching of revolutionary and democratic doctrines from the pulpits, in opposition to strict obedience to sovereign authority, alarmed Hobbes. Hill characterizes the religious atmosphere as one of a "riot of competing sects" tending to anarchy. Most extreme were the Fifth Monarchists, "who sought in the sixteen-fifties to bring about by military revolt the long predicted reign of Christ. . . . The duty of the elect was to eliminate hindrances to Christ's rule on earth. This often, in political terms, became 'overturn, overturn, overturn', a

\textsuperscript{12}Hill, \textit{Century of Revolution}, 86.
doctrine of anarchism." For all their extremism, the Fifth Monarchists represented only a more radical version of a more widely disseminated Puritan millenarian moral compulsion. To Hobbes, these developments represented nothing less than the first stages of an anarchistic political catastrophe.\textsuperscript{13}

Upon taking the throne in 1625, King Charles felt compelled to convene a succession of Parliaments in order to secure financing for the military (especially naval) buildup that his foreign policies required. The legislature was thus given a pretext for claiming a more prominent constitutional position; controversy over the exact nature of this position finally led to civil war. Complicating the King's position was the suspiciously Anglo-Catholic character of the "Laudian counterreformation" initiated by Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud. After King and Parliament exchanged a series of ultimatums, the last coming in 1642, the war was on. Opposition to royal authority coalesced under the leadership of the New Model Army, commanded by Oliver Cromwell. Charles was captured and eventually executed on January 30, 1649. There followed a period of "Commonwealth" or republican government in which Cromwell held effective executive power. However, a succession of Parliaments proved too radical for Cromwell,

and he dismissed them; he finally proclaimed a
"Protectorate" government with himself holding the office of
lord protector. Upon Cromwell's death in 1658 his son
Richard succeeded him, but the younger Cromwell resigned the
following year. An alliance of royalists invited Charles
II, son of the executed king, to return to England; he
assumed the throne in 1660, completing the Restoration.

The "War between the Pens"

In Behemoth, Hobbes observes that "a kind of war
between the pens of the Parliament and those of the
secretaries, and other able men that were with the King"
attended the English Civil War. The conflict often took on
the character not so much of a military engagement as of an
exchange of propagandistic salvoes between parties seeking
to establish the legitimacy of their stances with the
public. The periodic issuance of "declarations" and
"remonstrances" may illustrate that partisan divisions had
not yet reached the extremes associated with twentieth-
century ideologies. Opponents who attempted to engage each
other in debate must have felt that they still shared at
least some common ground. In any case, a look at some of
the political manifestoes of the period should prove
illustrative of what was at issue during the period.

Many of these manifestoes take the form of claims made against the sovereign on behalf of Parliament or the people. The earliest one of importance was the Petition of Right, issued to the King by Parliament as constitutional conflict over taxation was coming to a head. The Petition was an expression of several grievances that would be heard again in the following century, during the American Revolution, including taxation without consent, imprisonment without cause, and billeting of soldiers in private homes; protections against some of these abuses would be enacted into the United States Constitution under the Bill of Rights. The King's acceptance of the Petition represented a crack in the edifice of absolute sovereignty.

After 1640, as civil war loomed, the rate of issuance of manifestoes accelerated. The Grand Remonstrance of 1641 received only a slim majority in Parliament, reflecting a cleavage between the incipient Presbyterian and Independent parties; it addressed religious issues. The Remonstrance asserted a Parliamentary right of approval over government advisors, and it called for an international synod (to involve bishops from both England and Scotland) to address the question of a religious settlement. (If the Petition of Right anticipates the United States Constitution, then the Remonstrance, with its list of political and religious grievances, may be taken as anticipating Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.) The following year, with war
approaching. Parliament issued an ultimatum to the King in the form of the Nineteen Propositions, which made demands similar to those of the Remonstrance. The King issued a surprisingly moderate reply to the Nineteen Propositions, invoking not absolutism but a "mixed" theory of government that included King, Lords, and Commons. Perhaps this was an indication of how precarious his position had become.

By 1647, with the King in military custody, the New Model Army proposed a new constitution for England. The document that the army drew up, the Agreement of the People, anticipated the United States Constitution in some important respects. It called for popular sovereignty, with the legislature to hold power as a public trust. The people held certain civil and religious rights in reserve from government, the document declared. The Agreement reflected the influence of the radical Leveller party, some of whom wanted to extend suffrage to the whole populace without regard to property.¹⁵

Hobbes must have been alarmed by the character of the "war between the pens," since sovereign authority was on the defensive throughout. It is unlikely that Hobbes could ever

have brought himself to support any claim of right of revolution on the part of subjects against their sovereign. While it has been suggested that Hobbes's views were convenient to the interests of the wealthy, Thomas notes that he viewed the middle classes' opposition to the Crown as foolhardy; their own best interests should have dictated support for sovereign authority. However, as Skinner observes, Hobbes had his political works published during the Commonwealth period, after the King's execution. Skinner characterizes Hobbes as a de facto theorist who affirms the authority of the "powers that be," no matter which party is in power. Justification is to be based not on providence but on the practical needs of the political realm, which requires order rather than disorder. Thus, Hobbes is a theorist of the status quo. The writers of the "war between the pens" have no standing upon which to base their claims as far as he is concerned. He feared those who preached against oppression. Such people tended to make their case before "the common people, who would easily believe themselves oppressed, but never oppressors."\(^{16}\)

**Hobbes's Science of Politics**

The nature of the times prompted Hobbes to publish his reflections on politics. From 1640 to 1651 he presented

three political works which represented a continuing elaboration of a single argument. *Elements of Law*, first circulated in 1640, contained the entire argument in compressed form. Scholars cite its first section in particular as the best statement of Hobbes's psychology and his view of human nature.

The political implications of the argument were not stated explicitly until *De Cive*, which appeared in Latin in 1642 with an English translation (under the title *Philosophical Rudiments*) in 1650. *De Cive* was to have been the third part of a trilogy on the subjects of "body, man, and citizen," with the previous two parts to be entitled *De Corpore* and *De Homine*. The first two sections appeared eventually, but political events compelled Hobbes to complete *De Cive* first. Hobbes hoped that *De Cive* would prove sufficiently congruent with men's political experiences that it could stand alone, without benefit of the other two sections: "Therefore it happens, that what was last in order, is yet come forth first in time. And the rather, because I saw that, grounded on its own principles sufficiently known by experience, it would not stand in need of the former sections."\(^{17}\) Finally, the whole argument was elaborated in the forceful polemical statement of *Leviathan* (1651).

Metaphysics

Hobbes became convinced that the natural science of the Enlightenment, especially Galilean mechanics, could provide the conceptual framework for an encyclopedic account of human knowledge. In the ninth chapter of Leviathan he presents a typology of the sciences which classified physics, mathematics, geometry, and civil and moral philosophy as providing "knowledge of consequences." The natural sciences provide knowledge of "consequences from the accidents of bodies natural"; the moral sciences, "of politic bodies."\(^{18}\)

Since mechanics is the study of matter, the choice of mechanics as the paradigmatic form of scientific knowledge has metaphysical implications. Indeed, the core tenet of Hobbes's metaphysics is that everything that exists is matter, or body; or, at the very least, that no knowledge can be had of that which is not body. Scientific knowledge consists of knowledge of bodies and their motions. Scientific laws describe the behavior of bodies as they collide with each other. All knowledge is knowledge of bodies in motion and of the causal relationships that obtain among bodies as they impact upon each other. Hobbes maintained that even his psychological and social theories were of this nature, although several observers have

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questioned whether his account of man and society is genuinely mechanical.\(^{19}\)

How could Hobbes maintain that men are just like billiard balls? He did it by employing a "resolutive-compositional" method. Complicated phenomena are to be explained by resolving them into their simplest components and then recomposing them. One employs the resolutive method to argue from effects to causes; to move from causes to effects, simply employ the compositional method, which is the converse of the resolutive. In this way, complex phenomena such as man and society can be broken down into their simplest components for scientific purposes. Ultimately, the most complicated phenomena are revealed to be nothing more than aggregations of smaller bodies and their motions.\(^{20}\)

**Nominalism**

Hobbes adhered to *nominalism*, the doctrine that names are the ultimate reality, but that, at the same time, the content of names is completely arbitrary. Hobbes began his version of nominalism with the suggestion that names serve as signs, marks, or "notes of remembrance." Apparently, he believed that names have no meaning apart from that given to them.


them by the community of speakers of a language. He denied that names can be thought of as derived from nature. The names of the animals were "taught by God himself," but even they were "arbitrarily imposed." Over time, names can be found "growing everywhere out of use"; they are "invented and received by men at pleasure." He denied the existence of essences. Even the existence of universal names does not indicate the presence of essences, "there being nothing in the world universal but names; for the things named are every one of them universal and singular." Some names indicate things "truly existent"; so-called "universal" names point to that which is "only feigned." Peters notes that Hobbes could employ the nominalist doctrine most conveniently in polemics. "Negatively he used it to launch polemics against the doctrines of the Schools whose adherence to Aristotelian essences not only, in Hobbes's view, fuddled men's minds with metaphysical vaporings, but were also a positive threat to peace by their encouragement of extra-mundane systems of beliefs and of the superstitions by means of which the priests maintained such a stranglehold on the population."21

Since names have no meaning apart from that which men give to them, the matter of definitions becomes crucial. Men properly place definitions at the "beginning of their

reckoning." Furthermore, scientific error can most often be attributed to those who "begin not their ratiocination from definitions; that is, from settled significations of their words." In the political realm, it will fall to the sovereign to provide the crucial definitions of things political. "Moreover, if a controversy be raised of the accurate and proper signification, that is, the definition of those names or appellations which are commonly used, . . . the determination will belong to the city." In Hobbes's political scheme, the sovereign becomes the "Great Definer." 22

**Human Nature**

Applying a mechanistic paradigm to human psychology, Hobbes sought the causes of sensation. He determined that "the cause of sense, is the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper to each sense," either immediately or mediately. Whether the sensation is of pleasure or of pain is determined by whether the pressure created by the external body helps or hinders "that motion which is called vital," that is, the circulation of the blood through the body. The passion of appetite is associated with pleasant sensations; unpleasant sensations lead not to appetite but to aversion. These passions of appetite and aversion are the determinants of human behavior, according to Hobbes.

Thus, Hobbes held that man is essentially passionate. Man's appetites may be identified with his self-interest, his aversions with fear; self-interest and fear are held by Hobbes to be the basic motivations of human behavior.²³

Hobbes did not shrink from the conclusion that human behavior is completely determined by the play of the passions. Freedom cannot mean freedom from passion; the only relevant sense of freedom is freedom from external constraint. Freedom in this sense is consistent with complete determinism. It follows that there is no such thing as an independent will; "will" is simply the last appetite to manifest itself in deliberation.²⁴

Political disputes are about good and evil in the political realm; Hobbes derived his understanding of the significance of claims about good and evil from his account of sensation. To call something good or evil amounts to nothing more than an expression of human appetite or aversion. "Every man, for his own part, calleth that which pleaseth, and is delightful to himself, good; and that evil which displeaseth him." Good is subjective, not objective; it inheres in men and not in the things that men value, so that the good will vary from person to person. "Nor is

there any such thing as absolute goodness, considered without relation."^{25}

Physically, human beings are roughly equal, argues Hobbes. Some are stronger than others, but with a weapon the weakest could kill the strongest, "since there needeth but little force to the taking away of a man's life." It is in their capacities for passion that men differ most dramatically; the object of one's passion might be material wealth, physical safety, or famous reputation. Respectively, men are driven to seek these objects by competition, diffidence, and glory, which Hobbes calls the "three principal causes of quarrel." While some people will be relatively tranquil, others will be fanatical in the passionate pursuit of the objects of their desires. Self-interest inclines to contentiousness in the pursuit of the objects of our desires; fear inclines us to seek peace, but the tendency to struggle outweighs the inclination to peace unless the balance is manipulated artificially.^{26}

**State of Nature and Right of Nature**

Hobbes conceived of the state of nature as one in which there is no sovereign authority to constrain the passionate pursuit of desire. He spoke of a "right of nature" which is tantamount to a right to what one can get away with. To

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^{26}Hobbes, *English Works* 4:82 (see also 2:6-7); 3:110-112.
have such a "right" means to be compelled, on account of being unable to do otherwise; it is the capacity to do what one cannot help doing. This "right of nature" does not appear to require that others recognize a moral obligation to respect it, as in more conventional interpretations of right; it is an "amoral" conception of right.

Since Hobbes at several points asserted that claims about good and evil are mere expressions of subjective preference, his amoralism has often been taken for granted. However, in Rudiments he did appear to ground his political doctrine on an appeal to experience rather than on his psychological theory; on this basis, some scholars have speculated that Hobbes's political theory is independent of his reductionistic psychology, so that it is consistent with a conventional understanding of moral obligation. This is the so-called "Taylor thesis" of Professor A. E. Taylor. For a time, Hobbes scholarship was dominated by a discussion of this "Taylor thesis," but it has not won universal acceptance. For instance, while Hobbes may have wished to convey the impression that his was a genuinely moral theory, Jones argues that he "never really appeals to anything but utility."27

Hobbes's concept of "right of nature" or "natural right" is not moralized or sentimentalized. In other

theories, government and civilized society are to secure for the individual what is his by right of nature. For Hobbes, on the other hand, the full exercise of men's right of nature would bring not the fulfillment of a civilized condition but its very opposite, a state of war. To overcome this state of war requires the supersession of the right of nature. The right of nature, understood as the right to use absolutely any means to defend oneself in a state of nature, is nothing but a description of that which it would be prudent for one to do in such a state; it might even be psychologically impossible for someone to renounce self-defense in such a state of war. As such, this conception of the right of nature lacks any moral content, although Hobbes's language may sometimes obscure this.

Hobbes's view of law may be contrasted with his view of natural right. While natural right can be seen as a reflection of a compulsion, at least it is a compulsion generated from within the individual, not imposed from without; in this sense, "law is a fetter, right is freedom, and they differ like contraries." This doctrine of law was expounded further in the Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England, a work composed late in Hobbes's career. At issue is whether law partakes essentially of command or of reason. Hobbes's "Philosopher" contends that if the latter is the case, then everyone will be entitled to ratiocinate about law, and the law's ability
to compel will be lost. Thus, law consists essentially of command, or "fetter."  

"It is therefore a right of nature, that every man may preserve his own life and limbs, with all the power he hath." Everyone would be entitled to judge for himself what steps were necessary; the "right of nature" can be reduced to a right of self-defense. Only for the very strongest would the passionate pursuit of desire be unconstrained. For everyone else, Hobbes's most famous formulation would apply: life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Whatever other passions they harbor, there is one that would become predominant for most men—fear, particularly the fear of a violent death.  

Hobbes thought that it would be irrational for men to continue in this state of nature. Even if all they care about is the fulfillment of their desires, men ought to be able to recognize that their desires usually will be frustrated in these circumstances. To observe the laws of "civil society" would be rational. The "catch" is that while men still find themselves in a state of nature, anyone who proclaimed his disinterested adherence to a set of rules would be vulnerable to those willing to take advantage.

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Erecting Leviathan: The Covenant

The law of nature, which demands that men seek peace, requires that the right of nature be set aside. The exercise of the right to self-protection by absolutely any means leads to a state of unceasing war, a state in which no rational man would want to remain. However, left to their own devices, men will remain slaves to their passions, unable to attain the peace that their reason recommends to them. The situation must be weighted artificially to favor peace.

For Hobbes, then, sovereignty was not to be established by an appeal to the right of nature, but by the overcoming of this selfsame right. Once the free exercise of the right of nature obtains, it issues in the warlike state of nature, from which rational men must necessarily escape through the institution of the office of the sovereign. Hobbes was not concerned with whether this state of nature ever really existed. The argument is hypothetical, and the state of nature is a heuristic device. Ultimately, the argument may be seen as a logical exercise which is intended to demonstrate the non-optional character of political obligation. Hobbes held that men ought to behave as though they had had a "right of nature" and then agreed to give it up. It is as though men agreed to combine all their wills into one will; they have agreed to give up their natural right to their sovereign. Men enter not into a contract but
a covenant, a relationship of trust that extends into perpetuity. This arrangement is wholly a work of artifice; men are not political by nature. If men's natural inclinations are given free play, they may kill each other in the pursuit of their desires.  

The Office of the Sovereign and Its Powers

Hobbes was unique in that he invoked a form of social-contract theory not to protect people from absolute political authority but to affirm absolutism itself. The sovereign is an "artificial person"; the covenant establishes an office, which is not to be confused with the "natural person" of those who hold the office. Since the office of sovereign does not exist prior to the covenant, the sovereign is not bound by it; the subjects are obligated to the sovereign, but the converse does not hold. The subjection of the subjects to the sovereign is absolute, hence sovereign authority is absolute. There is no right to rebel, at least none that sovereign authority can affirm; a successful rebellion may be described as such only ex post facto. Furthermore, for the subjects to grant anything less than absolute authority to the sovereign would be irrational, since absolute power is required to enforce the social covenant by means of which a state of war was

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escaped; it is irrational to will an end without willing the means to that end. Since the sovereign represents the multitude, it is as though all the subjects are the authors of all the acts of the sovereign; for the subjects to resist sovereign authority in any way would be self-contradictory, as though they were resisting themselves. The subjects cannot complain of the injustice of sovereign authority, because justice and injustice have no meaning apart from the establishment of sovereign authority and the exercise of sovereign command. Nevertheless, Jones notes that it appears that, at least when sovereign authority is established by institution or agreement rather than acquisition or conquest, men can establish that authority while placing limits on it at the same time.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{The Nature of Power}

In the first instance, Hobbes's notion of power signifies nothing more than possession of the means to attain an end. However, with respect to relations among men, power takes on a coercive aspect; it consists in the ability to compel a subject to act according to the will of the one who compels him, rather than the subject's own will. As such, power is something that is exercised upon other men; the Millian conception of power as one's own capacity for self-development, or the Aristotelian notion of power as

\textsuperscript{31}Jones, \textit{Machiavelli to Bentham}, 117-128.
the actualization of one's undeveloped but potential talents, is lost. A relationship involving power is a "zero-sum game"; the exercise of one person's power is always at someone else's expense. Consider, for instance, Hobbes's statement in *Leviathan*, chapter 10, that "the Value, or WORTH of a man, as is of all other things, his price; ... honour consisteth only in the opinion of power." In estimating each other's power, men are like competitors in a open marketplace. Their estimates of each other's power are constantly fluctuating; they must consider not only everyone's actual power, but everyone's estimate of everyone else's power. Genuine power consists in the margin of one's power over that held by other men; effectively, one is powerless unless one's power is superior to that of others. As long as others seek ever greater power, one must play the "power game" just to preserve one's own position. It is a conception of power that would seem to dictate a ruthlessly competitive society, and it has made Hobbes the target of critiques from the modern political left.\(^{32}\)

Sheldon Wolin, for instance, has criticized Hobbes for holding an oversimplified, excessively negative conception of power. In Hobbes's account of the institution of sovereignty, the subjects agree not to act; they refrain from acting in order to clear a "right of way" for the sovereign. Subjects renounce their natural right and leave

the field of action open to the sovereign. Wolin argues that this conception of political power will turn out to be hollow. "The power to act required only the elimination of hindrances rather than the active enlistment of the private power and support of the citizens. The citizens had simply to stand aside and not interfere. If sovereign power were effective because it induced withdrawal, how could the sovereign ever hope to join his subjects' wills to his in the pursuit of a common endeavor?" Actually, the removal of hindrance was incomplete as long as there remained consolidations of private power in the form of privately held property. Hobbes's sovereign, once established, would still require the active support of private power; to expect the sovereign "to overawe the wealthy by waving the sword" would be unrealistic.33

The Special Problem of Religion: The Battle against the Ministers

Power considerations governed Hobbes's assessment of the political situation of contemporary England, but the source of "private" power with which Hobbes was most concerned was not the economic power identified by Wolin but rather ecclesiastical power. England was riven by challenges to sovereign authority in the name of religion. Sovereign power had to be asserted to preserve the peace.

The situation dramatized the general need for absolute sovereign authority. Whether a single person or an assembly, the sovereign ought to have absolute legislative and judicial power, power to make war and to punish. There may be no appeal from the decisions of the sovereign representative; that would be tantamount to anarchy.

One important power of the unchallengeable sovereign representative is the power to judge what doctrines will be admissible in the commonwealth. Disagreement over doctrines is one of the most frequent occasions for impassioned conflict; to allow it would be to countenance a lapse into something like Hobbes's warlike state of nature. The subjects of the Hobbesian commonwealth cannot be allowed to endanger the public safety by indulging in political debate. "For doctrine repugnant to peace, can no more be true, than peace and concord can be against the law of nature."34

"Doctrines repugnant to peace," religious in derivation, were rampant in the England of the Civil War, in Hobbes's view. He found himself in an awkward and ambiguous position with respect to religion. The English state as understood by most Englishmen was bound up with the established church; the ruler was also the "defender of the faith." Religious faith could be a component of political unity. The seventeenth century showed that faith could contribute to political disruption as well. At the outset

of Behemoth, Hobbes presents a bill of indictments against those responsible for the corruption of the English people; Christian ministers, including "Papists," Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, "Fifth-monarchy men," and ministers of "divers other sects," were at the head of the list.35

Hobbes sought to legitimate the union of temporal and ecclesiastical power in the civil sovereign, so that the declarations of the sovereign would be taken as authoritative on all doctrinal matters. In the seventeenth-century environment he saw that, on the contrary, religious claims were being put forward as competitors for authoritativeness against the civil sovereign. "Our rebels were publicly taught rebellion in the pulpits," cried Hobbes, whereas they should have been taught "the grounds of their duty" instead.36

Chapter 12 of Rudiments and the corresponding chapter 29 of Leviathan include a listing of "seditious opinions" that "tend to the dissolution of a commonwealth." Prominent among these are "that the judgement of good and evil belongs to private Persons," and "that the Supreme Power may be divided." The spread of these seditions corresponded with the proliferation of new religious sects. Puritans and Dissenters were bold enough to go about claiming that they

36Ibid., 343.
had been moved by the spirit of God; it seemed as though everyone felt himself authorized to claim that God was speaking through him. In a climate of religious anarchy, everyone was claiming to be a religious authority, or so it seemed. In secularized language, it seemed that everyone was claiming an absolute right of conscience, such right having priority even over the commands of the civil sovereign. To Hobbes, it looked like a return to the "war of all against all" of his state of nature. Everyone was claiming the authority that properly belonged to the sovereign; if everyone acts like a sovereign, it will be as though no one is sovereign. "Papists" would place the ecclesiastical authority in a Pope who resided outside the realm, creating the potential for a conflict with the temporal authority. Protestant sectaries went beyond this, authorizing everyone to act as a Pope unto himself.37

Ultimately, the source of the sedition was to be found in the theories of the ministers. Unsound, subversive theology could undermine the polity; civil order required control over the pulpits. Of course, theologies were not created ex nihilo. They originated in the seminaries and the universities. Here we find an interesting parallel with contemporary political events. "The Universities have been to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans."

had found a home in academia; most dangerous were the doctrines of scholasticism. Rebellious men were being "furnished with arguments for liberty out of the works of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and out of the histories of Rome and Greece, for their disputation against the necessary power of their sovereigns." Hobbes's advice to a new ruler would be to make the universities the first targets of reform.

The core of rebellion, as you have seen by this, and read of other rebellions, are the Universities; which nevertheless are not to be cast away, but to be better disciplined: that is to say, that the politics there taught be made to be, as true politics should be, such as are fit to make men know, that it is their duty to obey all laws whatsoever that shall by the authority of the King be enacted, till by the same authority they shall be repealed . . . that the King owes his crown to God only, and to no man, ecclesiastic or other; and that the religion they teach there, be a quiet waiting for the coming again of our blessed Savior, and in the mean time a resolution to obey the King's laws, which also are God's laws; to injure no man, to be in charity with all men, to cherish the poor and sick, and to live soberly and free of scandal; without mingling our religion with points of natural philosophy, as freedom of will, incorporeal substance, everlasting nows, ubiquties, hypostases, which the people understand not, nor ever care for. When the Universities shall be thus disciplined, there will come out of them, from time to time, well-principled preachers, and they that are now ill-principled, from time to time fall away.

Thus, Hobbes had not given up all hope for the universities; they could not be dispensed with, no matter what their recent shortcomings.38

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Against the "Papists"

In the absence of the necessary censorship of higher education, Hobbes set out on his own to do the work of an intellectual policeman. He saw the Presbyterians and the "Papists" as the major threats; both gave legitimacy to an authority that could challenge that of the sovereign. The Presbyterians abetted anyone who claimed to be moved by the "spirit of God"; once it is granted that the spiritual inspiration is genuine, any claims made are beyond normal means of evaluation. Pocock remarks: "Hobbes, then, set out to destroy 'enthusiasm,'... a doctrine that must place the authority of prophetic utterance at the disposal of any man who might claim it on grounds that could not be evaluated by his fellows." "Papism" might be a more direct threat; it places the ecclesiastical authority outside the realm, in the person of the Pope. Hobbes could not countenance this. "Which being thus, most manifest it is, that those subjects who believe themselves bound to acquiesce to a foreign authority in those doctrines which are necessary to salvation, do not per se constitute a city, but are the subjects of that foreign power." 39

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The heart of Hobbes's challenge to "Papism" is found in chapter 42 of *Leviathan*, "Of Power Ecclesiastical." Here he controverted the views of the Italian Cardinal Bellarmine, author of a tract defending the temporal power of the Pope. Hobbes argued that Bellarmine had improperly derived a coercive power from the power to teach. Properly understood, excommunication should carry no civil sanction; it is a simple refusal to associate. Similarly, kings may receive recommendations from Christian divines, but they are not to be commanded by them. Preachers, therefore, "are our schoolmasters, not our commanders, and their precepts not laws, but wholesome counsels."\(^{40}\)

Hobbes found several of the doctrines of the Roman church to be conducive to the subversion of the civil authority; "they had many fine points in their ecclesiastical policy, conducing to the same end," he remarks. The doctrine of excommunication represents a significant challenge, since temporal authority "can only kill the body [not the soul]." Another abuse is the doctrine of transubstantiation, which amounts to "the turning of consecration into conjuration, or enchantment." It attributes a kind of magical power to the clergy, beside which kingly authority pales. Most threatening of all are priestly celibacy and the claim of authority to judge the authenticity of marriages. From these it follows, first,

that civil and ecclesiastical authority can never be united, and, second, that the clerics will have the authority to judge the legitimacy of the royal succession. "Do you not see, that by this the King must of necessity either want the priesthood, and therewith a great part of the reverence due to him from the most religious part of his subjects, or else want lawful heirs to succeed him: by which means, being not taken for the head of the Church, he was sure, in any controversy between him and the Pope, that his subjects would be against him?"\(^{41}\)

**Against the Presbyterians: "Mortalism"**

Yet another opinion "tending to the dissolution of a commonwealth" is "that faith and sanctity, are not to be attained by study and reason, but by supernatural inspiration, or infusion." Hobbes had to take this stance in order to defeat the Presbyterians. "Which granted, I see not why any man should render a reason of his faith; or why every Christian should not be also a prophet; or why any man should take the law of his country, rather than his own inspiration, for the rule of his action."\(^{42}\)

By denying the reality of spiritual inspiration, Hobbes could defeat not just Presbyterianism but any form of Puritan religious extremism. To make this a coherent


position, Hobbes must adopt what Pocock describes as a novel form of religious heterodoxy called "mortalism." Mortalism denies the existence of spirit in the conventional understanding of the term. God cannot be experienced by an infusion of spirit; God is only experienced when he speaks to us, directly or indirectly. God is to be known only by his words. Spirit, or soul, exists only alongside body; it dies when the body dies, and is revived only when the body is resurrected; it is to be understood as a subtle form of corporeal body. This mortalist doctrine is applied to such doctrinal matters as eschatology and the existence of angels in part 3 of Leviathan, especially chapters 34 and 38.

The "Foundation of Faith"

Hobbes was determined to resist the "seditious" tendencies of both "Papism" and Presbyterianism. At the same time, he was aware that a component of the legitimacy of the English state was its religious character. While he sought to place a limit on the application of religious claims in the political sphere, Hobbes insisted that his views were compatible with orthodox Christianity. Although Hobbes's views were heterodox, Pocock argues that it would be a mistake to classify him as an atheist.


According to Hobbes, our obligation to God is to acknowledge his power. It is not part of our compact with the sovereign to refrain from doing this; the sovereign may not prevent us from making this acknowledgement. However, we have abandoned our right to judgement about right and wrong in the temporal sphere to the sovereign; this includes the right to make judgements about what forms of acknowledgement of God's power are appropriate. As far as we are to be concerned, that which gives honor to God is simply whatever is taken for such in the civil society in which we live. In the past, it had fallen to Adam, Abraham, and Moses to make such judgements; now, when whole civil societies are Christian commonwealths, this function is to be performed by the sovereign. The "one essential" of salvation is to acknowledge "that Jesus is the Christ," in whatever form is accepted in the civil society in which we live. Beyond this, individuals may not ratiocinate about such matters.45

Hobbes had another argument for his view of the relationship between civil and ecclesiastical authority based on the definition of a church. A church is a group of people who are united in their adherence to a single religious dispensation. As such, a church must have an authoritative interpreter of scripture and doctrine at its

head. Each Christian commonwealth thus constitutes a church, with the civil sovereign of each commonwealth at the head of each church. As long as nations are sovereign and there is no international civil authority, there will be as many churches as there are nations; hence, there can be no universal Church.46

"Officially," at least, Hobbes's doctrines remained consistent with Christian belief. At best, however, this was an uneasy coexistence. Pocock's view that Hobbes was not an atheist is a minority persuasion. More common is the view that his writings conveyed a high degree of skepticism or irony regarding religion. The fundamental intention appeared to be to subordinate religion so that it would not present a threat to civil order.47

Such was the interpretation of Leo Strauss, who saw a parallel between the stance of Hobbes and that of the modern liberal state. Like the Hobbesian sovereign, the modern state has its own purposes, and if objections to these purposes are raised from a religious standpoint, then the state must subordinate religion. The modern state could even be interpreted as putting forward a justificatory doctrine that represents a "secular religion." Unobstructed progress, including widespread economic prosperity and the abolition of war, are the promises of universalistic

47Jones, Machiavelli to Bentham, 140-142.
ideologies that tend to sweep aside all vestiges of the more modest, particularistic world-views that they encounter. To satisfy these expectations, the modern ruler must endear himself to his subjects, even if this requires the sacrifice of constitutional legitimacy. Strauss thus argues that the modern "universal and homogeneous state" represents a latter-day Hobbesianism that is as intolerant of opposition as is Hobbesian absolutism.
CHAPTER 3: LEO STRAUSS--CLASSIC NATURAL RIGHT AND THE MODERN HOBBSIAN STATE

The contribution of Hobbes was of central importance to the thought of Leo Strauss, who has become a leading figure in contemporary political theory. Strauss directed his critical attention first to Spinoza, then to Hobbes, next to the ancient Greek writer Xenophon, and finally to Machiavelli as he sought to ascertain the nature of the breakdown of political order that European civilization had experienced, and, especially in the study of Xenophon, to recover an alternative to the tendency which had led Europe to initiate a disastrous political experiment. Strauss presented his basic teaching in Natural Right and History, in which he upholds classic, inegalitarian natural right against the modern, egalitarian version. In classic natural right, virtue takes precedence over freedom, obligation is upheld in preference to claim, and reason predominates over passion. Strauss attributed contemporary political disorders to the supplanting of the classic natural right teaching by the modern version. Spinoza, Machiavelli, and especially Hobbes prepared the groundwork for this reversal, which manifests itself in the efforts of the modern liberal regime to build a "universal and homogeneous state" for the purpose of universal prosperity and enlightenment.

Strauss joined the exodus of German-speaking intellectuals to the United States before the onset of World
War II. Before that, as a young Jewish student in Germany during the Weimar Republic period, a pressing concern became what he frankly called "the German-Jewish problem" (which was but a symptom of a more general predicament). He scrutinized the contribution of Spinoza, who as a Jew in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century confronted a similar period of political and religious upheaval (similar to the upheaval faced by Hobbes, Spinoza's English contemporary, as well). Ultimately, Strauss found Spinoza's solution unsatisfactory; furthermore, he viewed Spinoza's position as derivative from the thought of Hobbes. His confrontation with Hobbes led Strauss to understand the contemporary crisis as a manifestation of the conflict between the classic and modern natural right teachings. Strauss finally traced the origins of this conflict all the way back to the thought of Machiavelli, but he continued to regard Hobbes as the most systematic exponent of the modern version of natural right.

In Hobbes's presentation, the sovereign dictates the interpretation of holy scripture and the details of religious observance. In the modern world, religion has become a private matter, but Strauss nevertheless perceives

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a tendency for the modern state to impose an insidious view of man's place in the world. Instead of a religious orthodoxy, the state insists on loyalty to the goal of universal enlightenment and affluence for all. Modern science is to seek mastery of nature for the relief of man's estate. The state debases education by taking control of the educational apparatus for the purpose of the unrestricted development of technology; the university becomes a technical training center rather than the seat of civilization and culture.

Strauss suggested that the modern state's promotion of unlimited technical progress represented a kind of "neo-Hobbesianism," an unacknowledged and yet unchallengeable new doctrine. He detected the potential for a uniquely modern form of tyranny in this new doctrine of progress. He became convinced that the classical Greek writer Xenophon had anticipated the possibility of a tyranny based on applied science in a work entitled Hiero or Tyrannicus; Strauss sought to recover an appreciation of this ancient interpretation of tyranny. Upon the publication of his interpretation of the Hiero, Strauss became embroiled in an exchange with Alexandre Kojève. Kojève contended that historical trends pointed to the attainment of a "universal and homogeneous state" which would solve the problem of the good regime. Strauss found Kojève's terminology apt, but he discerned that the notion of a "universal and homogeneous
state" captured the essence of a new form of tyranny. Strauss thought its attainment unlikely; furthermore, if attained, it might well be destructive of man's humanity.

Strauss's criticism of the modern state corresponds to the anti-government tendency of contemporary American conservatism; although Strauss surely might not approve of popularized versions of his thought, many right-leaning politicians and intellectuals have cited his influence. Dinesh D'Souza, of the Heritage Foundation publication Policy Review, provides a thumbnail sketch of Straussian influence in American politics.

Yet this unassuming bespectacled man left an indelible mark on students who would go on to distinguish themselves in the American academy—such men as Harvey Mansfield at Harvard, [Allan] Bloom and Joseph Cropsey at the University of Chicago, Werner Dannhauser at Cornell, Harry Jaffa at Claremont McKenna College, and Walter Berns at Georgetown University. . . . Prominent Straussians include: Paul Wolfowitz, former assistant secretary of state, now a U. S. ambassador; Gary McDowell, associate director of the Department of Justice; William Kristol, chief of staff for Education Secretary William Bennett; and Carnes Lord, director of security at the National Center for Public Policy. Speechwriters for Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Defense Secretary Weinberger identify themselves as Straussians. Jack Kemp and Lewis Lehrman are politicians of the right who derive their Straussian perspective from Strauss protege Harry Jaffa.

D'Souza concludes that the followers of Strauss constitute "the most rigorous conservative force in political theory, with increasing influence on public policy."

The Core of Strauss's Teaching

The heart of Strauss's doctrine was put forward in *Natural Right and History* in a few pages within chapter 4, entitled "Classic Natural Right."

According to Strauss, the classic natural right teaching took for its starting point a critique of hedonism. "The thesis of the classics is that the good is essentially different from the pleasant, that the good is more fundamental than the pleasant." Since pleasure is associated with the satisfaction of wants, the wants must be prior to the pleasures. Wants and the striving for their satisfaction are the primary facts. Furthermore, there is a natural order of the wants, reflective of the natural constitution of the being in question. In human beings we encounter the common-sense distinction between body and soul; everyone admits that the capacities connected with soul are higher than those associated with body. The capacity for speech, reason, or understanding distinguishes man from the other animals and permits us to speak of man's having a soul. According to nature, a truly human existence will consist of the highest possible development of these uniquely human capacities. "Therefore, the proper work of man consists in living thoughtfully, in understanding, and in thoughtful action."³

Strauss allowed that the thesis that the most excellent life for human beings is the thoughtful life could be defended on hedonistic grounds, but he contended that the classics would object to this. Hedonism would make reason the handmaiden of pleasure, and would detract from the intrinsic value of the excellent human life. "We know that it is a vulgar error to identify the man of excellence with one's benefactor. We admire, for example, a strategic genius at the head of the victorious army of our enemies. There are things which are admirable, or noble, by nature, intrinsically."

The contention that human nature is social is derived from the distinctive human capacity for reason. Reason manifests itself in speech, and speech is essentially communicative. Spoken communication, the essentially human act, necessarily implies reference to others; "fellow-feeling" is implied in the communicative act. Communication through speech therefore provides the natural basis for justice in the sense of consideration of others. "Man refers himself to others, or rather he is referred to others, in every human act, . . . His sociality does not proceed, then, from a calculation of the pleasures which he expects from association, but he derives pleasure from association because he is by nature social." The necessity to take into account the other's point of view in spoken

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4Strauss, Natural Right and History, 128.
communication so that agreement may be secured means that freedom is necessarily limited. There is a sense that, concerning one's fellows, all things are not permitted. The power of speech conveys a great freedom, but this freedom is accompanied by a sense of restraint. "Restraint is therefore as natural or primeval as freedom," argues Strauss.5

The derivation of the human essence from the capacity for reason, speech, and communication suggests the model of the city, or civil society, as the ideal form of human association; "Man cannot reach his perfection except in society or, more precisely, in civil society." Not just any city will suffice; the ideal city necessarily will be small, along the lines of the ancient Greek polis. This society is to be kept together by mutual trust, which requires acquaintance; while it may not be necessary for everyone to be acquainted with everyone in the city, everyone should at least know an acquaintance of everyone else. The pursuit of human excellence requires the supervision of manners; if the society can be kept small enough to permit intimate acquaintance, this supervision can be maintained without resort to despotism. In any case, the modern metropolis falls far short of this classic ideal of civil society; "In

a very large city, in 'Babylon,' everyone can live more or less as he lists."

An essential point is that this ideal civil society would be a closed society. Strauss holds that the attainment of human excellence is a matter of chance; it is unlikely that all societies could attain it at once. "The probability that all human societies should be capable of genuine freedom at the same time is exceedingly small."

This is a decidedly inegalitarian principle; societies will differ in the degree to which they approximate excellence. The chances of realizing human excellence are best if a multiplicity of independent societies, each maintaining a particular way of life, is permitted. To attempt to incorporate all societies into a universal or all-comprehensive state would likely result in a civilization of the least common denominator which could not sustain the achievements of the higher societies. "An open or all-comprehensive society will exist on a lower level of humanity than a closed society, which, through generations, has made a supreme effort toward human perfection," concludes Strauss. "If the society in which man can reach the perfection of his nature is necessarily a closed

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6 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 130-31. Strauss refers to *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.6.1158a10-18 and 9.9.1170b20-9.10.1171a20, and *Politics* 3.3.1276a27-34.
society, the distinction of the human race into a number of independent groups is according to nature.\textsuperscript{7}

The best chance for the attainment of human excellence is provided by the maintenance of a multitude of independent societies. Within each of these societies, the pursuit of excellence will involve the exercise of constraint, since excellence involves freedom exercised within limits. Self-restraint, or self-discipline, is best, but it cannot always be relied upon. Therefore, the promotion of excellence within each society will require the exercise of rulership, which will include a modicum of force and coercion. "Justice and coercion are not mutually exclusive; in fact, it is not altogether wrong to describe justice as a kind of benevolent coercion." The standpoint of classic natural right cannot affirm anarchy, the absence of rule, as a political ideal. The good ruler will exercise power in moderation, but the application of political authority will sometimes be necessary. Political excellence consists in finding a mean between power and restraint; virtuous rule is distinguishable from despotism because it is directed toward excellence, not the interest of the ruler. The political art consists in the moderate exercise of power over men who vary widely in their capacity for excellence. Natural right is necessarily inegalitarian; those who are entitled to exercise political power are superior in right to those who

\textsuperscript{7}Strauss, \textit{Natural Right and History}, 131-32.
are subject to that power. "While all men, i.e., all normal men, have the capacity for virtue, some need guidance by others, whereas others do not at all or to a much lesser degree. . . . Since men are then unequal in regard to human perfection, i.e., in the decisive respect, equal rights for all appeared to the classics as most unjust."®

From the perspective of classic natural right, political power is to be exercised on behalf of a particular way of life. Each civil society seeks to establish and maintain a politeia, a term often translated as "constitution." However, "constitution" or politeia in this sense refers not just to a document prescribing abstract legal principles, but to the particular way of life of a society, not limited to the legal or political. Politeia might better be translated by "regime," understood in a broad sense. A constitution or regime in the classic sense does not require the ruler to respect the right of the citizens to live in just any way they wish; the ruler is entitled to promote a certain way of life, to command and forbid particular things. This constitution or regime is a substantive arrangement, not just a legal document. It permits the ruler to act in such a way as to influence the tone or character of the society, the habits or attitudes

®Ibid., 132-35. Strauss refers to Nicomachean Ethics 5.1.1129b25-1130a8 and 10.9.1179b7-1180a10, and Politics 1.5.1254a29-31, 1.6.1255a3-22, and 7.3.1325b7 ff., among other passages.
that the society considers most respectable. It might even be conjectured that a society cannot avoid exercising such influence; if it were to attempt to maintain a strict neutrality concerning ways of life, it might find that it had erected the standard of the "common man" or "mass man" as authoritative by default. "When the authoritative type is the common man, everything has to justify itself before the tribunal of the common man; everything which cannot be justified before that tribunal becomes, at best, merely tolerated, if not despised or suspect."  

Strauss emphasizes that, according to the teachings of the classics, the best regime will be attainable only under the best conditions, and the existence of these conditions will be a matter of chance. When these conditions do not obtain, we shall have to settle for the best feasible regime rather than the simply best regime. To attempt to actualize the best regime when the requisite conditions are not present might require the politician to resort to unjust or ignoble measures; the abolition of human imperfection, requiring a miraculous change in human nature, is not feasible and should not be sought. The best feasible regime, which will be the best that can be done in most circumstances, is equivalent to the legitimate regime; whereas only one regime can be simply best, there might be a

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variety of legitimate regimes, depending on circumstances. The legitimate regime will be imperfect; it will be just, but not noble. "Noble actions require, as Aristotle says, a certain equipment; without such equipment they are not possible."\(^\text{10}\)

The simply best regime would consist of the absolute rule of the wise; however, formidable obstacles to its attainment compel us to separate the question of the best regime into its theoretical and practical aspects. "The few wise cannot rule the many unwise by force," notes Strauss. "The unwise multitude must recognize the wise as wise and obey them freely because of their wisdom." However, the wise may be unable to persuade the unwise. "What is more likely to happen is that an unwise man, appealing to the natural right of wisdom and catering to the lowest desires of the many, will persuade the multitude of his right; the prospects for tyranny are brighter than those for rule of the wise." Since we can apprehend that to try to realize the simply best regime directly may result in tyranny, we must, as a practical matter, temper the absolute right of the wise to rule with a requirement for consent.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 138-40. Strauss refers here to *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.7.1135a5, and to several passages from *Politics*, including 2.6.1265a18-19, 4.1.1288b10 ff., 4.11.1295a25-30, and 7.12.1331b18-23.

\(^{11}\) Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 140-41. Strauss refers to *Politics* 2.2.1261a38-b3 and 2.9.1270b8-27, among other passages.
As a practical matter, the solution to the problem of the best regime is the establishment of a mixed regime. A wise legislator would draft a legal code to which the citizenry would consent freely. The code should be altered as little as possible; its implementation should be entrusted to wise legislators who will administer it in the spirit in which it was drafted. The classics held that such a government could best be entrusted to a landed aristocracy, made up of "gentlemen." The gentleman, while not a wise man or a philosopher, partakes of nobility and detachment from the vulgar to a sufficient extent that he can be trusted to be a wise administrator. One form of such a government would be a mixed regime consisting of democratic, aristocratic, and democratic components, with the aristocratic part in the central position. "The mixed regime is, in fact--and it is meant to be--an aristocracy which is strengthened and protected by the admixture of monarchic and democratic institutions."12

Aristotelian Natural Right

Strauss next distinguishes three versions of natural right: the Socratic-Platonic, the Aristotelian, and the Thomistic.13 According to Strauss, Aristotelian natural right is distinguished by its respect for the particular as

12 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 141-42. Strauss refers to Politics 2.6.1265b33-1266a6, among other passages.
13 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 146.
opposed to the general or the universal. This distinction is relevant to Strauss’s attitude toward Spinoza, toward Hobbes, and toward the contemporary state.

Aristotelian natural right lacks the emphasis on the divergence between the requirements of philosophy and politics found in the Platonic-Socratic version. According to Strauss, Aristotle in his treatment of justice never diverts his attention from the concrete manifestations of the just and the unjust as they occur in public life.

A right which necessarily transcends political society, he [Aristotle] gives us to understand, cannot be the right natural to man, who is by nature a political animal. . . . Plato eventually defines natural right with direct reference to the fact that the only life which is simply just is the life of the philosopher. Aristotle, on the other hand, treats each of the various levels of beings, and hence especially every level of human life, on its own terms. When he discusses justice, he discusses justice as everyone knows it and as it is understood in political life, and he refuses to be drawn into the dialectical whirlpool that carries us far beyond justice in the ordinary sense of the term toward the philosophic life.

Justice as it is understood in political life is not equivalent to fully developed philosophy, but it retains its validity nonetheless. In an important sense, natural right is not the exclusive property of philosophy, but is part of political right, in that political life represents the full development or completion of natural right. While we may speak of relations of justice between complete strangers, "only among fellow-citizens do the relations which are the
subject matter of right or justice reach their greatest density and, indeed, their full growth.\(^{14}\)

A second aspect of the "particularism" of Aristotelian natural right, which distinguishes the Platonic-Socratic as well as the Aristotelian doctrine from the Thomistic, is its insistence on the mutability of natural right. Strauss interprets this to mean that for Aristotle natural right manifests itself in concrete decisions in which the faculty of phronesis is exhibited, not in abstract principles. General principles may be derived from all such concrete decisions, but for Aristotle all such general principles are corrigible. Another way of putting it would be that general principles are valid only \textit{ceteris paribus}. Principles such as those of commutative and distributive justice are posterior to the pursuit of the common good, the nature of which is such that it cannot be expressed in terms of a priori principles. According to Strauss, Plato and Aristotle both hold that "there is a universally valid hierarchy of ends, but there are no universally valid rules of action."\(^{15}\)

\textbf{Strauss on Spinoza}

\textit{Natural Right and History} represents a concise statement of a political teaching whose origin may be traced

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 156-57.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 157-63.

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back to Strauss's first scholarly undertaking, a study of Spinoza which he completed before he left Germany. Strauss understood Spinoza's thought within the context of the recurring "Jewish problem" which had plagued European politics through the centuries. The problem of finding a religious and political settlement that would provide a secure existence for European Jewry manifested itself in Spinoza's day, just as it would almost three centuries later, when the young Strauss would confront the political upheavals of Germany during the nineteen-twenties. Strauss detected an "Epicurean motive" in Spinoza's thinking, an effort directed toward establishing social calm and political comity. An important element of such an accommodation would be an understanding of some kind between Christians and Jews.  

In his philosophy, Spinoza conceives of God simply as the totality of everything that exists in the universe. He presented this doctrine as part of a posture in which he feigned a sympathetic attitude toward Christianity, urging Christians to purge their faith of outmoded Jewish relics. Strauss argued that Spinoza was simply accommodating the prejudices of predominantly Christian Dutch society; actually, he was a thoroughgoing skeptic with respect to

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16See Gerhard Krüger, review of Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft (German title of Spinoza's Critique of Religion), by Leo Strauss, in Deutsche Literaturzeitung 51 (20 December 1931): 2408.
religion, and his doctrines could be turned against any orthodoxy. Spinoza was trying to reconcile both Christianity and Judaism to the modern project, providing a doctrine to which both Christians and Jews could assimilate themselves. However, in doing so he had sacrificed everything essential to both faiths, argued Strauss. In practice, the criticism of religious orthodoxy was demoralizing and inimical to societal excellence. Strauss viewed Spinoza's philosophy as another instance of the modern reductionistic tendency directed against those particularistic beliefs and practices by which individuals and societies orient themselves.17

Spinoza's doctrines did not hold Strauss's attention for long. Despite differences between the two, he regarded Spinoza's efforts essentially as derivative from those of Hobbes. In the history of the break between classic and modern natural right, the thought of the English philosopher was the "main event."

**Strauss on Hobbes**

Originally, Strauss identified Hobbes as the initiator of the break between the classic and modern conceptions of natural right. Later, he came to view Machiavelli as the founder of the modern, but the example of Hobbes remained

central to his thought. Strauss's most extensive statement on Hobbes is found in the monograph *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*.\(^\text{18}\)

For Strauss, the crucial feature of Hobbes's political philosophy, that which distinguished it from classic natural right, was its inversion of the proper relationship between right and law. "For Hobbes obviously starts, not, as the great tradition did, from natural 'law', i.e. from an objective order, but from natural 'right', i.e. from an absolutely justified subjective claim which, far from being dependent on any previous law, order, or obligation, is itself the origin of all law, order, or obligation. . . . For, by starting from 'right' and thus denying the primacy of 'law' (or, what amounts fundamentally to the same, of 'virtue'), Hobbes makes a stand against the idealistic tradition." Hobbes's "natural right" occupies an intermediate position between the classic understanding of right and a purely natural principle; it lacks the character

of a natural "law," but at least it remains a "juridical conception."^{19}

In Strauss's presentation, Hobbes begins his political philosophy with two "postulates of human nature": natural appetite on the one hand, and reason on the other. Appetite is rooted in man's animal nature; insofar as he is an appetitive creature, man does not differ from the beasts. Hobbes distinguishes man from the other animals with his second postulate, that of reason; reason confers upon man powers that the other creatures lack. However, unlike the classics, Hobbes places reason in a position subordinate to appetite. "Human appetite is thus not in itself different from animal appetite, but only by the fact that in the case of man appetite has reason at its service."^{20}

Acting in the service of appetite, reason suggests that self-preservation, the preservation of life, is a primary good. It does not represent a *summum bonum* in the sense that it provides satisfaction or repose to the spirit, but it is at least the prerequisite for the satisfaction of all other wants. Hobbes speaks more often of "avoiding death" than of "preserving life"; the goodness of self-preservation occurs to the reasoning capacity only, but the aversion to death receives reinforcement from the passions. Men fear death more passionately than they desire life. Furthermore,


^{20}Ibid., 8-9.
it is not the mere fact of death that constitutes the *summum malum*, but an *agonizing* death, especially a *violent* death at the hands of other men, that men find truly fearsome. The fear of violent death is irrational and emotional by nature, but at least it is rational in its *effects*, Hobbes suggests. In fact, he proposes to make this fear the basis of the political. He goes so far as to deny the moral value of any political impulse that does not spring from the fear of violent death.\(^\text{21}\)

Man requires companions to ward off those who would put him to death violently. Such companions could be obtained by *force* or by *agreement*. The former approach constitutes despotism, and in a sense it is the more natural of the two; the superior man seizes his opponents and places them in his service rather than killing them. Hobbes holds non-despotic rule to be unnatural. It occurs only when two or more men reach an agreement to perform a mutual abnegation; they recognize the threat of death, rather than each other, as the true enemy.\(^\text{22}\)

The fear of violent death thus provides the impetus for the remainder of Hobbes's political philosophy. It enables him to distinguish between justice and injustice, preventing his philosophy from becoming wholly naturalistic. To act out of fear of violent death is just; to act from other

\(^{21}\text{Ibid., 15-18.}\)

\(^{22}\text{Ibid., 21-22.}\)
motives, such as fear of punishment or fear of loss of reputation, is unjust. These latter motives constitute "vanity," while the motivation provided by fear of death is true "modesty." This contrast of vanity and modesty may be seen as a secularized version of the contrast of pride and humility in Christian thought. Without the distinction between vanity and modesty, Hobbes would be left with no conception of justice.  

For Strauss, Hobbes's political philosophy represents a lowering of the sights with respect to the classic conception of natural right. Not reason but impassioned fear of violent death is the basis of the political. Wariness of one's fellows, not sociability, is natural for humans. The non-despotic state is not natural but artificial. A many-faceted reductionistic tendency manifests itself. Bourgeois morals drive out aristocratic virtue; religion is to be subordinated to the state; history threatens the primacy of philosophy; the study of politics becomes a naturalistic science of the passions.

A Political Science of the Passions

Strauss has gained a reputation for emphasizing the timeless significance of a philosopher's thought, to the neglect of considerations of social and historical context. In The Political Philosophy of Hobbes he deviated from this

23 Ibid., 23-28.
tendency; his intent was historical and biographical. He sought to downplay the influence of Galilean natural science on Hobbes's political philosophy. He identified two tendencies in Hobbes's thinking, the first the development of a new moral attitude which is present from the beginning of his career, and the second a growing attraction to the new physics and mathematics accompanied by an explicit rejection of the philosophical tradition. However, the two tendencies were independent of each other, and they overlapped; the break with tradition was incomplete even when Hobbes first encountered Euclidean geometry at about age forty. "But the new moral attitude is one thing, and the consciousness of its novelty and the rebellion against tradition, which is the concomitant of that consciousness, is another."24

Once Hobbes's career as a political philosopher and controversialist was underway, his break with Aristotle was nearly complete, but nevertheless he held back from condemning Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Strauss detects the influence of the *Rhetoric* in Hobbes's anthropology as expressed in such passages as chapter 10 of *Leviathan*. Whatever the differences between Aristotle and Hobbes might be (concerning the priority of reason as opposed to passion, or law as opposed to right, for instance), the account of human passions in the *Rhetoric* corresponds to Hobbes's

24Ibid., xi-xii, 136.
reductionistic tendency to some extent, since Aristotle seems to account for all the passions in terms of pain and pleasure. Anger, for instance, is described by Aristotle as a pain caused by a slight to an individual or his friends; pity is a pain attending the suffering of an evil by someone who does not deserve it. "It would be difficult to find another classical work whose importance for Hobbes's political philosophy can be compared with that of the Rhetoric," claimed Strauss; "the use and appreciation of Aristotle's Rhetoric which may be traced in Hobbes's mature period are the last remnants of the Aristotelianism of his youth."25

Hobbes's political science consists of the classification and criticism of the passions, especially that of vanity, and of the opinions that these passions generate. One thing that Hobbes does have in common with the classics is that he draws a clear distinction between reality and appearance, or between knowledge and opinion; fear is the foundation of political reality, vanity of misguided opinion ("For vanity is the force which makes men blind, fear is the force which makes men see"). Hobbes seeks to criticize the prevalent but incorrect political opinions that spring from vanity passion; Strauss describes his theory as an "exact and paradoxical political

25Ibid., 30-43. See also Aristotle, Rhetoric, trans. Lane Cooper (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1932), esp. 2.2-11.
philosophy" which aims at purging the polity of all vestiges of pre-scientific morality. However, to the extent that this exact, scientific philosophy partakes of reason, its source is fear, and not the reasoned speech that Strauss cites as the source of the political in the tradition of classic natural right. For Hobbes, the attempt to ground the political in the capacity for speech partakes of vanity.26

Hobbes's political science differs from the classics in its insistence on applicability. He rejects the classical insight that the realization of the best regime is a matter of chance. Strauss remarks that while Hobbes may seek to remove all vestiges of vain passion, in the end he insists that the standard arrived at by reason be in accord with the passions. Hobbes insists on applicability in all cases, even when the circumstances for the realization of political excellence are most unfavorable. To be applicable in such extreme cases, political science must come to imitate a technical procedure. The polity is to be understood as an artificial body, and the political scientist's function is akin to that of a mechanic who attends to keeping a machine running. If the machine is kept in proper working order, it should not run out of control, no matter how much friction is generated by the violent passions actualized within it. Hobbesian political science can have no higher goal than

26 Strauss, Political Philosophy of Hobbes, 130, 136-39, 142-45; see also Natural Right and History, 129-30.
keeping the political mechanism under control. "The aim of the state is for him as a matter of course peace, i.e., peace at any price." Political science understood as such a technical undertaking cannot, of course, have anything to say about virtue and vice, rightness and wrongness.27

Strauss concluded that Hobbes's contribution amounted to a lowering of the standards of political philosophy to such an extent that its application could only bring political disintegration. By placing right prior to law and reward prior to obligation, modern natural right threatens to submerge political order in a cacophony of competing claims. If all differences in reasonableness among men are denied, it becomes impossible to solve the problem of sovereignty by proposing that the rational ought to rule the irrational. The renunciation of the possibility that human nature might provide a rational standard implies the abolition of the distinction between the good and the necessary; the necessary becomes the only standard.28

History versus Philosophy

The renunciation of a rational standard in political science suggests a reduced role for philosophy relative to history in the study of politics. Hobbes's attitude, as Strauss interprets it, is that "philosophy lays down

28 Ibid., 157-61, 165-70.
precepts for the right behavior of men. But precepts are not nearly so effective as examples." Hobbes, for instance, preferred to teach political prudence and the dangers of democracy by means of a translation of Thucydides' history rather than a philosophical tract. Such a preference reveals that Hobbes took his bearings from how man actually lives rather than how he ought to live. Strauss held that the preference for history implied a disparagement of reason. "As Hobbes doubts the effectiveness of precept altogether—does he not assert the impotence of reason with reference to all men, that is, as a principle?—must we not conclude that the impotence of reason was established for him even before he engaged in natural science?"29

Strauss invoked Aristotle's authority to argue that the shift from philosophy to history, or at least from metaphysics to politics, reflected a denial of the existence of an order transcending man, suggesting instead that man is the highest being in the universe. Man and not an eternal order became the central theme. The philosophical ideal of a life devoted to contemplation and understanding was to be replaced by what Strauss called "a more popular ideal."30

Hobbes's thinking eventually led him back from history to philosophy, but he returned not to the philosophical tradition but to his own political philosophy, which he held

29Ibid., 79-81.
30Ibid., 90-91.
to be both more valid and in particular more applicable than that of Aristotle. Strauss describes Hobbes's procedure as the replacement of a morality of obedience with a morality of prudence—which, of course, raises the question whether it has any truly moral content. Hobbes's teaching is strictly instrumentalist; it is concerned with finding an effective means to a desired end. Whether there ought to be any constraints on the utilization of just any means to a desired end is a neglected question. "Hobbes lets us see that even if there were an eternal order, he would take into consideration only the actual behavior of men, and that his whole interest is centered on man, on application, on the 'use of means'."\textsuperscript{31}

Strauss contends that the subject of Hobbes's political philosophy is history. A comparison with Aristotle is instructive. For Aristotle the development of a polity has a rational end; the study of the political has the notion of a stable, perfect order as its connective thread. The perfect order provides an objective standard for judging the political. For Hobbes, on the other hand, "the subject of at least the fundamental part, and precisely of that fundamental part, of his political philosophy, is an history, a genesis, and not an order which is static and perfect." The state of nature, or that which develops from it, is not to be understood by a standard found outside of

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 98-102.
all we need do is understand fully the state of nature itself. History provides its own standard, instead of being judged by a standard set up beforehand. Since history "tests itself," the philosopher is relieved of the task of judging it.32

Religion Subordinated to the State

Strauss concluded that Hobbes's preference for history over philosophy would commit him to a disparagement of the idea of an eternal order; this disparagement was made manifest by the subordination of religion implied by the Hobbesian doctrine of sovereignty. The prominence given to the matter of sovereignty places civil authority on a collision course with religious commitment in Hobbes's thought. One of the best-known features of his theory is his insistence on the absolute nature of sovereign authority. Out of mutual fear, men are persuaded to substitute a limited, avoidable danger—that of state authority—for an immeasurable, unknowable danger. A high price is paid for this concession to absolutism, however; the possibility of any external standard by which to judge the legitimacy of authority is removed. Strauss contended that this feature made it impossible for Hobbes's political science to distinguish between despotism or tyranny and virtuous rule (an incapacity shared by contemporary

32Ibid., 104-06.
behavioristic political science, Strauss would add). Strauss drew the fateful conclusion that Hobbes's "final theory is that every effective rule is eo ipso legitimate."33

In order that sovereign authority might be effective, Hobbes's theory stresses that no division of authority can be tolerated; otherwise, civil disobedience and disorder would be legitimated. As has been shown from the discussion of the English Civil War above, Hobbes regarded the religious sphere, especially the Christian tendency to distinguish between temporal and ecclesiastical power, as harboring the potential for political division and sedition. In a brief section on Hobbes within his study of Spinoza, Strauss emphasized the tension between religion and the Hobbesian conception of the state; "Obedience to the established power is never sin. Rather, rebellion against established authority is sin." To Hobbes, Christianity inverted the proper relation between religion and the state. To Strauss, this meant that all devotion or commitment without a specifically political origin, especially the religious impulse, would tend to be subordinated in a Hobbesian regime. "Hobbes's is the first doctrine that necessarily and unmistakably points to a thoroughly

33Ibid., 67-68.
'enlightened,' i.e., a-religious or atheistic society as the solution of the social or political problem.'\textsuperscript{34}

Hobbes's doctrine requires political supervision of the religious; the sovereign dictates the interpretation of holy scripture and religious dogma. Political authority must keep religion under control; otherwise, the fear and promise of the eternal might subvert the effectiveness of the fear of the violent death. "Hobbes's personal attitude to positive religion was at all times the same: religion must serve the State and is to be esteemed or despised according to the services or disservices rendered to the state," Strauss remarked. He detected reflections of this Hobbesian attitude in the modern state's treatment of religion.\textsuperscript{35}

**Bourgeois over Aristocratic Morals**

The disparagement of religion had its counterpart in the vulgarization of manners and morals in the Hobbesian polity. Keith Thomas has argued that over the course of his career Hobbes displayed an attraction for an aristocratic ideal, in his personal life if not in his political theory; he lived a detached, solitary existence devoted to contemplation.\textsuperscript{36} Whether or not this was the case, Strauss argues that at the level of political philosophy we see in

\textsuperscript{34} Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 95-96; *Natural Right and History*, 198.


\textsuperscript{36} Thomas, "The Social Origins of Hobbes's Political Thought."
Hobbes a movement from an aristocratic to a bourgeois ethic. He came to realize that his most fundamental premises could not provide a foundation for an aristocratic politics; the polity was to be based on fear, not honor or virtue.

"Hobbes's criticism of aristocratic virtue thus does not mean the replacement of honour by prudence. It is rather justice and charity which take the place occupied before by honour. These virtues, which in Hobbes's view, are the only moral virtues, have, however, their ultimate foundation in fear of violent death." It would seem that to so distinguish between justice or charity and prudence might be to draw a distinction without a difference. As has been noted above, Hobbes's theory does not rise above the level of utilitarianism or instrumentalism, raising the question whether it has any authentic moral content. Whether Hobbes's politics is a moral theory or a mere counsel of prudence, its motive force comes from the fear of violent death. "Precisely, this attempt to give a foundation to utilitarian morals by having recourse to a force which imperatively compels prudence, is the peculiarity of Hobbes's political philosophy."37

The description of England as a "nation of shopkeepers" is recalled by Strauss's account of the character of the society that Hobbes's philosophy would dictate. Strauss refers to *Rudiments* in attributing to Hobbes the opinion

that material goods and the means to their acquisition are the only real goods; "Along with peace at home and abroad, freedom for individual enrichment is the most important aim of corporate life." Strauss anticipates Thomas's judgement about Hobbes's stance on the English Civil War; he was not an opponent of the English middle classes, but he argues that they were acting against their own best interests by opposing sovereign authority.  

Strauss's description of Hobbes's account of man's place in the universe anticipates his judgement that the impulse to dominate nature is characteristic of modernity. In contrast to Aristotle's thesis of the benevolence of nature, Hobbes appears to posit something resembling the scarcity hypothesis of modern economics. Man "experiences only force, and not kindness" from nature.

Constantly aware of the desperate seriousness of his situation, it will not occur to him to be proud of his freedom, and, therefore, he will, above all, be on his guard against taking that freedom as the object of his speculations, against contemplating himself in his freedom and taking pleasure in it. . . . Not grateful contemplation of nature, and still less vain contemplation of man, is fitting to man's situation, but the utilization and cultivation of nature. For man can assert himself only by increasing and improving nature's deceptive and niggardly gifts by his labour and exertions; . . . Because Hobbes's point of departure is that man is at the mercy of nature, he distrusts good fortune and the fortunate, distrusts their gratitude and their gaiety, distrusts, in particular, in spite of all personal affection, the aristocracy, whose virtues are only 'virtues of nature'.

38Strauss, Political Philosophy of Hobbes, 118-19. See also Chapter 2, 29-30 above.
Thus Hobbes is not merely the partisan of the new money-making classes; he expresses the spirit of a society in which enrichment would be the motivation not of just a single class but of everyone. Aristocratic virtue cannot provide the foundation for a polity; the true foundation will not be revealed until political philosophy lowers its sights. Furthermore, the affluence that a bourgeois society may achieve should not deceive us; the society may appear to be flourishing on the material level, but the society of which this great economic machine is a part is based on fear. "In the movement from the principle of honour to the principle of fear, Hobbes's political philosophy comes into being."  

**Strauss on Machiavelli**

Strauss turned his attention from Spinoza to Hobbes and later to Machiavelli; by the time of the appearance of the American edition of *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Strauss had changed his opinion about the origin of the break between classic and modern natural right. "Hobbes appeared to me as the originator of modern political philosophy. This was an error; not Hobbes, but Machiavelli, deserves this honor." He concluded that Machiavelli's

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reserve, in contrast to the audacity of Hobbes, had led him to underestimate the radicalism of the Florentine thinker.\(^{40}\)

Strauss condemned Machiavelli on the same grounds that he denounced Hobbes. Both suggested that a desirable end justifies any means; neither distinguished between how men actually live and how they ought to live. In the \textit{Prince}, Machiavelli deliberately adopted a posture of indifference to the distinction between king and tyrant. "If it is true that only an evil man will stoop to teach maxims of public and private gangsterism, then we are forced to say that Machiavelli was an evil man," declared Strauss in his \textit{Thoughts on Machiavelli}.\(^{41}\)

The parallels that Strauss detected between the theories of Machiavelli and Hobbes led him to view the thought of the former as an intimation of the latter. Both thinkers maintained an unsentimental view of man as a creature of the passions; a ruthless political authority was required to keep men's passions from getting the better of them. Machiavelli did not even resort to the device of a putative social covenant among men to justify the state; he asserted simply that political morality was built on a


foundation of immorality or at least amorality. Strauss's presentation of this justification of political authority sounds distinctly Hobbesian.

Necessity makes men not only virtuous but good as well. Men in general have no natural inclination toward goodness. Therefore they can be made good and kept good only by necessity. Such necessity is brought upon men originally by non-human nature, by the original terror. But the quasi-original goodness is inseparable from defenselessness and want. Men are therefore compelled to form societies in order to live in peace and security. The security afforded by society would remove the necessity to be good if the primary necessity to be good were not replaced by a necessity to be good which stems from laws, i.e., from punishment or threat of punishment--by a necessity originating in men.

We might note the intimation of a Hobbesian, "positivist" conception of law in the equation of law with punishment. Order is to be kept through the exercise of a civil authority who exercises a kind of "virtue" unrestricted by considerations of law or morality. "Immoral modes" would be resorted to only in "extraordinary cases"; Strauss remarks that "Machiavelli's view of the relation between moral virtue and the common good . . . abolishes the essential difference between civil societies and bands of robbers, since robbers too use ordinary modes among themselves whenever possible."42

Machiavelli insinuated that Christianity left men with too much of a guilty conscience to exercise the necessary political ruthlessness. Strauss contended that in this respect his intention was identical to that of Hobbes;

42 Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli, 249, 259.
religion had to be subordinated to the political realm. "We no longer understand that in spite of great disagreements among those thinkers, they were united by the fact that they all fought one and the same power—the kingdom of darkness, as Hobbes called it; that fight was more important to them than any merely political issue." Both thinkers had to be circumspect, since they were confronted with pious Christian opinion. Machiavelli appealed to a prejudice in favor of classical antiquity to gain a hearing. He claimed to favor a revival of classical virtue, thereby disparaging Christianity indirectly. His explicit statements on Christianity were inconsistent, so that his teaching can be interpreted plausibly as consistent with the established religion. Hobbes took a different approach in the second half of Leviathan, offering an explicit apology for the consistency of his doctrine with religious orthodoxy. Strauss contended that because of the politically awkward situation in which each thinker found himself, neither could state his true views explicitly. He argued, for instance, that Machiavelli often contradicted himself intentionally, so that complicated interpretive rules are needed to ascertain his genuine views; furthermore, he would indicate his dismissal of a widely held view by refusing to mention it. Strauss held that both Hobbes and Machiavelli were opponents of religion, but that theirs were esoteric
teachings whose true meanings could be ascertained only by "reading between the lines."\textsuperscript{43}

Although he finally felt compelled to attribute the origin of modern political philosophy to Machiavelli rather than to Hobbes, Strauss continued to view the British philosopher as the paradigmatic example of the break with classic natural right. Machiavelli had only initiated that which Hobbes would bring to systematic fruition. "It was Machiavelli, that greater Columbus, who had discovered the continent on which Hobbes could erect his structure."\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Strauss on Xenophon}

After completing his study of Hobbes, Strauss directed his attention away from modernity and toward an ancient Greek text. He undertook a critical explication of Hiero or Tyrannicus by Xenophon, who is best known for having supplemented Plato's account of the life of Socrates. Strauss believed that in the Hiero he had found a clue to the nature of the type of tyranny that threatened to engulf modernity. Xenophon provides an intimation of a beneficent form of tyranny which struck Strauss as capturing perfectly a kind of "neo-Hobbesianism" into which contemporary political practice threatened to lapse. He published his

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 231. Strauss's fullest statement on the necessity of esoteric interpretations is to be found in the title essay of Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), 22-37.

\textsuperscript{44}Strauss, Natural Right and History, 177.
reflections on the *Hiero* in an essay entitled "On Tyranny" which appeared in a volume bearing the same title, along with a new translation of the *Hiero* commissioned for the occasion. The revised and enlarged edition of this volume contained Alexandre Kojève's response to Strauss's original reflections in an essay entitled "Tyranny and Wisdom," along with a rejoinder by Strauss entitled "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*."

The *Hiero* takes the form of a dialogue between the title character, a tyrant of antiquity, and Simonides, a poet reputed to be a wise man, who has come to visit him. Strauss remarks that "the intention of the *Hiero* is nowhere stated by the author." The dialogue contains little narration other than the phrases "Simonides said" or "Hiero said" at the appropriate places; we do not know whether either of the characters speaks for the author. Strauss believes that this ambiguity is a deliberate tactic on the part of Xenophon; "The dialogue that deserves the name communicates the thought of the author in an indirect or oblique way," he remarks. "Society will always try to tyrannize thought."  

Commenting on the dramatic action of the dialogue, Strauss states that the conversation "is likely to take place in an atmosphere of limited straightforwardness." The tyrant is especially likely to have an opinion of the wise

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man that partakes of the vulgar. He fears that the wise man seeks to subvert his tyrannical rule; he confuses wisdom with the ability to become a tyrant. Although Simonides would not appear to be able to threaten Hiero's rule, he faces the problem of gaining the tyrant's confidence. He must adopt the "hardboiled" posture of the "real man" in order to convince Hiero that he is unscrupulous enough to be competent to advise a tyrant. He appears to win Hiero's trust gradually over the course of the dialogue.46

At first glance, the action of the dialogue appears simple enough; it can be divided roughly into two parts. In the first part (chapters 1-7) Hiero holds forth on the unhappiness of the tyrant's life. In the second part (chapters 8-11) Simonides suggests measures that can be taken so that the tyrant can be the happiest of men. Thus the dialogue would appear to be a relatively straightforward endorsement of beneficent tyranny. We should not hasten to make a summary judgement on this matter, however.47

In chapter 1, Simonides induces Hiero to admit some unpleasant facts about his life as a tyrant. The poet suggests that the tyrant is, in a sense, wiser than he is, since the tyrant is in a position to evaluate the merits and demerits of the tyrannical life compared with that of the private man. Hiero protests that tyrants have fewer

46 Ibid., 40-42, 53-57.
pleasures and more pains than private men. They go on to
discuss several species of physical pleasure, including
visual spectacles, food, the pleasures of marriage, and
finally homosexual pleasure. Hiero contends that the tyrant
is in an inferior position to the private man with respect
to all these, especially the last. "To the private man it
is immediately a sign that the beloved grants favors from
love when he renders some service, because the private man
knows his beloved serves under no compulsion. But it is
never possible for the tyrant to trust that he is loved."
Hiero has won only a rhetorical victory here; he defeats
Simonides' suggestion that the tyrant's life is superior in
pleasures, but at the price of being forced to reveal his
own despair.  

At the outset of chapter 2, Simonides adopts an
unsentimental pose in response to Hiero's remarks.
Inferiority in the enjoyment of physical pleasures would
seem to him to be a trivial matter, since the tyrant's life
is superior in the decisive sense that he is "most capable
of harming your private enemies and benefiting your
friends." Hiero responds that this is an appearance that
may seem obvious to the multitude. "Now tyranny displays
openly, evident for all to see, the possessions which are
held to be of much value. But it keeps what is harsh hidden

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Xenophon, *Hiero or Tyrannicus*, trans. Marvin Kendrick, in
in the tyrants' souls, where human happiness and unhappiness lie concealed." From this point until the end of chapter 6, Simonides remains almost completely silent while Hiero describes the unhappiness of the tyrant's life in matters transcending physical pleasure.49

For the tyrant, all the lands he surveys are hostile territory, even his own city, Hiero declaims; even at home, the tyrant is surrounded by jealous rivals. The tyrant cannot even brag about his nation's martial conquests as the private man can; he must try to minimize these, lest they seem unjust. Furthermore, the tyrant is hated by those who ought to be inclined by nature to love him, including children, wives, brothers, and comrades. Everyone knows that tyrants have themselves killed these, and that tyrants have also perished at the hands of same.50

The tyrant cannot even trust his own food and drink, since rivals may attempt to tamper with them; the tyrant requires a servant to sample his food and drink before he himself does. Cities have been known to honor those who kill the tyrant. The tyrant's needs and desires are much harder to satisfy than those of the private man, since they are of such a large scale; the tyrant's greatest expense of

49Ibid., 6.
50Ibid., 6-9.
all is that of guarding his own life, which forces him to resort to plunder.\footnote{Ibid., 9-10.}

The tyrant must fear the brave, the wise, and the just, who may seek to overthrow tyrannical rule; he can trust only the unjust, the incontinent, and the slavish. One of his few pleasures is found in the arming of mercenaries, who are to terrorize the citizens of the tyrant's own city. The tyrant has slaves instead of friends; he is deprived of pleasant intimacy. The tyrant cannot even allow himself a pleasant night's sleep, lest his enemies set upon him in the night. Fear spoils all the tyrant's pleasures; he cannot even trust his own guards.\footnote{Ibid., 11-13.}

Simonides takes the conversational lead at the outset of chapter 7. He suggests that the tyrant bears all the burdens that he does for the sake of honor. "Accordingly, it seems to me that you probably endure all these things you bear in the tyranny because you are honored beyond all other human beings." Hiero objects that honor, like erotic love, is not genuine unless given freely. Why not give up tyranny, then? But merely to give up tyranny would not suffice to make amends for all the crimes committed by the tyrant. "Rather, if it profits any other man, Simonides, to
hang himself, know . . . that I myself find this most
profits the tyrant."  

Strauss contends that the transition from chapter 7 to
chapter 8 is the turning point of the dialogue. In a sense,
Simonides has the tyrant in his power; conceivably, he could
induce Hiero to commit suicide by agreeing with his
despairing assessment at this point. However, he does not
do so; he thereby shows that he has no ulterior motive, and
this effects a change in Hiero's attitude. The remainder of
the dialogue is taken up with Simonides's suggestions for
measures that the tyrant could take to win the affection of
his subjects. He should leave punishment to others, and
should reserve the giving of rewards to himself.
Honorariums could be offered to the best farmer or merchant
in the city, for example. "To sum it up, if it should
become clear with respect to all matters that the man who
introduces something beneficial will not go unrewarded, he
would stimulate many to engage in reflecting on something
good." Additionally, the tyrant could instruct the
mercenaries to act as protectors of all the citizens, rather
than terrorizing them. Finally, the tyrant should spend a
portion of his private fortune on public works for the
common good. "Augment the city, for you will attach power
to yourself. Acquire allies for it. Consider the
fatherland to be your estate, the citizens your comrades,

53Ibid., 13-14.
friends your own children, your sons the same as your life, and try to win victory by benefiting all these."\(^{54}\)

According to Strauss, the position of Xenophon cannot be identified with either Simonides or Hiero. Xenophon's Simonides presents suggestions for the improvement of a radically faulty order; that order remains faulty even after it is improved. Simonides discusses the pleasant effects of the tyrant's kind actions; in order to avoid giving offense, he pays no regard to how the tyrant came to power, or to his previous misdeeds. A mitigated tyranny is still a tyranny. Strauss notes that Simonides never refers to Hiero as a king. Hiero thus lacks a valid title; tyrannical rule, in opposition to kingship, lacks legitimacy.\(^{55}\)

Strauss interprets Xenophon as being in agreement with his own position regarding the philosophical justification for constitutional government. In theory, the absolute rule of the wise would be best; Xenophon acknowledges the weight of objections to the "blindness" of "merely" legal justice that places the letter of the law over its spirit. In practice, however, the establishment of the absolute rule of the wise is likely to partake of tyranny; as a practical matter, constitutional government, or "kingship," is best.\(^{56}\)


\(^{56}\) Ibid., 74-77.
"Tyranny is defined in contradistinction to kingship: kingship is such rule as is exercised over willing subjects and is in accordance with the laws of the cities; tyranny is such rule as is exercised over unwilling subjects and accords, not with laws, but with the will of the ruler." Tyranny could be improved so that the subjects willingly acquiesce in it, but it would still partake of tyranny in that it would remain lawless rule; the subjects might be treated like comrades instead of children, but they are not free.57

The Kojéve-Strauss Exchange

Alexandre Kojéve, a philosopher of Russian origin who spent most of his career in France, responded to Strauss's interpretation of the Hiero in his essay "Tyranny and Wisdom"; the ensuing exchange gave Strauss the opportunity to expound further on the relation between modern totalitarianism and the tyranny intimated by Xenophon. Kojéve is best known for his interpretation of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, especially with regard to chapter 4, section A of that work, which deals with the so-called "master-slave dialectic." This interpretation revolves around the central concept of recognition; Kojéve contends that it is man's nature to seek recognition. Furthermore, Kojéve would argue that it is only through a dialectical

57Ibid., 69-72.
procedure in which representatives of different viewpoints seek recognition from each other, rather than an "Epicurean" intellectual isolation and detachment, that any degree of objectivity can be attained in either philosophy or statesmanship. This dialectical procedure often takes the form of a struggle in which a superior overcomes an inferior in a process akin to a master's subjugation of a slave; in the Hiero, Kojève would interpret Simonides as the "master" and Hiero as the "slave." The concept of recognition provides the perspective from which Kojève criticizes Strauss's interpretation of the Hiero.\(^5^8\)

Kojève remarks that the measures comprising the "beneficent tyranny" proposed by Simonides in the last three chapters of the Hiero have become an "almost banal reality" in the modern world; modern tyrants have already constructed this "utopia." However, Kojève believes that a tyranny confined to one country could never fulfill completely the tyrant's lust for recognition. Total satisfaction could consist only in the construction of the "universal and homogeneous state," a worldwide regime of universal enlightenment and equality. "The fact is that the political man acting at the prompting of his desire for 'recognition'..."

(or for 'glory') will be fully 'satisfied' only when he is at the head of a State, not only universal but politically and socially homogeneous as well (taking account of irreducible physiological differences); of a State, that is, which is the end and the end product of the common labor of all and of each." Such a state, Kojève claims, would represent "the realization of the supreme political ideal of mankind."  

In Kojève's view, it is not at all problematical for the philosopher to attempt to advise the tyrant. In fact, history reveals that philosophical ideals are often realized, "sooner or later" if not directly and immediately. For instance, Alexander the Great realized the ideal of universality in an empire; St. Paul realized it with the establishment of a church. Hegel would cite these as examples of "historical verification" of a philosophical impulse. The "universal and homogeneous state" would provide "historical verification" of the Christian ethic, albeit in secularized form. Kojève appears satisfied that the establishment of such a state would represent the solution to the problem of the good regime.  

In his response to Kojève, Strauss upholds the ideal of wisdom or virtue, in opposition to recognition, as man's  


60 Ibid., 180-88.
natural end. In claiming to have synthesized classical and Biblical morality, Hegel and Kojève actually have constructed a lax morality out of two moral codes which made very stringent demands. They would justify the doing of that which the self-respecting man would not do—the establishment of a tyranny. Strauss found it unsurprising that the Hegelian synthesis would have this result, because—and this is a crucial point—he regarded the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as nothing more than a sophisticated version of the reductionistic Hobbesian state-of-nature theory; instead of providing an external standard, it justifies whatever history produces. "Kojève knows as well as anyone that Hegel's fundamental teaching regarding master and slave is based on Hobbes' doctrine of the state of nature."61

Strauss concedes the need for intersubjective verification in philosophy in order to avoid sectarianism. However, he prefers the sect to a relativistic Republic of Letters in which all opinions are treated as equal, none are taken too seriously, and there is no conception of virtue or excellence other than a "middle-of-the-road" consensus. Such a stance may have political as well as philosophical significance; the relativistic Republic of Letters may be identified with contemporary liberalism, while the

61 Strauss, "Restatement on Xenophon's Hiero," in On Tyranny, 203-05. See also The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, 57-58 and 104-06, on the relation between Hobbes and Hegel.
independence of mind associated with the outspoken sectarian may correspond to the self-image of contemporary conservatism. The lackluster consensus of the "least common denominator" is likely to be the result if the philosopher goes to the marketplace with the idea of participating too directly in efforts toward the best regime. "Indispensable philosophical politics" consists of persuading the city to tolerate philosophy, not in building the best regime directly; philosophy has been relatively successful at achieving the former task. The philosopher, however, "does not expect salvation or satisfaction from the establishment of the simply best social order."62

Strauss believed that the attempt to actualize the universal and homogeneous state would be "possible only on the basis of unlimited technological progress with all its terrible hazards"; if technology should not progress sufficiently, the result would be permanent revolution and political chaos. Furthermore, he felt the Kojève had "an unfounded belief in the eventually rational effect of movements instigated by the passions." In any case, he held that "men will have very good reasons for being dissatisfied with the universal and homogeneous state." On Kojève's own principles, if man's humanity can be fulfilled only by striving for recognition, then in such a state only the chief of state would find it. The only truly humanizing

thing left for men to do would be to attempt a political assassination or coup d'état. If we assume that the unlimited development of technology represents the end of History, then in the universal and homogeneous state all striving is superfluous and man's humanity is lost. If, on the other hand, dissatisfaction remains, the only remedy for it would be political violence. Either way, the actualization of the universal and homogeneous state would be tragic.63

Strauss on the Character of Modern Liberalism

Strauss believed that the contemporary liberal regime partakes of the tyrannical "universal and homogeneous state" to some extent. The Hobbesian nature of this "universal and homogeneous state" is established by the observation that its Universal and Final Tyrant would "be forced to suppress every activity which might lead people into doubt of the essential soundness of the universal and homogeneous state: . . . In particular he must in the interest of the homogeneity of his universal state forbid every teaching, every suggestion, that there are politically relevant natural differences among men which cannot be abolished or neutralized by progressing scientific technology." This mention of the necessity for the tyrant to suppress certain teachings recalls the powers attributed to the absolute

63Ibid., 207, 222-26.
sovereign by Hobbes, especially in light of the contemporary religious upheavals associated with the English Civil War which concerned Hobbes.  

Any doubt about the Hobbesian character of Strauss's "universal and homogeneous state" may be set aside by a consideration of Strauss's brief discussion of Hobbes in his essay on the Nazi ideologist Carl Schmitt. Here Strauss interpreted Hobbes's understanding of the salus populi as nothing more than defense against internal and external enemies, "the enjoyment of innocuous freedom," and "the just and modest acquisition of wealth by the individuals . . . which is promoted in particular by the cultivation of the sciences of mechanics and physics." According to Strauss,  

[T]hese principles cannot but lead to the ideal of civilization, i. e., to the demand for the rational and universal society as a single "union of consumers and producers." Hobbes is to a much higher degree than, say, Bacon the originator of the ideal of civilization. By this very fact he is the founder of liberalism. The right to the securing of bare life, i. e., the only natural right that Hobbes recognizes, has the character of an inalienable right of man, i. e., of a claim of the individual which precedes the State and determines the purpose and the limits of the State. The manner in which Hobbes lays the foundation for the natural right to the securing of bare life suggests the whole system of the rights of man in the liberal sense, even assuming that it does not make these indispensible.

Strauss held that Hobbes differs from "full grown liberalism" only by virtue of positing "man's natural malice," rather than "corrupt institutions or the ill will

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64Ibid., 226. See also chapter 2 above, 45-56.
of a ruling stratum," as the obstacle to the attainment of the liberal ideal.\textsuperscript{65}

Strauss believed that modern liberalism seeks to harness the apparatus of the state for the sake of the promotion of unlimited technological progress, and that it tends to suppress in Hobbesian fashion any opinion that "might lead people into doubt of the essential soundness" of this activity. According to Strauss's understanding of classic natural right, the state ought not to give its unqualified endorsement to just any innovation in technology. "The classics were for almost all practical purposes what now are called conservatives. In contradistinction to many present day conservatives however, they knew that one cannot be distrustful of political or social change without being distrustful of technological change. . . . They demanded the strict moral-political supervision of inventions; the good and wise city will determine which inventions are to be made use of and which are to be suppressed."\textsuperscript{66}


\textsuperscript{66} Strauss, "Restatement," in On Tyranny, 226; Thoughts on Machiavelli, 298.
A "Hobbesian" (or "neo-Hobbesian") political tendency would have the effect of cutting off political debate in summary fashion, either by force or by persuasion; in the latter case, what happens is that everyone takes the veracity of the "neo-Hobbesian" doctrine for granted. Strauss believed that the modern liberal state takes on a "neo-Hobbesian" character when it shunts aside "particularist" objections to the universalist state and its promotion of technology.

Conservatives look with greater sympathy than liberals on the particular or particularist and the heterogeneous; at least they are more willing than liberals to respect and perpetuate a more fundamental diversity than the one ordinarily respected or taken for granted by liberals and even by Communists, that is, the diversity regarding language, folk songs, pottery, and the like. Inasmuch as the universalism in politics is founded on the universalism proceeding from reason, conservatism is frequently characterized by distrust in reason or by trust in tradition which as such is this or that tradition and hence particular.

Despite his disagreements with Kojève, Strauss would probably not dissent from the definition of tyranny which he proposes: "In fact, it is tyranny (in the morally neutral sense of the word) when a fraction of the citizens (it matters little whether it be a majority or a minority) imposes its ideas and acts on all the other citizens, which are determined by an authority which it recognizes spontaneously but which it has not succeeded in making the others recognize; and where it does so without 'coming to terms' with these others, without seeking any 'compromises' with them, and without taking into account their ideas and
Kojève goes on to suggest that such a tyranny could be established "only through force or terror." Strauss would probably dispute this; he would incline to the view that a kind of tyranny could come about "by default," as it were, as a result of the phenomenon of "taking for granted" described above on the part of the majority. (Undoubtedly, Strauss would also dispute whether there can be a "morally neutral sense" of the word "tyranny"!) Strauss suggests that the modern liberal state partakes of tyranny when it places its institutional weight behind a "universalist" or "cosmopolitan" perspective without taking into account or "coming to terms" with the ideas and desires of the "particularist" or "parochial" fraction of the citizens. Thomas Spragens attributes to "technocratic" liberalism an "analytical division of society into two 'classes' of people who are radically distinguishable in their relationship to the mode of production of knowledge (to put it in quasi-Marxist form) and who are therefore conceived as radically distinguishable in their mode of being—the 'knowers' being depicted as free, rational actors, the 'nonknowers' as causally determined functions of their environment."

Spragens also speaks of the distinction between the

"enlightened" and the "unenlightened" as being functionally equivalent to that between the "knowers" and the "nonknowers." There can be no question that in Strauss's view contemporary liberalism partakes of a kind of tyranny of "enlightened," "universalist," "cosmopolitan" opinion over an "unenlightened," "particularist," "parochial" worldview.68

In contemporary American politics, this division between the particularist and the universalist manifests itself in those sociocultural issues associated with "single-issue politics," especially those which involve a collision between secularist and religious world-views. Dinesh D'Souza gives voice to the frustration felt by conservatives over their inability to get a hearing for the questioning of "enlightened" opinion (note particularly the reference to sex education):

Liberalism, Strauss argues, adopts the values of positivism and historicism, not consciously, but at the level of cliche. This is best seen in slogans and formulations that have become commonplace in our time: "You can't legislate morality." "You're trying to turn back the clock." "How can you believe that? This is 1987?" The way liberals typically apply historicism is as follows: first, they decide what political program they favor; second, they identify inevitable historical movement toward that program; third, they maintain that since things are headed in that direction anyway we might as well make the transition as painless as possible; fourth and finally, they label anyone who opposes their preferences—which are, by now, historical laws—regressive, dogmatic, and worthy of derision and

contempt. This pattern of reasoning is very familiar with respect to liberal views on sex education, welfare programs, arms control, and a host of other items. Without doubt, the conservatives would cite the rhetorical approach described above as an instance of liberal "neo-Hobbesianism." On matters such as sex education (now including the question whether to promote the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS) the liberal state interposes itself between religiously devout parents, who seek to teach the chaste morals sanctioned by orthodoxy, and their children. Typically, debate sinks to a low level, owing to the sensitivity of these matters; liberals often put themselves in the position of portraying the parents' views as "worthy of derision and contempt." On these and related matters, it would not be hard to find examples of contemporary polemic portraying the conservative position simply as being "behind the times."

It is not clear whether Strauss regarded the "secularist" or the "technocratic" aspect of modern liberalism as more fundamental. Undoubtedly, an important feature of the modern "corporate state" is its utilization of educational institutions for the development of technology. Concomitantly, education comes to be thought of as nothing more than technical training. Strauss believed that such a conception of education depended on the assumption that all men are equally capable of attaining

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69 D'Souza, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss," 40.
wisdom. The result, however, is not universal wisdom, but the degradation of education and culture (of which secularization may also be a component). Concern about the subordination of liberal education to technical training is reflected in contemporary polemic about the state of education (including one work by a student of Strauss, Allan Bloom). Strauss feared that the modern liberal state would drive out the ideal of liberal education. "Last but not least, liberal education is concerned with the souls of men and therefore has little or no use for machines. If it becomes a machine or an industry, it becomes undistinguishable from the entertainment industry unless in respect to income and publicity, to tinsel and glamour."^{70}

**Strauss: Philosopher or Ideologue?**

Strauss's description of the dangerous tendencies within the contemporary liberal state added up to such a rhetorically powerful indictment of liberalism that political partisans have been tempted to try to appropriate it. As was noted above, several prominent American conservatives either exhibit Straussian influence or describe themselves explicitly as followers of Strauss. A typical tactic in conservative polemic has been the identification of the "universal and homogeneous state" with

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the welfare state. Ironically, such a tactic has the effect of cutting off political debate in a summary fashion, more severely even than the "cosmopolitan" liberal disparagement of "parochial" views, since no one would want to be identified with a regime which is totalitarian or proto-totalitarian in tendency.

Such an identification, if tenable, would place philosophy squarely on one side of the contemporary left-right or liberal-conservative political division. Those who are not prepared to concede that such an abrupt end to political and philosophical debate is appropriate will wonder whether such an identification is not based on a tendentious leap of interpretation. For instance, a Straussian may adopt the posture that we ought to be able to apprehend immediately, perhaps by means of intuition, that certain proposals would be put forward by the minions of a sinister "universal and homogeneous state." A less indiscriminate interpretation might reveal that such a conclusion does not follow so immediately. Consider, for instance, Strauss's own remarks to the effect that, given the impossibility of the "universal and homogeneous state," political society must maintain the character of a "particular society . . . whose highest task is its self-improvement," or his acknowledgment that modern democracy affirms not absolute equality but "equality of opportunity, which implies that differently gifted people are supposed to
do very different things with the opportunity offered." Is the welfare state really an intimation of the sinister "universal and homogeneous state," or is it justifiable on legitimate grounds of "self-improvement" or "equality of opportunity"? Is it legitimate to argue that all measures touching on the economy serve the ends of the "universal and homogeneous state"? Indeed, if it is true that, as Strauss suggests, modernity has erred in leaving technology free from moral and political supervision, we might well ask whether the unregulated economy is not a form of technology, and whether the welfare state is not a proper instance of moral and political supervision of the economy. Furthermore, it represents something of an extrapolation from the thought of Hobbes to say that the welfare state represents a form of "neo-Hobbesianism," since Hobbes's absolute sovereign is intended in the first instance to perform the functions of the "night-watchman state," along the lines of a minimalist, Nozickian "dominant protective association" rather than a "universal and homogeneous state."^{71}

Yet another instance of tendentiousness might be Strauss's esoteric interpretation of a thinker such as

Xenophon. Such an interpretation requires an intricate succession of claims and arguments, each of which could be considered plausible in isolation; however, such a long chain of steps is required that one is given to wonder whether there are no weak links. Dallmayr suggests that the whole procedure is inimical to political and philosophical debate; he argues that "once esoteric and exoteric meaning become infinitely exchangeable, we enter into a terrain of quasi-Derridean playfulness—a terrain momentarily entertaining but tedious in the end." If it is assumed that the greatest minds have deliberately obscured their true teachings, then debate in political philosophy will be closed to all except those who have privileged insight into the correct esoteric interpretations. As Dallmayr argues, "By endorsing esotericism, Strauss's approach (in my view) jeopardizes political philosophy—by ultimately pitting philosophy against politics, and politics against philosophy. Immunized against worldly politics, philosophy becomes a self-contained enterprise, while politics is emptied of intrinsic meaning."72

Strauss may have deemed it legitimate to deploy such an esoteric argument against the contemporary state in the face of the "neo-Hobbesianism" of a "vanguard" politics such as that discussed by C. B. Macpherson (see chapters 4 and 8

below). Nevertheless, the confusion attending Strauss's stance toward liberal democracy provides an illustration of the pitfalls of his esotericism. His followers take umbrage at the suggestion that he was anything but a staunch defender of liberal democracy against totalitarianism. Nevertheless, he drops hints to the effect that a political philosopher may not be able to make his true teaching explicit. Is liberal democracy just one step below the simply best regime, or is it only one step above political bestiality? Although he professes to admire the practical wisdom of the American founders, he maintains that liberal democracy seeks to establish the "universal and homogeneous state" no less than does communism. Was he merely flattering vulgar American opinion when he offered remarks in defense of liberal democracy? He and his followers railed against such an interpretation. Their protests may be sincere, but Strauss left himself open to such a treatment through his insistence on esotericism.73

CHAPTER 4: C. B. MACPHERSON--THE HOBBESIAN 
PREMISE OF POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

Whereas Leo Strauss identified the phenomenon of the "universal and homogeneous state" as the contemporary manifestation of Hobbesianism, for C. B. Macpherson it is the assumption of "possessive individualism" that played this role. The two concepts differ in status; while Strauss thought that, at least in some cases, the "universal and homogeneous state" was being built by tyrants who knew exactly what they were doing, for Macpherson "possessive individualism" takes on the character of a hidden or implicit premise, held not by conscious advocates but by those who absorb it unconsciously as a part of the "conventional wisdom."

A central component of Macpherson's possessive individualism is the notion of self-ownership or "property in oneself." The individual is the proprietor of his capacities, including those which might be held to be essential to his humanity. Since these capacities are understood as property, they are all thought of as alienable; they may be bought, sold, or traded in the same way as one might dispose of a piece of material property.

Macpherson holds the assumptions of possessive individualism to be culpable for a condition in which contemporary man has come to think of himself as essentially an acquirer and consumer of material goods. The conception
of man as active, which he finds in both Aristotle and Marx, has been shunted aside. The capacity to be an actor is not seen by contemporary man as being particularly important; furthermore, it is alienable, just like anything else. Macpherson suspects that those of us who work in the employ of other people have alienated our active capacity. A conception of man as essentially consumptive rather than active has come to prevail.

Hobbes is the first of a succession of English-speaking political thinkers whom Macpherson identifies as incorporating possessive-individualist assumptions. In his The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism he examines several such thinkers who appeared during the seventeenth century, with most attention devoted to Hobbes and Locke; Harrington and the "Levellers" of the English Civil War period are also treated. In The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy this examination is extended into the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Macpherson finds that the assumptions of possessive individualism prevail to a greater or lesser extent in the thought of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and the "equilibrium theorists" of twentieth-century political science, such as Robert Dahl and Joseph Schumpeter.

In these works and elsewhere, Macpherson dissects possessive individualism and presents what he takes to be its deleterious effects. One such effect has been the
development of a version of democracy which he believes does not generate sufficient participation, at least not from the perspective of the teachings that provided the foundations of democracy before the rise of the liberal state. In works such as *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* and *The Rise and Fall of Economic Justice* he argues that the ethical demands of the Western political tradition require a form of democracy that provides for more extensive participation than exists presently, and he explores the implications of such a participatory democracy for politics in the industrialized world. In *The Real World of Democracy* he puts forward the view that the nations of the "Third World" have developed a notion of democracy that draws upon the concept's pre-liberal roots; a renewal of democracy may result from a confrontation between the "First World" and the "Third World."

**Macpherson's Critique of Modernity**

Macpherson does not object to being categorized as a "social democrat." This category would include the political parties of the European Left, which favor modifications of the market economy that go beyond those upheld by the Democratic Party in the United States. Macpherson includes himself among "the bulk of contemporary social democrats and those socialists who do not accept the whole of the Marxian theory," who "accept the humanistic values read into liberal democracy by Mill and the
idealists, but who reject present liberal democracy as having failed to realize those values." These socialists and social democrats, while not accepting Marxian theory in all its particulars, draw upon what they see as the ethical core of Marxism, with its echoes of an Aristotelian notion of human potentiality to be actualized. They affirm "that the human essence is to be realized fully only in free, conscious, creative activity," and they hold that a capitalist economic system threatens to frustrate the realization of this human essence. Such a critique places the matter of society's economic organization at the center of politics, extending the political realm to an extent not allowed for by a theorist such as Hobbes. "The death of the concept of economic justice may be said to have been proclaimed by Thomas Hobbes in 1651 . . . Hobbes set the tone of all subsequent liberal theories."¹

According to Macpherson, "The driving force of Marx's whole thought was the belief that man had it in him to be a freely creative being." Macpherson's critique of modernity is that this free creativity has been driven out by an economic organization that incorporates a "vision of inertia."

It is almost incredible, until you come to think of it, that a society whose keyword is enterprise, which

certainly sounds active, is in fact based on the assumption that human beings are so inert, so averse to activity, that is, to expenditure of energy, that every expenditure of energy is considered to be painful, to be, in the economist's term, a disutility. . . . To see the hollowness of this vision, one need only ask what we shall all do when automation, cybernation, and new sources of non-human energy, have made the system of working for material rewards quite out-of-date and useless. What then shall we do except expend our energy in truly human activities—laughing, playing, loving, learning, creating, arranging our lives in ways that give us aesthetic and emotional satisfaction?

The problem is that the "truly human activities" have atrophied in the face of the necessity to "make a living."
The work that people do to provide for their material subsistence has become so exhausting and time-consuming that people are either unwilling or unable to expend much energy outside of the workplace. Leisure activities consist of little more than passive consumption, including escapist entertainment.2

For Macpherson, man is a being who has latent powers and capacities that ought to be actualized rather than left undeveloped. He opposes this ideal to the utilitarian notion of man as maximizer of utilities, a reductionistic view that admits only differences in the quantities of utility that each man accumulates without admitting qualitative distinctions between ways of life that may or may not be fit for a human being. Macpherson argues that the rise of market society has allowed an older conception

of man as an active developer of his capacities to be driven out by a utilitarian view of man as passive consumer.

From Aristotle until the seventeenth century it was more usual to see the essence of man as purposeful activity, as exercise of one's energies in accordance with some rational purpose, than as the consumption of satisfactions. It was only with the emergence of the modern market society, which we may put as early as the seventeenth century in England, that this concept of man was narrowed and turned into almost its opposite. Man was still held to be essentially a purposive, rational creature, but the essence of rational behaviour was increasingly held to lie in unlimited individual appropriation, as a means of satisfying unlimited desire for utilities. Man became an infinite appropriator and an infinite consumer; an infinite appropriator because an infinite desirer.

The political philosophy of Hobbes reflected a tendency to view man as a consumer of utilities. "A man's powers, in this view, were not of his essence but were merely instrumental; they were, in Hobbes's classic phrase, 'his present means to obtain some future apparent good'." Modern liberal democracies are torn between the utilitarian and the Aristotelian conceptions of man. In Macpherson's view, John Stuart Mill attempted to restore an emphasis on the development of human capacities to liberal-democratic theory, but his efforts were insufficient; the democratic franchise did not alter the essential features of market society, which reinforce the tendency for men to see themselves as consumers of an ever-increasing volume of utilities.\(^3\)

Undoubtedly, the thought of Marx exercises a strong influence on Macpherson's view of man and of the kind of activity appropriate to a human being. For instance, in volume 1, part 3 of Capital we find a discussion of what constitutes "exclusively human" labor. "A spider conducts operations that resemble those of weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement."

This element of conscious control over the labor process constitutes the essence of truly human activity for Marx and Macpherson. Under conditions in which so many of us work as employees of others, the element of conscious control and intelligent initiative is exercised primarily by the employers, not the employees. Marx discusses the consequences of such an organization of work in a passage from one of his 1844 manuscripts which foreshadows Macpherson's critique of the predominance of the consumptive over the active view of man in contemporary liberal democracies.

The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour therefore is not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to
satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague.  

The Nature of Possessive Individualism

In chapter 2 of The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Macpherson lists the postulates that he contends constitute the fundamental assumptions of "possessive market society":

(a) There is no authoritative allocation of work.
(b) There is no authoritative provision of rewards for work.
(c) There is authoritative definition and enforcement of contracts.
(d) All individuals seek rationally to maximize their utilities.
(e) Each individual's capacity to labour is his own property and is alienable.
(f) Land and resources are owned by individuals and are alienable.
(g) Some individuals want a higher level of utilities or power than they have.
(h) Some individuals have more energy, skill, or possessions, than others.

These features are all implicit in the crucial assumption of "possessive individualism," to which Macpherson attributes many of the deleterious tendencies of modern liberal democracy. Such tendencies were no doubt foreshadowed by the changes involved in the continuing rationalization of the English economy, which preceded Hobbes's career at least by several decades; nevertheless, in political philosophy,

Macpherson first detects the explicit assumptions in the thought of Hobbes. He then traces the history of "possessive individualism" throughout the subsequent history of English-speaking political thought, up to and including the modern political science of the twentieth century. Possessive individualism consists essentially of the assumption of "self-ownership," the notion of the individual as proprietor of his own capacities. Under possessive individualist assumptions, freedom comes to be looked upon as a function of possession, an absence of dependence on the wills of others. The capacities most central to the human essence are treated as commodities, in the same way that we might treat material objects that we own; they can be bought, sold, or traded on the marketplace. People come to think of society as consisting of exchange relations, and of political society as a device for the maintenance of orderly exchange. Perpetual exchange produces an unequal distribution of wealth in which land and capital become concentrated in a few hands; most people find themselves in the position of having to work for other people in order to earn a living. Macpherson's view is that this situation amounts to a net transfer of power to the capitalists; most people have lost access to the means of making their labor productive. Almost all are compelled to sell their energies in the labor market; they have been drawn into the universal
Hobbesian competition for power, from which none can opt out.⁵

Macpherson implicates the assumptions of possessive individualism in his critique of modern liberal democracy, in which we find a "curiously limited . . . vision of human excellence that has got built into our society and that we have made do with up to now. It is a vision that is inextricably linked with the market society." The notion of human nature as essentially active, which he would attribute to both Marx and Aristotle, has atrophied under a set of assumptions in which man comes to think of his capacity for action as just one among many alienable possessions. The Hobbesian approach to power reflects this "vision of inertia" as opposed to activity. "A man's powers, in this view, were not of his essence but were merely instrumental: they were, in Hobbes's classic phrase, 'his present means to obtain some future apparent good.'" We find no trace of the Aristotelian conception of human powers as talents or potentials to be actualized, such that the increase of one man's powers would be a benefit to all. The Aristotelian concept of developmental power is replaced by a view of power as extractive; each man finds himself in a struggle to extract from his fellows the best bargain that he can in the marketplace. As a result, we find workers who see work as

drudgery rather than as an opportunity for development, and who rush into escapist activities as soon as the working day is over.

A man whose productive labour is out of his own control, whose work is in that sense mindless, may be expected to be somewhat mindless in the rest of his activities. He cannot even be said to retain automatically the control of whatever energies he has left over from his working time, if his control centre, so to speak, is impaired by the use that it made of him during his working time. Any such diminution of a man's control over his extra-productive activities is clearly a diminution of his power over and above the amount of the transfer.

The critique of possessive individualism clearly recalls the Marxian concept of alienation. To alienate means to place something in the power of another. An extreme version of alienation would be found in a society that allowed people to sell themselves into slavery, as is contemplated by Robert Nozick in his libertarian political tract, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Such an arrangement would strike many people as a violation of a deeply held moral intuition. It might be argued that there is a right to freedom of the person that is an *inalienable* right, that is, a right so fundamental to what it means to be a human being that people should be forbidden to forfeit it voluntarily. Macpherson would contend that an arrangement such as Nozick contemplates is only a more extreme version of what is allowed already under capitalism, in which most people are
employees of others, so that their control over their creative powers is compromised.®

Hobbes's Possessive Individualist Assumptions

Hobbes is the first of a succession of English-speaking thinkers in which Macpherson detects the assumptions of possessive individualism. According to Macpherson, Hobbes's theory is an account of the relations necessary to a particular kind of society; strictly speaking, the conclusions it draws should not be generalized beyond this particular society. Nevertheless, the portrait of society drawn by Hobbes is similar enough to our own that the theory remains relevant.®

Macpherson begins with a discussion of Hobbes's view of human nature and its relation to the account of the state of nature. He contends that Hobbes's statements about that which is innate in man, about man "as such," do not contain all that is necessary to argue the case for universal obligation to an irresistible sovereign. Hobbes's state of nature is not inhabited by men "as such," but by civilized men, as they would be within civilized society, except with sovereign power removed; such men have not been completely


®Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 9-17.
abstracted from society. For instance, it was necessarily true of men in civilized society that they would seek ever-increasing power over others, Hobbes assumed; Macpherson inclines to the view that this holds only for a certain kind of civilization, but he allows that some such assumptions had to be made.®

It might be more appropriate to speak of a "natural condition of mankind," which clearly refers to something to be found within men, rather than a "state of nature." Behavior in the state of nature is not that of primitive man, but of social, civilized man; the term refers to what is natural to men as they are now. In discussing chapter 13 of Leviathan, Macpherson remarks that "the matter about which competition and diffidence would lead to a war of each with all, is the civilized matter of cultivated land and 'convenient seats.'" The warlike state of nature is arrived at by taking men as they are and removing their fear of sovereign authority. "Take men as they now are, remove the fear of unpleasant or fatal consequences of their actions to themselves, and their present natural proclivities would lead directly to the state of war."®

To deduce the characteristics of the state of nature in this manner dictates that the state arrived at will contain many features of the civilized society from which sovereign

®Ibid., 17-19.
®Ibid., 24-27.
authority is removed in imagination. Macpherson argues that Hobbesian man, even in the state of nature, behaves as though he were an inhabitant of a competitive market society; he cites chapters 10 and 11 of *Leviathan* (in which, he asserts, Hobbes presents just about all he has to say about men in society) in support of his argument. In these chapters, Hobbes sets forth his definition of power. Power is of two types: natural and acquired. Natural power consists not of mere ability, but of *eminence* of ability; it is a comparative quality, consisting of an *excess* of one's capacities over those of others. Practically speaking, acquired power consists of one's ability to utilize natural power to command the services of other men. Wealth and reputation constitute power because they give strength against others. This definition takes it for granted that every man's power is opposed by every other man's. For instance, in *Leviathan*, chapter 10, Hobbes observes, "Nor does it alter the case of honour, whether an action, so it be great and difficult, and consequently a signe of much power, be just or unjust; for honour consisteth only in the opinion of power." Macpherson remarks that this passage presents "the essential characteristics of the competitive market." That honor consists of an *opinion* of power, independent of any standard of justice or injustice other than men's opinions of same, can be taken as a summary of the way in which the market assigns value. Market value
determines, and is determined by, everyone's estimate or opinion of everyone else's power. Everyone is subject to this market for power; furthermore, every man's power is opposed by the power of every other man.\textsuperscript{10}

The conclusion that the state of nature would be characterized by savage competitiveness was derived, in Macpherson's view, from two postulates: first, that some men seek ever-increasing levels of power and delight, while others seek only to continue their present level; and, second, that society is so fluid that the behavior of the immoderate compels everyone else to enter the contest for power. He contests Strauss's interpretation, according to which Hobbes held that all men innately seek ever-increasing power; he cites passages from Elements of Law and Rudiments which contrast "vainglorious" and "temperate" men in support of his contention. "The evidence for Hobbes's position that only some men innately desire ever more power is clear," he concludes.\textsuperscript{11}

The related questions of the extent to which men seek power over others and the extent to which this desire for domination is innate in man is crucial to the controversy over Hobbes between Macpherson and his opponents. Strauss, for instance, appears to believe that Macpherson attributes


\textsuperscript{11}Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 40-44. See Hobbes, English Works 2:7, 4:82.
too much to market society. "Yet according to Hobbes, man is distinguished from the brutes by the faculty of considering phenomena as causes of possible effects, and therefore by awareness of potentiality and power. Macpherson does not even attempt to show that the natural antagonism of all men does not follow from the peculiarity of man thus understood," remarks Strauss. "Nor is Hobbes' view of men's natural competitiveness a reflex of the emerging market society; Hobbes found or would have found clear signs of that competitiveness not only in the market but in the courts of kings, in the most backward villages, among scholars, in convents, in drawing rooms, and in slave pens, in modern as well as in ancient times."^12

Strauss thus attributes to Hobbes the view that the desire for ever-increasing power is innate in man. According to Macpherson, Hobbes's view is that the desire is natural to some men, but only an acquired behavior in others. Macpherson's own view is that such a desire is common to all men only within a possessive market society. Both Strauss and Macpherson can cite several passages from Hobbes in support of their interpretation of him. Macpherson claims that the most decisive passage cited by Strauss comes from a late and somewhat insignificant

polemical work of Hobbes directed at his scholastic opponents. Macpherson himself refers to a passage from *Elements of Law* in which Hobbes speaks of "those men who are moderate, and look for no more but equality of nature," as opposed to "others, that will attempt to subdue them." He takes this passage from one of Hobbes's major political tracts to be decisive. "In view of the evidence it seems to me closer to Hobbes's intention to treat the striving for power and precedence which he finds to be characteristic of all men in society (and in the state of nature) as an innate striving in some men and an acquired behavior in others." Furthermore, if the striving is an acquired behavior in some men, it will be open to Macpherson to argue that market features of society have something to do with the acquisition.\(^{13}\)

It would appear that the universal obligation to obey an irresistible sovereign cannot be derived *solely* from the proposition that some men seek greater and greater power while others are more temperate. If this is the case, then it could be that in the state of nature the vainglorious would grab for power while the temperate would acquiesce, and no war of all against all would follow. A second postulate is required in order to establish that in civilized society it is necessarily the case that everyone's

\(^{13}\text{Macpherson, } Possessive Individualism, 42-45. See Hobbes, English Works 4:82.\)
powers are constantly invaded by everyone else's. A model of society is required in which everyone is drawn into a competition for power. Macpherson holds that it has been much overlooked that Hobbes does put forward just such a social model, besides his model of the state of nature. The presence of this social model may have been obscured because it was not explicit. According to Macpherson, we can conceive at least four such possible social models. The first would be "customary or status society," in which power is allocated authoritatively instead of by the market. Three other models represent various stages in the penetration of society by the market; they include "simple market society," "more fully developed market society," and finally the aforementioned "possessive market society," which, according to Macpherson, is Hobbes's actual model. This final model contains the important feature that all goods, including land and capital, are allocated by the market. It follows that everyone is forced to compete in the marketplace in order to sustain life, meeting the requirement, crucial to Hobbes's theory, that everyone's power be opposed to everyone else's.\textsuperscript{14}

If we assume that Hobbes derived many of his conclusions about human nature from observation of his contemporaries, it is not difficult to comprehend how he came to draw the conclusions he did about the necessary

\textsuperscript{14}Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 46-61.
features of contemporary society. The seventeenth-century England of Hobbes's time was rapidly developing into a full-fledged market society. It was not a perfect laissez-faire regime; mercantilist policies aimed at enhancing national power were pursued. However, land was being brought onto the competitive market, and more and more people were making a living as wage-earners. Hobbes's treatment of distributive and commutative justice suggests that he dismissed the standards of customary or status society in favor of those of the market; in chapter 15 of Leviathan he wrote dismissively, "As if it were injustice to sell dearer than we buy; or to give more to a man than he merits."\(^{15}\)

Hobbes was not totally sanguine about the prospects of a middle-class market society; in Behemoth he would suggest that bourgeois morality was responsible for the English Civil War. On balance, however, Macpherson concludes that Hobbes accepted the assumption common to educated people of his day that civilized society was to be equated with market society. "We may conjecture that the ease with which Hobbes attributed essentially market relations to all societies was due to his having shared the view, common to men of the Renaissance, that civilized society was limited to classical Greece and Rome and post-medieval western Europe. Since the classical societies were to some extent market societies they could easily be taken to fit a model drawn primarily

from the more completely market society of his own time."
Plato and Aristotle lived in a partially commercialized
society, Macpherson argues; Aristotle, embracing a
traditional standard, attempted to dissuade his
contemporaries from embracing the market. Medieval
civilization exhibited even less market penetration, but as
the term "Dark Ages" suggests, this can be associated with a
civilizational breakdown. Europe did not become
"recommercialized" until the early modern period, coinciding
with the career of Hobbes. "Hobbes saw (and regretted) that
market man and market society were here to stay, but he fell
short of recognizing that this was a recent change. Now he
saw it, now he didn't."\textsuperscript{16}

Hobbes's account of a ruthless competition for power in
the state of nature, whatever its relation to a market
system of economic organization, was essential to his
derivation of a universal obligation to an irresistible
sovereign. He believed that he had deduced obligation
directly from facts about human nature and civilized
society. The deduction represented what Macpherson calls a
"Galilean shift" in political theory. Previous theorists
had purported to deduce obligation from fact, but they had
actually "smuggled in" additional premises about natural

\textsuperscript{16}Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 67; "The Economic
Penetration of Political Theory," chapter 9, Rise and Fall, 105-
107 (see also "The Rise and Fall of Economic Justice," chapter 1,
Rise and Fall, 5-7).
purpose or the will of God. Hobbes, influenced by the laws of Galilean mechanics, was convinced that obligation could be derived directly from laws of "political mechanics," without resort to "fanciful" or "imported" notions of purpose. Political mechanics presents a further advantage in that it establishes an equal rather than a hierarchical natural right; by ruling out a system of values external to man, Hobbes had eliminated the possibility of a hierarchy of rights or obligations. (In this interpretation, Macpherson diverges from the view of Strauss by emphasizing the influence of the new natural science on Hobbes's political philosophy.)

Macpherson holds that in order to so deduce obligation from fact, Hobbes needed to be able to postulate an effective human equality. Part of the work had been done by the elimination of teleological considerations; Hobbes goes on to establish both equality of fear and equality of insecurity. Equality of fear follows from the observation that the weakest person is capable of killing the strongest. Equality of insecurity is based on the equal desire of each to preserve his life. Of course, once the dynamism of the market has set in over a sufficient period of time, "some are more equal than others" in an important respect. Nevertheless, it can be asserted that the market subordinates everyone. Macpherson believes it mistaken to

17Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 76-78.
think that a rational man could not reject the market. However, if the market is indeed inescapable, then everyone must acknowledge the power that enforces the rules of market society; this is the only possible morality. Macpherson's only objection is to the suggestion that these considerations are necessary to any civilized society; he holds that it would have been more proper for Hobbes to have claimed insight into the essential relations of his own society only.\footnote{Ibid., 74-78, 81-87.}

Hobbes thought that his doctrine would prove congenial to the middle classes; their objections to it startled him. What the middle classes took exception to was the self-perpetuating nature of the Hobbesian sovereign, who would have the power to designate his own successor. The middle classes wanted a sovereign whom they could control. Macpherson contends that Hobbes failed to realize that an irresistible sovereign could be maintained even if not self-perpetuating. Calculating men of property could see the advantage of having a power capable of enforcing the rules of the market; the non-propertied would be obedient as long as they saw no alternative. Hobbes acknowledged the presence of classes, but he underestimated their effect; he did not see the potential for cohesion within the propertied class to provide a centripetal force that would compensate for the centrifugal force of the dynamic market. In fact,
Hobbes's doctrine provides effective support to the propertied class in that it performs the task of primary capital accumulation that is necessary to the establishment of a possessive market society. As a mercantilist, Hobbes understands the accumulation of national wealth to be a primary state function. Macpherson mentions that he offers a typically "bourgeois" justification of taxation: the wealthy are liable to be taxed insofar as they are dependent on the state for enforcing the rules and otherwise providing the framework for accumulation on the open market. One limitation that Hobbes places on accumulation is that property is to be an absolute right against everyone except the sovereign; even this stipulation serves the purpose of accumulation, however. The sovereign must keep the right of "eminent domain" in reserve against any claims of right held over from traditional or status society that might form a roadblock to the establishment of the possessive market society.19

Macpherson's attitude is that Hobbes could have headed off many of the criticisms of his theory by claiming less than universal validity for it; he could have claimed to have discovered the laws of the essential relations of his

own society only, or of societies of the same type. The objections are not so much to Hobbes's theory as to possessive market society and possessive individualism themselves.20

Possessive Individualism in English-Speaking Political Thought

Macpherson sees English-speaking political thought from Hobbes to the present as permeated with possessive-individualist assumptions. In Possessive Individualism, and in a later work, The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy, he traces the history of the assumptions as they appear in the thought of leading Anglo-American thinkers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Harrington, Locke, Bentham, and James and John Stuart Mill are the more prominent figures treated. It turns out that Hobbesian assumptions are present even among the theorems of twentieth-century political science.

Following immediately upon his treatment of Hobbes, Macpherson considers a group of Hobbes's contemporaries from the English Civil War period. The Levellers were advocates of an expanded franchise during the debates among the republican forces following the first phase of the English Civil War. Macpherson emphasizes that they were not advocates of a universal manhood suffrage, as is often assumed. Instead, they favored a "non-servant franchise"

20Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 105-06.
from which servants and beggars were to be excluded. Their rationale for this "non-servant franchise" reveals their possessive-individualist assumptions. They held that the franchise was to be extended to all who had not lost their birthright. Servants and beggars had lost their birthright by placing themselves in a position in which they were dependent on the wills of others. Such an argument reveals that the Levellers must have thought of the birthright-to-franchise as something that men could forfeit (or, in Marxian terminology, alienate). They were not, however, full-fledged possessive individualists. They upheld the natural right to the franchise for all who had not forfeited it, and while they viewed the individual as the proprietor of his own person, they did not carry this to extremes; they held that some rights, such as civil and religious freedoms, were inalienable. Nevertheless, their arguments reveal the influence of possessive-individualist assumptions in substantive political debate as well as in political philosophy.21

Macpherson regards James Harrington, author of Oceana, as a minor figure in comparison with Hobbes, but he is nevertheless a thinker of some importance because of his attention to considerations of class. Harrington viewed himself as what we would now call a political scientist rather than a political philosopher; he meant to investigate

21Ibid., 107-157.
the conditions necessary to political stability. Central to his thought was the crucial concept of "the balance." He believed that the distribution of political power necessarily corresponded to the distribution of property; the political regime could be a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy, depending on whether property is held by one, a few, or many. Harrington intended that his principle of "the balance" would maintain an equilibrium among the nobility, the gentry, and the yeomanry, so that political stability would be preserved. He proposed a constitution that would divide power between the yeomanry and the gentry; the yeomanry would predominate in the lower house of the legislature, but most of the political class would come from the gentry. Harrington also placed great emphasis on an "agrarian law," which was supposed to prevent an overconcentration of property within the upper classes. However, the agrarian law was phrased so permissively that it would have permitted all the lands of England to come into the possession of one percent of the population. Essentially, Harrington believed the balance to be maintained despite the extreme permissiveness of the agrarian law because he shifted the focus of the balance from a balance of property to a balance of opportunity. Apparently, he thought that everyone would accept that the balance was still in place as long as upward economic mobility was possible. This version of the balance
principle embodies possessive-individualist assumptions because it depends on everyone's assuming bourgeois economic attitudes; everyone would have to place the highest priority on maintaining the features of a competitive market economy.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Locke's Version of Possessive Individualism}

John Locke deserves a more extended treatment as a political theorist whose reputation is on a par with that of Hobbes. He was in some senses a more genuine natural rights theorist than Hobbes. Macpherson allows that Locke provided a version of natural right that was less "wholesale," hence more meaningful and specific, than that of Hobbes. Furthermore, Locke provides for limited government and a right to revolution. Locke makes natural law prior to natural right, so that his natural right is limited. While Hobbes provided for equal natural right, his right was not reciprocal, since it amounted to a right to invade others. Locke's natural right, while reciprocal in that it required everyone to respect everyone else's right, was unequal in that it permitted unlimited accumulation in its final version. For Macpherson, an acceptable natural right theory must provide for both equal and reciprocal right; neither Hobbes nor Locke met this requirement.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 160-193.

\textsuperscript{23}Macpherson, "Natural Right in Hobbes and Locke," essay 13, Essays in Retrieval, 224-37.
A possessive-individualist assumption plays a central role in Locke's theory, since he establishes a right to appropriation through the assertion of a property right in one's own person. From this self-proprietorship it follows that one has a right to that with which one mixes one's labor. The right to preserve one's life and the right to the fruits of one's labor establish a right to individual appropriation, prior to government. Initially, at least, this right of appropriation is limited. There is the stipulation that one must leave "enough and as good" for others. Also, one may take no more than one's share, so that nothing perishes uselessly. Finally, there is the implicit limitation that one may take no more than what can be obtained with one's own labor. However, although Locke limits natural rights initially, he effectively overthrows the limitations in the final revision of his theory. The spoilage limitation is overcome by the introduction of money, since gold and silver do not spoil. Accumulations larger than a single individual could use could nevertheless be put to use as capital. Since men have consented implicitly to the use of money, capitalist accumulation is justified as a natural right, prior to the establishment of government. A commercial economy that includes the use of money, the suppression of the spoilage limit, and markets and commerce beyond the level of barter is posited as existing prior to the establishment of government;
Macpherson calls this assumption historically improbable, but not inconceivable. There are two levels of consent, first to the commercial economy and second to civil society. From the viewpoint of a more standard interpretation of Locke, to posit a commercial economy prior to civil society appears tendentious; most interpreters hold that Locke justifies capitalist accumulation within civil society only, rather than as a natural right. For his part, Macpherson insists on pressing an interpretation in which the "difficulty of enforcement [of contracts based on institutions of property] is the main reason Locke finds for men moving to the second level of consent and entering civil society." The "enough and as good" limitation is overcome implicitly; it is assumed that increased productivity more than makes up for the lack of land available to others after capitalist appropriation.24

There remains one stipulation regarding accumulation still to be overcome, the "implicit labor limitation." This limitation is transcended by means of the assumption that if labor is property, it is alienable. A right to labor that one has purchased is asserted; one's servant's labor is the same as one's own. It is assumed that wage labor exists in a state of nature. Furthermore, it can be reiterated that the general features of a commercial economy with unlimited accumulation were consented to in the state of nature.

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Unlike Hobbes, Locke at least distinguishes between property and life; some rights are inalienable, so that alienation of labor does not confer arbitrary power over life. Nevertheless, traditional limitations on accumulation generally have been overturned. A limitation on appropriation is a feature that has been read into Locke's thought by modern liberals; the import of his theory is to turn the tables on those who would limit appropriation.²⁵

After overcoming these traditional limits on accumulation, Locke goes on to suggest a class differential in rights and rationality between the propertied and laboring classes. The latter were viewed as not being full members of the body politic, since they did not live fully rational lives. Macpherson cites a comment in which Locke takes it for granted that wage laborers necessarily would live from hand to mouth, since they would lack opportunity to "raise their thoughts above that." Full rationality was associated not with labor, but with unlimited appropriation. This class differential in rationality was ascribed to the state of nature; apparently, Locke observed a class differential in his contemporaries and read this differential back into the nature of man. Macpherson contends that the alleged difference in rationality is simply a difference in ability or willingness to abide by a bourgeois moral code. A class differential in rationality

²⁵Ibid., 214-220.
is a bourgeois concept. When property is defined narrowly as consisting merely of goods and land rather than "life, liberty, and estate," then only those with goods and land can be included in civil society. The non-propertied were in a position similar to the Calvinist "non-elect"; they were to have no voice in government, despite being subject to its discipline. The native with no estate was to be treated like a foreigner. Possessive-individualist assumptions, together with the overthrow of any limitations on natural right, produce a political theory that can justify the effective subordination of the non-propertied.26

Possessive Individualism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

The most vulgar version of possessive-individualist political theory is the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, who built a system that provided for private enterprise and unlimited private property, based on a few postulates. He took it for granted that in an advanced society there must be a class of people who must labor or starve; the state need make no provision for their subsistence other than to maintain the physical incentive provided by the fear of starvation. After making a tentative case for an egalitarian distribution of wealth, he overturns this argument by giving security of property priority over

26Ibid., 221-38. At 230, Macpherson refers to Some Considerations of the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest and Raising the Value of Money, in Locke, Works, vol. 2 (1759, 19.
equality; without security of property, there can be no wealth, however it is to be distributed—indeed, there can be no civilization. Hence, "equality must yield."

Macpherson judges the entire theory to be influenced deeply by bourgeois postulates. Man is viewed as a self-interested pleasure-maximizer. Consideration of the pleasure to be maximized is strictly limited to material goods. A Hobbesian society in which everyone opposes everyone else is assumed.27

Bentham's model of society required government in order to protect the free market, but government itself could become rapacious. To resolve this dilemma, Bentham had to devote considerable attention to the extent of the franchise. He was not enthusiastic about a democratic franchise, but he was driven to it by the logic of his position, as well as by popular demands being put forward in his day. He presented a purely protective case for a democratic franchise; subjects require the franchise in order to protect themselves, since the rulers and the ruled form naturally opposed classes. It was a view that could be deduced easily from a view of human nature which sees man as unalterable and which acknowledges no essential political potential in man to be developed through participation.28


28Macpherson, Life and Times, 34-43.
John Stuart Mill is Macpherson's favorite among the English-speaking political thinkers he considers; he comes closest to reconsidering the view of man that is reinforced by possessive market society. Instead of accepting a reductionistic utilitarian view of man, Mill proposes a political ideal which political society is to attempt to approximate. This revision of utilitarianism was provoked by Mill's concern for the condition of the working class, which he, along with many of his contemporaries, had come to view as blatantly inhuman. The poor could no longer be consigned to living a hand-to-mouth existence; a model of democracy was to be adopted that would contribute to the self-development of all, rich or poor. The essence of man was to exert and develop his latent talents, including his political capacities. According to Macpherson, genuine democracy should seek improvement "in the amount of personal self-development of all members of the society, or, in John Stuart Mill's phrase, the 'advancement of community . . . in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency.'" Unfortunately from Macpherson's perspective, the younger Mill stopped short of a critical evaluation of capitalist institutions. He attributed the inequality he encountered to accident, perhaps an accidental injustice in
the distribution of property before the establishment of capitalist institutions.29

Mill's twentieth-century idealist successors were even less realistic in their assumptions. Theorists such as Barker, Lindsay, and MacIver lost sight of class and exploitation. Any shortcomings in society could be overcome by liberal democracy and the welfare state. They hoped that the class issue would recede, or that it could be mitigated by the welfare state; essentially, they relied on good will. John Dewey was at least less indulgent than these other democratic theorists of the early twentieth century about the actual operation of liberal democracies; he held out as a hope what others treated as an achievement. Dewey upheld an experimental method, "cooperative intelligence," and social control of economic processes. He spoke of a "socialized economy," but it was not clear what he had in mind; he appeared to be more interested in the prospects of democratic liberalism than in a critical analysis of capitalism. Macpherson's judgment is that Dewey and the other twentieth-century idealist theorists were too optimistic about liberal democracy because they failed to see how the competitive party system had reduced political

responsiveness. Later theorists would discredit their postulate of overriding citizen rationality.\textsuperscript{30}

The pluralist elitist models of such mid-twentieth-century political scientists as Schumpeter and Dahl actually represent a reversion to the "protective" democracy of the utilitarians. Rather than providing a means to make decisions about social and moral ends, democracy becomes a simple device for choosing governments. The only genuine participants are the sets of elites who compete for power as the representatives of the political parties. Voters do not decide issues, they choose men; but, this at least protects them from tyranny. Otherwise, the moral content of democracy is emptied out. Political participation lacks intrinsic value. A "consumer sovereignty" model of democracy as a simple market mechanism seemed realistic to these theorists. The model assumes that political demands are so diffuse and shifting that a device is needed to produce an effective majority. The possessive-individualist assumptions of Hobbes, transmitted via Benthamite utilitarianism, continue to manifest themselves in the supposedly sophisticated models of twentieth-century political science.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30}Macpherson, \textit{Life and Times}, 69-76.
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 77-82.
Escaping Possessive Individualism
Through Participatory Democracy

Descriptively, the model proposed by twentieth-century equilibrium theory must be judged substantially adequate, at least as long as we operate within the assumptions of possessive market society. However, Macpherson cannot accept the claim that this theory has no justificatory intent. Most statements of the model imply that its account of democracy is the only realistic one, and also that it produces the self-evident goods of political stability and consumer sovereignty. It assumes that men's political capacities are a fixed datum, which Macpherson treats as a "claim not proven." He holds that the model provides for a market, but not for a democracy. It establishes an equilibrium in inequality; its consumer sovereignty is largely illusory. It registers effective political demand only, giving an advantage to political professionals and those with money. Furthermore, the system encourages apathy; it may even require it, lest stability be endangered. Voter demands are not independent; choice is shaped. Curiously, these features are held to reinforce the validity of the model.\textsuperscript{32}

Macpherson contends that such a liberal democracy produces a level of participation too low to meet the ethical requirements of democracy itself. However, it would

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 82-92.
seem that direct democracy is out of the question; a representative system of some kind is required. Not even electronic technology can give us direct democracy; someone would have to formulate the questions that people would be asked to answer in plebiscites to be held via telephones or home computer terminals.\textsuperscript{33}

Whatever the form that participatory democracy is to take, certain conditions will have to be met before it can come about; these include a change in political consciousness and a reduction of social and economic inequality. We are left with a "vicious circle"; each of these changes seems to require the other. The changes will have to come reciprocally, with an incremental change at one level engendering a degree of change at the other, and so on. Developments during the nineteen-sixties and seventies (reference to which may now appear somewhat dated) provided Macpherson with a foundation for hope. The public became more aware of the ever-increasing costs of continuous economic expansion, including pollution and overpopulation, he thought. An awareness of the costs of political apathy engendered movements for "black power," "student power," and industrial democracy. The phenomenon of "stagflation" prompted doubts about the ability of the capitalist system to meet consumer expectations.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 93-98.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 98-108.
If the competitive party system is to be bypassed, some provision for political accountability will have to be made; the failure of Soviet-style "democratic centralism" must be acknowledged. Perhaps direct democracy can be reconciled with the practical necessity for a representative system by means of a "pyramid" device, by which direct democracy would operate in local councils at the factory or neighborhood level, each of which would elect delegates to representative assemblies at higher levels. Failing that, perhaps a more participatory system could be combined with the existing party system by enacting a "pyramid" arrangement within each of the existing parties.35

In an important sense, participatory democracy is likely to have a broader purview than liberal democracy; it is likely to reconsider property arrangements and downgrade market assumptions. An important component of the political agenda of participatory democracy might be a demand for economic democracy, in the form of political control or direction of the economy (to one degree or another) for the sake of "a kind of society where all persons have equal effective right to a fully human life," as Macpherson puts it. Many features of a liberal society (at least in the original nineteenth-century sense) are likely to be absent under such an arrangement. However, as long as participatory democracy retains the developmental ideals put

forward by John Stuart Mill, there is no reason to deny it to be liberal in essence, since liberalism, in a general sense, has always stood for the abandonment of outmoded restraints. 36

The Problem of the "Vanguard"

Macpherson remarks that the advent of participatory democracy will require "a change in people's consciousness (or unconscionness), from seeing themselves and acting as essentially consumers to seeing themselves and acting as exerters and enjoyers of the exertion and development of their own capacities." If an attempt is made to carry out such a political program, it may prove difficult to raise everyone's consciousness at once. In fact, some will suggest that this insistence upon the necessity of "consciousness-raising" lends a sinister flavor to Macpherson's political stance. For instance, the problematical nature of a plebiscitary democracy was noted above, since the range of proposals to be settled within such a polity would be determined by those who posed the alternatives to be voted on. If left unaccountable, the person or body of persons who formulated the alternatives might come to wield the real power within the polity. Would this function be performed by those of a "higher

consciousness," for the benefit of those of us whose consciousnesses are not so elevated? Skeptics would conclude that such an arrangement would be the epitome of an Orwellian regime.  

At more than one point, Macpherson raises the dilemma posed here, but he sets it aside almost as soon as he raises it. In The Real World of Democracy, he asks, "How can the debasing society be changed by those who have themselves been debased by it? This is the problem that has faced not only liberal and radical, but also conservative, reformers, from Plato to Rousseau, from St. Thomas More to Marx. The debased people are, by definition, incapable of reforming themselves en masse." The strategies pursued by Plato, Rousseau, and Lenin are all problematical. "There can be no guarantee that Plato's authoritarian rulers, or Rousseau's charismatic leader, or Lenin's vanguard, will in fact use their power for the ends for which it was supposed to be used. Yet, in the circumstances we are talking about, there seems to be no less dangerous way." He acknowledges Sir Isaiah Berlin's criticism of "the doctrine that only they can know," yet he claims that "the terrible thing about this is that the postulate is often correct."  

\[37\] Macpherson, Life and Times, 99. See also p. 144 above.

\[38\] The Real World of Democracy, 19; "Berlin's Division of Liberty," essay 5, Essays in Retrieval, 106-107.
The issues raised here by Macpherson are discussed at length by Thomas Spragens in his *The Irony of Liberal Reason*. Spragens diagnoses the proposal for a "vanguard class" as a symptom of "technocratic" liberal rationality, in which sociopolitical knowledge is held to be accessible only to a class of experts. The claim of such a class or political party could all too easily represent "the fashioning by a well-intentioned, power-seeking intellectual class of their own legitimacy myth." Spragens's view is that such a claim has dangerous and sinister implications. He asks, "Who, in short, are the educators and who the educated? Who are the knowers and who the known? Who controls and who is controlled?"  

Macpherson should at least be given credit for acknowledging the difficulties posed here. He affirms that "the great majority of people in the Western liberal-democracies place a high value on the unique characteristics of the liberal-democratic state," including civil liberties and governmental accountability. In his response to Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*, he allows that institutional safeguards will be needed in the socialist commonwealth to offset the threat of "a ubiquitous party hostile to political freedom." His view, however, is that institutional safeguards, necessary or not, will not be decisive.

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It is not the absence of a fully competitive labour market that may disable a socialist government from guaranteeing political freedom; it is the absence of a firm will to do so. Where there's a will there's a way, and, for all that Friedman has argued to the contrary, the way need have nothing to do with a fully competitive labour market. The real problem of political freedom in socialism has to do with the will, not the way. The real problem is whether a socialist state could ever have the will to guarantee political freedom.

Macpherson thinks that in socialist regimes that might come to power in the Western world, conditions would be more favorable to the development of a will to maintain political freedom than in those regimes currently dominated by communist parties. Nevertheless, as long as "consciousness-raising" on the part of a "vanguard" is contemplated in the place of more mundane forms of political persuasion, many observers will be uneasy.40

"Third World" versus "First World"
Conceptions of Democracy

Macpherson believes that the peoples of the underdeveloped nations of the "Third World" are developing a democratic theory that recalls the ancient notion of democracy as rule by an oppressed class, even though coercion by a "vanguard" may have been involved in the establishment of these regimes. These peoples see competitive market society as unnatural, something imposed from above. They also see political competition and a

competitive party system as unnatural, since their societies lack class division. Since these nations are struggling to escape the yoke of what they call "neo-colonialism," there is a tendency to see any political opposition as treasonous; the genuine liberal-democratic achievements of civil rights and civil liberties are in danger of being shunted aside in the drive to modernize, accumulate capital, and create national loyalty.41

Nevertheless, the claim is made that these nations manifest a genuine Rousseauian "general will" that they can express only through a single dominant party. This notion of democracy is pre-liberal in that it emphasizes ends over means. These peoples find some aspects of Marxism congenial, but not the doctrine of the class state. They see themselves as classless already; they seek a national revolution, not a class revolution.42

Macpherson holds that the presence of nuclear weapons means that the West can no longer hope to dominate the world
outright; to win favor in the Third World, both superpower blocs will have to compete on moral grounds. This presents the prospect of a non-military engagement between the West and the Third World. Macpherson remarks that if the civil and political libertarianism of the West is to prevail, respect will have to be shown for the legitimate aspirations of Third World democracy. Since the Third World ideologies do not display the hegemonic tendencies of Marxist-Leninism, the West need not be implacably hostile to them, Macpherson argues. "In recognizing the merits of the new ideologies' humanism, the West would be going back to the roots of its own democratic tradition."43

The record of Third World governments may not lend much support to Macpherson's vision of a beneficent Third World democracy, if the accounts of numerous journalists and other specialists are to be believed. Furthermore, his sanguine attitude toward "vanguard" politics will lead many, Strauss among them, to suspect that Macpherson is practicing his own brand of "neo-Hobbesianism," in spite of his explicit criticism of Hobbes's "possessive individualism." In any case, that Macpherson is a Hobbesian can be concluded by implication only. He criticizes Hobbes instead of affirming him after the fashion of Michael Oakeshott, who lauds Hobbes

for his discovery of the nature of the human political predicament.
CHAPTER 5: MICHAEL OAKESHOTT--THE HOBESIAN STRUGGLE TO DELIMIT POLITICS

Michael Oakeshott, unlike Strauss or Macpherson, looks upon the political thought of Thomas Hobbes sympathetically. While Strauss and Macpherson take Hobbes to be a culprit of one sort or another, Oakeshott views him as contributing to a proper conception of politics. Hobbesian sovereignty is not a justification of an authoritarian despotism, Oakeshott argues; it simply is a justification of the authority that a duly established government ought to have. Government authority is to be absolute within its proper sphere, but this does not confer absolute power upon it. According to Oakeshott's interpretation, the Hobbesian theory seeks to give government its due, no more and no less. Governmental power is to be absolute within the properly understood bounds of politics, but this does not imply that government must interfere and regulate outside these carefully limited bounds.

Drawing upon Hobbes and other thinkers, Oakeshott seeks to deflate the claims of politics to an extent. Politics is not an all-encompassing activity; philosophy, which seeks to give a coherent account of the whole of experience, is the only such activity. Experience admits of modes, which, from the perspective of philosophy, represent arrests or distortions of experience. This does not mean that the modes can be avoided, especially not the mode of "practice"
or practical activity, which is indispensible to the conduct of life. Each mode is legitimate within its own limits, but each has a tendency to present itself as universally valid, without qualifications; philosophy must resist these grandiose claims. Philosophy must criticize an activity such as politics when it threatens to exceed its sphere of legitimacy. Such was the account of philosophy and experience offered by Oakeshott in his first philosophical endeavor, Experience and Its Modes.

Oakeshott believes that contemporary tendencies are contributing to an understanding of politics as an unlimited, all-encompassing activity. Politics is becoming a technical, managerial enterprise concerned with satisfying whatever needs are most deeply felt at a particular moment, he argues. As such, politics tends to become a matter of passion rather than moderation. Such are the themes of Oakeshott's collection of essays entitled Rationalism in Politics. In a more recent work, On Human Conduct, Oakeshott has elaborated a concept of "civil association" or civitas, to which, he suggests, the political realm ought to be limited as far as possible. Civitas would be a strictly formal, legalistic, rule-governed relationship which would not specify substantive performances, but would prescribe conditions which would constitute constraints to be observed by persons pursuing whatever substantive purposes they choose. This discussion of civitas is presented as an
exacting specification of the understanding of politics implicit in the Hobbesian theory, in which the concern of the political realm is to secure its own authoritativeness, not to satisfy substantive wants. The legitimate concern of the political is so carefully delimited that it appears to approach the ideal of the "night-watchman state" of classical liberal thought. In his other political writings Oakeshott appears less concerned with the specific content of political proposals than with the tenor or spirit in which they are put forward; here he is less concerned with the construction of a minimalist state that with the prevention and control of political fanaticism and enthusiasm. An ambiguity can thus be detected, especially between the doctrine of On Human Conduct and the more diffuse short political essays; found throughout all the writings, however, is the influence of Hobbes as the philosopher who would keep the political from getting out of control.

**Philosophy as Unqualified Experience**

In Experience and Its Modes, Oakeshott delineates his conception of philosophy and its relation to other activities. He stresses that philosophy does not consist of an indiscriminate pursuit of universal knowledge. The mandate of philosophy is nothing more than to give a coherent account of experience, without presupposition or arrest, unhindered by the partial, the subsidiary, or the
abstract. Philosophy must take special care to maintain
detachment from that which is extraneous to it. "Nearly
always a philosopher hides a secret ambition, foreign to
philosophy," Oakeshott remarks. "But we must learn not to
follow the philosophers upon these holiday excursions."¹

W. H. Greenleaf describes Oakeshott as an Hegelian
idealist of a sort. According to Greenleaf, Oakeshott is
dissatisfied both with a transcendentalist realism that
placed truth only within a supersensible realm removed from
experience and with an anti-metaphysical empiricist
nominalism. It is to be hoped that an idealist philosophy
can preserve the logical certainty of realism without
refusing to acknowledge the reality of any aspect of human
experience. To this end, Oakeshott develops a theory of
truth in which the true is held to be that which renders our
experience coherent. Truth and experience are not to be
dichotomized so that one is extraneous to the other;
coherence is to be taken as the criterion for truth, not
vice versa.²

Just as he criticizes the separation of truth from
experience, Oakeshott also objects to the dichotomization of
reality into a world of ideas and an external world of
things. This distinction has only a practical, provisional

¹Michael Oakeshott, Experience and Its Modes (Cambridge:

²W. H. Greenleaf, Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics
(London: Longmans, 1966), 6-16.
validity, as does the distinction between thought and perception. His view of reality is derived from experience, as is his view of truth. To separate knowledge from reality, to make reality independent of experience, would render it unknowable. Therefore, he rejects as a vicious dualism any view which requires a divorce between experience and reality.³

Philosophy, then, represents a unified world of experience in terms of ideas. This unity does, of course, admit of diversity. The whole, however, does not consist simply of the sum of several different kinds of experience; experience admits of modes rather than kinds. The modes of experience are defective from the standpoint of philosophy; they represent defects or arrests in experience. Their perspective is limited or partial rather than holistic; philosophy must supersede them logically. Philosophy is unitary, concrete experience, whereas the modes do not rise above the merely abstract. Philosophy represents the completion of the modes; it is the pursuit of the concreteness of experience for its own sake, without hindrance, distortion, or presupposition.⁴

In Experience and Its Modes, Oakeshott designates the historical, scientific, and practical modes as the central objects of study, although this does not represent an

³Oakeshott, Experience and Its Modes, 48-54.
⁴Ibid., 69-82.
exhaustive listing of the modes. From the standpoint of philosophy, these modes are all defective because they are abstract and fail to achieve the character of fully concrete, coherent experience. They fail to overcome the dichotomy of the observer and that which is observed; they presuppose or designate the observed thing, rather than providing a comprehensive, exhaustive, concrete definition, which alone is satisfactory to philosophy.

The scientific and historical modes come closer than the practical to seeking experience for its own sake, but they still fall short. The scientific mode is concerned with definite, demonstrable knowledge, knowledge that is perfectly and unambiguously communicable; for this reason, science culminates in the search for quantitative knowledge. The scientific mode, unlike the historical and the practical, can admit relationships of cause and effect; the latter two modes deal with human beings who attribute significance, which is not reducible to causality, to their own actions. The historian, constructing an historical past from a set of artifacts, seeks an explanation of contingent relationships in terms of their significance. The historian projects truth and reality into the past, whereas the practical man projects reality into the future.\(^5\)

\(^5\)Oakeshott elaborates on the historical and scientific modes in chapters 3 and 4 of *Experience and Its Modes* (86-168 and 169-246). Further discussions of the historical mode are to be found in "The Activity of Being a Historian," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London and New York: Methuen, 1962),
Each of these modes of experience represents a homogeneous world of abstract ideas; they are exclusive of and irrelevant to each other. Error arises when we attempt to argue in one mode with the vocabulary of another. For instance, Oakeshott believes it to be illegitimate to argue against a philosophical postulate on the grounds that its propagation might be destructive to morality or religion; such an argument illegitimately moves from the practical to the philosophical mode. Similarly, he thinks it incorrect to speak of applying a scientific discovery to practical life. Such a discovery would have to be transformed—perhaps from the scientific mode to the technical mode, which would be a species of the practical mode—before it could be so applied.6

"Each world of abstract ideas, we have seen, so long as it is content to mind its own business, is unassailable," remarks Oakeshott. However, he believed it would be impossible for each mode so to limit itself. Each mode tends to assert its validity absolutely; to do otherwise, it would have to be aware of its shortcoming or partiality, which would mean it was already on the way to passing out of modality into philosophy. From the standpoint of totality, each of the modes is incomplete and contains an element of


6Oakeshott, Experience and Its Modes, 311-315.
self-contradiction. Philosophy must assert itself against the modes when they attempt to assert themselves outside their realms of limited validity. This obligation of philosophy holds especially with respect to the ubiquitous mode of practical experience. \(^7\)

**Politics as Practical Experience**

The practical is the one mode in which we cannot avoid participating. Concerned with the satisfaction of substantive wants, it is essential to the conduct of life. Although most of our mundane existence is taken up with practical activity, philosophy cannot abide the claim that practice constitutes the *whole* of experience, providing what the other modes lack.

Practice is defined by its essential concern with the alteration of existence. Alteration includes both change and the prevention of change, as in an activity of maintenance. Practical experience is not to be confused with a vulgar conception of "practicality." Even the religious mystic, living a life of quietism, is involved in the mode of practical experience. "Practice is activity, the activity inseparable from the conduct of life and from the necessity of which no living man can relieve himself."\(^8\)

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\(^7\)Ibid., 329-330.

\(^8\)Ibid., 256-57.
Practice depends upon a movement from a "what is" to a "to be" which is "not yet." The "what is" and the "to be" are always of the same character; the latter is implicit or potential in the former. (In a conserving or maintaining activity, threatened change belongs to the "what is.") The "to be," or "not yet," represents a more coherent form of the "what is"; it is equivalent to what ought to be. The activity of eliciting the "not yet" from the "what is" represents a reconciliation of the world of fact with that of value.

Practical activity requires a criterion for determining what constitutes a satisfactory alteration; this reveals that any claim on the part of practice to represent the whole of experience must be false. The world of practical fact is inherently unstable and incoherent; science and history at least deal with a world of unchanging fact. Practical activity by its nature throws truth ahead into the future; it seeks the criterion for a satisfactory alteration in a world of value which is not itself the world of practice. To look to a sphere beyond itself is intrinsic to practical experience; by itself, it cannot render experience coherent.⁹

Oakeshott believes that practical activity can never finally be satisfactory; in fact, it can be seen as intrinsically self-frustrating. The resolution of fact and

⁹Ibid., 257-263.
value attempted by practice can never fully be achieved; a new discord will spring up as soon as a reconciliation is achieved. Each resolution affords a new perspective which reveals new discords. Any resolution achieved by practical activity will always be partial and incomplete, owing to the character of practice as an abstract mode of experience.\(^\text{10}\)

Oakeshott criticizes contemporary society for having become infatuated with practical activity; he sees practice as driving out other spheres of activity. In *Experience and Its Modes* he had identified poetry as a form of practice; later, he came to conceive it as a kind of contemplative imagining that yields a delight inseparable from the activity itself. In his essay, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," he represented the diverse modes of experience as voices in a conversation; poetry is in danger of being drowned out by the louder voices of science and practice. In a discussion of "The Study of 'Politics' in a University," he discusses the technical and vocational trend in university education, tending as it does to drive out the historical and literary studies traditionally associated with liberal education: "And consequently, in a society (such as ours) which has a high standard of

\(^\text{10}\)Ibid., 289-291.
practical relevance, universities have often to be defended.\textsuperscript{11}

A technical trend can be discerned in politics as well as in education. Oakeshott held that an understanding of politics as an exclusively technical pursuit was characteristic of contemporary ideologies. Such an understanding excludes that element of tacit judgement or political "connoisseurship" that Oakeshott identifies as traditional political knowledge. Modern ideologies represent political "cribs" that may be necessary in order that newly enfranchised groups, whose members may not have had much opportunity to develop traditional political skills, may nevertheless participate in politics. Technical political knowledge may be formulated in terms of precise rules; traditional knowledge, which is more diffuse, appears less precise and quickly falls out of favor, at least when compared to the newfangled political "cribs."\textsuperscript{12}

The theme of the domination of technical activity at the expense of all other such modes was central to Oakeshott's reflections on politics. An understanding of politics as exclusively technical is one aspect of a self-frustrating "hyperactivity" that manifests itself in

\textsuperscript{11}Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" and "The Study of 'Politics' in a University," Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays, 246-247, 310-311.

\textsuperscript{12}Greenleaf, 46-51; see also Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics" and "Rational Conduct," 1-36 and 80-110 in Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays.
societal immoderation and political "enthusiasm." A more proper understanding of the political would emphasize its more detached, formal aspects. It would be preferable if politics resembled the mode of civil association, rather than mere technical activity, to as great an extent as possible.

**Hobbes: Politics as Artifice**

"The rule of law denotes both a strict and an unexacting relationship: here there is no place for enthusiasm." As with other thinkers identified with the political right, Oakeshott diagnoses contemporary political disorders as manifestations of an unbridled enthusiasm, perhaps recalling the disenchantment of Hobbes with the activities of religious sectarians before and during the English Civil War. Oakeshott seeks to delineate the boundaries of "politics properly understood" in order to exclude such enthusiasms. Here he conceptualizes his preferred mode of politics as "the rule of law"; elsewhere he speaks of a preference for societas rather than universitas. Both conceptualizations are designed to exclude an "enthusiastic" politics of mass movements and charismatic leaders.13

Oakeshott's determination to defeat political enthusiasm dictates that he disparage any reference to

natural law as the foundation of political authority. In the first place, he finds the promulgation of such doctrines to be attended by "enthusiasm" in the pejorative sense. Furthermore, for good Hobbesian reasons he sees these doctrines as threats to the political order, since they threaten to become competitors with law as established by duly constituted authority. He speaks of "the fanciful doctrine of the Declaration of Independence" and "the absurd device of a Bill of Rights." "National interest" has no more validity than "common good." His "rule of law" has no use for a "higher" or "fundamental" law in the sense of an entrenched constitution or Basic Law.14

To keep the polity from being overrun by political enthusiasm, a detached stance toward matters political must be reinforced by an insistence that politics falls within the realm of artifice, not nature. In his introduction to the Leviathan, Oakeshott stresses that for Hobbes "civil society is an artifact; it is artificial, not natural. . . . The word 'civil', in Hobbes, means artifice springing from more than one will." Whereas Plato was the philosopher of Reason and Nature, and Hegel was the theorist of Rational Will, Hobbes provided the "master-conceptions" of Will and Artifice.15


Oakeshott believes that Hobbes provided a perspective from which modern confusion about the scope of the political could be overcome. Hobbes understood that the crucial issue was not the *naturalness* but the *authoritativness* of rule. In his most recent reflections, Oakeshott argues that "what we need to be shown is how the ingredients of such an association might be created and assembled; and, in particular, how human beings might acquire the condition of being *obligated* to observe the prescriptions of an *humanus legislator.* Among theorists of association in terms of the rule of law, Thomas Hobbes is, I think, one of the few who addressed himself exactly to this question."\(^1^6\)

In the same essay, Oakeshott speaks of Hobbes's "vision of a state" in such a way as to suggest that this "vision" closely parallels his own conception of "civil association" or *societas.* "Such a state, he [Hobbes] contended, is composed of *personae* related solely in terms of obligations to observe in all their self-chosen conduct certain non-instrumental (that is moral or procedural) conditions prescribed by a sovereign legislative office expressly authorized to deliberate, make and issue such prescriptions which constitute the *lex* of the association." This vision, "superbly pioneered" by Hobbes along with Bodin, "is deeply rooted in our civilization."\(^1^7\)

\(^1^6\)Oakeshott, "The Rule of Law," in *On History*, 149-150.
\(^1^7\)Ibid., 157, 161-162.
Civil Association: Common Concern, Not Common Purpose

In the second part of On Human Conduct, entitled "On the Civil Condition," Oakeshott feels compelled to attempt an exhaustive specification of the terms of the relationship he called "civil association." "It is a certain mode of association, one among others," he remarks; "I shall call it the relationship of civility." Whether this relationship of civility constitutes a distinct mode of experience, on the same level as the historical, the scientific, and the practical, is left ambiguous.18

The engagement appropriate to civil association falls somewhere between the sphere of the legal and that of the political. Oakeshott defines the political as "practical activity concerned with the institutions and arrangements of an association of human beings." As a form of practical activity, politics is concerned with whether particular institutions are desirable, but civil association has a concern more exacting and specific than that of "mere" desirability. A central component of civil association is adjudication of the kind to be found in a disinterested legal court, in which "merely" political considerations are to be set to one side. Civil association can no more exclude legislation than adjudication, but legislation of a certain kind, which would consider the satisfaction of

specific interests instead of adopting a disinterested perspective, would remove us from civil association into the realm of politics in the vulgar sense.19

**Civitas** is a condition postulating relationships "neither quite so narrow as those pointed to in the words 'legal' and 'legally', nor so indiscriminate as those now commonly (but I think unfortunately) understood by the words 'political' and 'politically'." Drawing upon the discussion of the Greek polis in Aristotle's *Politics*, Oakeshott characterizes the civil condition as "always self-complete in the sense of having no extrinsic substantive purpose .... it is like 'friendship' but diluted or 'watery'." As such, it should be distinguished from a transactional relationship between bargainers, which pursues a common purpose or interest in the form of the satisfaction of a substantive want. This latter "enterprise association," which is strictly to be distinguished from civil association, includes but is not limited to exchange relationships in the economic marketplace.20

Civil association, as an alternative to enterprise association, is defined as association in terms of subscription to a practice. Subscription to a practice should not be taken as equivalent to "practical engagement"

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or a "mode of practical experience," since these latter expressions designate concern with satisfaction of substantive wants, while the notion of a practice seems to be defined by the absence of just such substantive concerns. A practice does not enjoin a substantive performance, but instead sets conditions to be met in the course of any such performance. It is a formal rather than a substantial relationship, similar to that among speakers of a common language in that it is concerned with subscription to common rules rather than pursuit of common purposes, akin to the relation "of French-speakers in respect of their language, not in respect of what they have to say."21

Civil association is concerned with the propriety or authority of actions rather than their substantive desirability; essentially it is rule-articulated association. It calls only for assent, not approval or disapproval. All within the jurisdiction of a rule are obligated; obligation is not a condition that one can deny simply because one does not feel it. A rule is a prescription or standing order that remains in force for unknown future occasions. Rules do not enjoin particular actions; they simply prescribe norms to be adhered to, whatever the action.22

21Ibid., 119-122.
22Ibid., 122-127
The rules of civil association are rules of a particular kind. An enterprise association may have its constitution or bylaws, but the enforcement of these rules does not constitute the substantive purpose of the enterprise. Similarly, the rules of a game do not have the same status as those of civil association; players are in the game to win, not just to follow the rules. Civil association begins and ends in terms of rules; the rules of civil association, called lex or "law," define a relationship among formal equals or cives. Laws are the sole terms in which cives are related. Cives may be understood as "fictional persons," and their creation by lex may be understood as a "legal fiction"; no man is a "civic person" and nothing else. Men are cives only from the perspective of civil association, the "mode of civility." The rules of civil association go together to form a system for the enforcement of norms of human behavior; they are related to each other argumentatively, not merely incidentally. This system must specify conditions for ascertaining its own authenticity and specifying its jurisdiction, since there are no extrinsic standards for doing so; lex specifies relations among cives who are not otherwise related.23

An essential feature of cives is that they may be related to each other as suitors to a judicial court; civil

23Ibid., 129-130.
association sustains itself by means of continuous adjudication. Such adjudication is not a "managerial" device; decisions are to be rendered and claims made only with respect to general normative considerations derived from lex. Ideally, there should be no "interested" parties in a judicial proceeding; not only the court, but also the "plaintiff" and the "defendant," should be concerned with the articulation or illustration of lex, with coming to a conclusion that is acceptable to lex, rather than with the satisfaction of a particular substantive interest.\textsuperscript{24}

Although adjudication is at the heart of lex, resort to legislation cannot be avoided absolutely in the civil condition. This follows from the character of civil association as a product of human artifice. However, Oakeshott cautions against a too hasty resort to legislation; where possible, it is preferable for the courts to articulate that which is implicit in lex as it exists already. Oakeshott contends that constant ad hoc legislation constitutes a breakdown in civil association. He would not regard much of the legislation passed by contemporary legislatures as genuine lex. He remarks that "lex cannot be a schedule of current awards designed to promote the achievement of some satisfactions at the expense of others . . . . Legislative opinion is concerned with the desirable composition of a system of moral, not

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 130-138.
instrumental, considerations and therefore it cannot be concerned with the claims or merits of interest in procuring substantive satisfactions."\(^{25}\)

Civil association can no more avoid an element of rulership and administration than it can forego completely the passage of legislation. *Lex* makes the issuance of injunctions consistent with civil association by authorizing specific offices with sufficient authority to enjoin performances that do not conform to legal conditions. To perform this enforcement function, the ruler requires an enforcement apparatus; he cannot avoid entering into managerial and administrative relations. Judicial rule is preferable to administrative edict, but both are necessary. However, it should not be the case that the ruler becomes nothing but a manager; in that case, civil association would have disappeared, having been replaced by enterprise association. "Rulers may employ clerks but they rule subjects." Otherwise, "rulership" will have been supplanted by "lordship."\(^{26}\)

The comprehensive conditions of civil association consist of the enforcement of a manifold of rules, not the pursuit of a common substantive purpose or interest. *Civitas* is concerned with law, not policy; the contemporary understanding of government as the adoption of "public

\(^{25}\)Ibid., 138-141.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 141-147.
policy" constitutes a vulgarization of civil association. Governmental authority should not be understood as a derivative of the desirability of policies adopted; in civil association, government is recognized as authoritative solely because of a common recognition that it is duly authorized. Appeal to "natural law" or a "common good" is ruled out. Lex may include rules for testing what purports to be authoritative, but such a "constitution" does not have the status of a "higher law" of superior status, according to which other law may be validated or invalidated; such a constitution is no more immune to inquiry or interpretation than the remainder of the law. Civil association knows no other "justice" than the "inner justice" of a legal system.27

Civil association admits considerations both of authoritativeness and of desirability. However, a certain danger arises when the latter considerations are involved. "Politics" for Oakeshott takes on a double meaning, the first of which is consistent with civil association, the second of which is inimical to it; we may speak of "politics properly speaking" and "vulgar politics." The proper sense of politics is the consideration of the conditions of civil association in terms of their desirability; this is not an undifferentiated engagement concerned with satisfying wants, whatever they may be. Ruling should be concerned with

27Ibid., 147-154.
authoritativeness, not persuasiveness; it has no place for techniques of persuasion which present the ruler as a charismatic figure who exercises an amorphous kind of "leadership." The requirements of electioneering threaten a vulgarization of the civil condition. If the ruler must engage in electioneering, he should at least distinguish his rulership from his participation in this vulgar kind of politics.28

Oakeshott understood civil association, or "politics properly speaking," as an exacting relationship which demands a high degree of detachment. Much of what is described with the adjective "political" in contemporary times would be excluded. Civil association requires a "disciplined imagination"; one must exercise a critical intellect while accepting the requirement of assent to authority. Oakeshott remarks that his conception may appear to "impose upon politics an implausibly circumspect character," but he stipulates that he is articulating an ideal form, not an account of just whatever happens to be in the head of a typical politician. As such, "it calls for so exact a focus of attention and so uncommon a self-restraint that one is not astonished to find this mode of human relationship to be as rare as it is excellent."29

28Ibid., 161-168.
29Ibid., 163-165, 180.
Oakeshott invokes the authority of Hobbes in defence of his conception of civil association as the proper understanding of politics. To make this case, he must defend his interpretation of Hobbes as the philosopher of politics-as-artifice against any suggestion that the author of the Leviathan was a natural-law theorist. Such is the purpose of Oakeshott's essay, "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes," in which he sets out to establish his favored interpretation of Hobbes over two alternatives. The first alternative he attributes to Strauss in The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. On Oakeshott's reading, Strauss holds that Hobbes's political obligation is binding because it is rational. Man is compelled to endeavour to preserve his own existence; his behavior is rational so long as he does not venture beyond this. It is rational for man to seek peace, which is necessary for self-preservation. To make war against others is to claim more than a person is naturally entitled to; as such, it is irrational and a violation of one's political obligation.  

Oakeshott presses several objections against this reading. First, he holds that Hobbes claimed for man more than an obligation or compulsion to self-preservation; man

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had a right to such. Further, the Straussian interpretation excludes the essential feature of moral conduct as disinterested; this reading would make all peaceful endeavors equally just, however interested. Finally, this reading goes astray by equating obligatory conduct with rational conduct. "On no plausible reading of Hobbes is the Law of Nature to be considered obligatory because it represents rational conduct. . . . 'reason' for Hobbes (except where he is being unmistakably equivocal) has no prescriptive force." Fear of death may be our motivation for action consistent with our obligation, but it is not necessarily a justification for doing so.  

A second interpretation that Oakeshott seeks to defeat is that put forward by Howard Warrender and others to the effect that Hobbes is indeed a natural-law theorist. The Law of Nature enjoins us to "endeavour peace," and according to Warrender the author of this Law of Nature is none other than God. Oakeshott objects that Hobbes could not admit knowledge of God as the author of natural law as included among our natural knowledge. Acknowledgment of God is a matter of belief, not knowledge. Hobbes speaks of God as "ruler" in a metaphorical sense only; God is the "ruler" only of those who acknowledge him. The duty to observe political obligation is not apprehended naturally; the Law of Nature lacks an authentic interpretation. Oakeshott

\[31\text{Ibid.}\]
argues that for Hobbes political obligation can emerge only by choice or covenant, not by direct apprehension of a natural law ordained by God.\textsuperscript{32}

Oakeshott's preferred interpretation is that there is no natural law for Hobbes. Obligation is binding neither because it is rational nor because it is natural, but only because it is made by a duly constituted authority. "The question, Why am I morally bound to obey the commands of the sovereign of my civitas? (which, for Hobbes, is the important question) requires no other answer than, Because I, in agreement with others in a similar plight to myself, and with a common disposition to make covenants, having 'authorized' him, know him indubitable to be a law-giver and know his commands as laws properly speaking." Fear of destruction may cause men to enter into a covenant, but until a covenant is entered into, there is no law and no obligation; obligation begins and ends with civil law.\textsuperscript{33}

What obligates men to go on keeping the covenant, once it is made? Oakeshott offers an intriguing answer: nothing does. A duty "to keep the covenant" would have to be imposed by a law outside the civil law; Oakeshott concludes that for Hobbes there can be no such law, hence no such duty. To continue to keep the covenant may be a desirable


\textsuperscript{33}Oakeshott, "Moral Life," in \textit{Rationalism in Politics}, 266-269.
action, but it is not a duty. "To make and keep the covenant . . . are for Hobbes (on this reading) acts of prudence which are reasonable and desirable to be performed on condition that others perform them, or acts of 'nobility' that make no conditions." Assent to political authority based on considerations of prudence or virtue would appear to be the only version of political "obligation" that Hobbes could admit; this is as obligatory as the political can be. There is no general political obligation; there are only duties to obey specific civil laws. Outside of specific laws, there is no obligation.34

We find in Oakeshott a consistent denial of natural-law content in the Hobbesian theory. Why, then, do we find such frequent references to natural law in the Hobbesian corpus? Oakeshott argues that Hobbes was conducting an argument at two levels, one for "initiates" and another for "the ordinary man." Strauss's doctrine of the esoteric reading is recalled. At one level we have an exercise in political persuasion, conducted in language inoffensive to the settled beliefs of the common people; at the philosophical level, we have a strict logical deduction. Roughly speaking, we may identify the logical exercise with the first and second parts of the Leviathan, and the polemics with the third and fourth parts, especially since in those parts Hobbes is concerned to convince the typical believing Christian of the

34Ibid., 266-273.
day that he need not feel a conflict between his obligation to his God and to his sovereign; the two endeavors probably cannot strictly be separated from each other, however. Oakeshott mentions that this interpretation by no means makes Hobbes unique in the history of political theory; he cites Plato, Machiavelli, and Bentham as authors who combined esoteric and exoteric doctrines in a single document.  

Since Strauss held that Hobbes placed Right before Law, Oakeshott and Strauss would seem to be as one in denying that Hobbes is a theorist of natural law. Nevertheless, Oakeshott takes some exception to Strauss's claims about Hobbes; he elaborates his objections in an article entitled "Dr. Leo Strauss on Hobbes." In particular, Oakeshott denies that Hobbes inaugurated a decisive break in the history of political thought (a claim which Strauss finally withdrew); Oakeshott holds that the Hobbesian theory has a longer and more honorable pedigree than Strauss allows. Oakeshott attributes the genesis of Hobbes's theory to the Stoic-Christian as distinct from the Aristotelian tradition, and also to the Epicurean tradition as it was revived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Previously, in his introduction to *Leviathan*, he had elaborated the lineage of the Hobbesian theory in more detail:

\[35\text{Ibid, 286-288.}\]
But this theory of Hobbes has a lineage that stretches back into the ancient world. It is true that Greek thought, lacking the conception of the creative will and the idea of sovereignty, contributed a criticism of the Rational-Natural theory which fell short of the construction of an alternative tradition: Epicurus was an inspiration rather than a guide. But there are in the political ideals of Roman civilization and in the politico-theological ideas of Judaism strains of thought . . . which may be said to constitute beginnings of a tradition of Will and Artifice. . . . The skepticism and the individualism, which are the foundations of his [Hobbes's] civil philosophy, were the gifts of late scholastic nominalism; the displacement of Reason in favour of will and imagination and the emancipation of passion were slowly mediated changes in European thought that had gone far before Hobbes wrote.

While Oakeshott asserts several intellectual sources for Hobbes in the above and in the article on Strauss, he discusses none of them in great detail. Nevertheless, he must have felt that he had suggested enough potential sources to dispose of the notion that Hobbes could not have had any intellectual precursors. Furthermore, just as Hobbes did not mark the beginning of all skeptical-nominalist theorizing, neither did he mark the conclusion of natural law theory: "The natural law theory did not die at once, even otherwise 'modern' thinkers such as Locke have it embedded in their theories, and it did not die without resurrection."36

Oakeshott attributes to Hobbes an elevated status within the Western political tradition; furthermore, he

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seeks to downplay the despotic or authoritarian implications often attributed to the Hobbesian theory. He affirms that for Hobbes there can be no unjust law; however, "This does not mean that the legislative office is magically insulated from making 'unjust' law." It means only that whatever law is made is authoritative; law can be inequitable or unnecessary while still being authoritative. The crucial question is whether the law, if inequitable or unnecessary, may be criticized openly as such by the subjects of the Hobbesian sovereign. The criticism traditionally put forward is that Hobbesian sovereignty obviates the possibility of political life on the part of the subjects; for the sovereign to admit criticism would appear to be to admit challenges to his authority.\(^{37}\)

It might be supposed that, were the Hobbesian sovereign to determine that dissent was not to be allowed, this could not be criticized as unjust; however, he might not deem it necessary to do so. Discussion may be admissable so long as disobedience is not countenanced. "The absolutism attributed to the sovereign authority implies no frenzy for regulation or passion for interference. The silence of the law will brood over large tracts of the subject's life." Furthermore, Oakeshott argues that an absolutely regulated society is contrary to the spirit of rule of law; since law

\(^{37}\)Oakeshott, "The Rule of Law," in On History, 157-158. See also Introduction to Leviathan, xli-xlili.
stipulates abstract conditions to be met, rather than specific performances, command always implies a degree of liberty in execution on the part of the subject.\(^{38}\)

**Societas and Universitas: Alternative Conceptions of Politics in the Modern European State**

Oakeshott asserts that the European conception of the state has now become a global phenomenon. How faithful has European civilization been to the ideal of politics proposed by Oakeshott as the essence of the Hobbesian political theory—the notion of civil association as rule of law? Has the opposing notion of "enterprise association" come to predominate in the contemporary European state? Or, is the European state now a confused, ambiguous mixture of these two concepts? In exploring this issue, Oakeshott introduces the terms *societas* and *universitas* as rough equivalents of "civil association" and "enterprise association." The fate of these opposing conceptions of politics in the contemporary world is the subject of the third part of *On Human Conduct*, entitled "On the Character of a Modern European State."

Oakeshott contends that the emergence of the concept "state," as it emerged by the sixteenth century from the breakup of the medieval realms, is marked by confusion. The new paradigm emerged from older forms of political association, some of whose features pointed to the analogy

\(^{38}\)Oakeshott, Introduction to *Leviathan*, xliii-xliv.
of societas, others to universitas. The character of the new regime and the understanding of the office of government that it implied were not specified exactly. Each of the two available analogies offered its own loosely knit collection of characteristics; a state could be defined as an unresolved tension between the two.

Societas corresponds roughly to Oakeshott's "civil association." Citizens of societas accept its authority under formal conditions described as "legality," which is not equivalent to a common substantive purpose or interest. It is a formal relationship with rules, not a substantive relationship of common purpose or common action. The office of the ruler is to stipulate and enforce conditions of conduct, not to adopt policies concerned with the satisfaction of substantive wants. Alongside societas is the alternative conception of universitas, or what Oakeshott calls "teleocratic" government. It is an association of persons which is itself like a person; individuals are comparable in status to the organs of a larger body, united in the pursuit of a common purpose or substantive end. These two analogies may point in different directions, but they are not mutually exclusive.39

Oakeshott holds that the analogies of societas and universitas were already being applied to reflection about the political during the Middle Ages; they were "already in

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use to denote some actual associations and communities. The human race was often reckoned to be a societas and so was a civitas or regnum; while an imperial city, a gild, a cathedral chapter, or a 'university' were recognized as universitates." Soon the two expressions were appropriated for learned argument about politics. While Oakeshott holds that an actual state may partake of both analogies to some extent, he believes that they should be kept distinct as concepts; regrettably, he argues, their meanings have become hopelessly muddled. For instance, the terms societas and universitas were translated into English respectively as "partnership" and "corporation," which are now used indifferently. When we refer today to "law," "ruling," and "politics," these terms partake of both the societas and universitas analogies in a muddled fashion.40

Oakeshott maintains that there is much to suggest that the late medieval realm can be understood in terms of societas. It was constituted in judicial terms. The monarch was not a lordly proprietor but a ruler of subjects, concerned with keeping the peace. Revenue was collected, but the realm was not treated as a piece of real estate to be exploited. The realm was not understood as a landed estate, a commercial enterprise, or a military association, but an association in terms of legal relationships.41

40Ibid., 199-201.
41Ibid., 206-213.
At the same time, some features of the late medieval realm suggested the analogy of universitas. The distinction between the government of a realm and the management of a manor never emerged conclusively. An element of lordship survived from the medieval realm to the European state, making it eligible to be understood as a kind of universitas. This was most convincing with respect to the ruler's sacerdotal authority, in which the inculcation of Christian culture is understood as part of the office of government. The Church was coming to be understood as one among many corporate associations within the state; the special authority once held by the Church passed to the ruler.\footnote{Ibid., 214-224.}

Over the course of the sixteenth century, kingdoms with pretensions to being modern states began to emerge. Their identifying marks were clear; their concern was to exclude "rule from without" in the form of papal or imperial authority. Rulership was concerned primarily with "pacification" aimed at encroachments from outside powers. The character of rule changed from personal management by a manorial lord to the formal relationship of ruler and subject. The new arrangement provided a liberation from the threat of civil disorder, but the liberation was not received without reservations; Oakeshott remarks that "this liberating civil authority was seen also to have a menacing
aspect: it evoked misgivings commensurate with its magnitude." Institutional arrangements were constructed to guard against this potential menace, but by the nineteenth century the pressure of circumstances led to a breakdown of the notion of postulated limits on government.43

The self-understanding of a particular state could consist of a mixture of the societas and universitas conceptions in any proportion, depending on the extent to which the office of government is understood as being either to rule or to manage. The concept of the modern European state partakes of ambiguity on this crucial question. Oakeshott, for his part, makes it clear that persons of a certain disposition will prefer the societas conception. Furthermore, he suggests strongly that he holds this disposition to societas to be morally superior; he calls it "the strongest strand in the moral convictions of the inhabitants of modern Europe." This disposition understands human conduct in terms of self-enactment, self-disclosure, or self-actualization; it understands human conduct in terms of its authenticity. For persons of this disposition, the conduct of life consists of a dramatic, contingent engagement by intelligent beings rather than the completion of an organic process upon beings subject to deterministic causal laws.44

43Ibid., 224-231.
44Ibid., 231-242.
Circumstances have arisen during modern European history that have given rise to a disposition opposed to that of self-enactment and self-disclosure. Several factors have contributed. The development of an administrative apparatus, indispensible though it may be, inclines us to conceive of government as an enterprise association. Furthermore, the recurrence of warfare compelled states to undertake activities inimical to civil association. However, the most crucial such development was the emergence of the so-called "problem of the poor," in which Europe saw the emergence of a mass mentality incapable of undertaking the demands of detachment and disinterest required by civil association.

The individual manqué had suffered not only substantive loss but also moral defeat. The morality of respect for individuality and of virtuous self-enactment was certainly not without competitors in the world of emerging European states, and it was soon to encounter a resurgent (though somewhat rickety) morality centered upon the pursuit of a so-called 'common good', but it had swept aside both what was valuable and what was not so valuable in the morality of communal ties. And the weight of this moral victory bore heavily upon the individual manqué. . . . He had feelings rather than thoughts, impulses rather than opinions, inabilities rather than passions. He required to be told what to think, to ask for, and to do, and in the course of time his natural submissiveness prompted the emergence of 'leaders' to perform this service for him.

Contemporary politics thus comes to partake of "mass movements" composed of "mass men" or "anti-individuals" who gravitate around politicians who use techniques of mass persuasion, advertising, and propagandizing to exercise a
charismatic "leadership" which would have no place within the more constrained understanding of politics provided by civil association. If the charismatic "leader" is sufficiently unscrupulous, he may take on the character of the totalitarian dictator.45

The concluding passages of "On the Character of a Modern European State" consist of a complaint about the compromised character of contemporary polities, in which societas and universitas have become so badly conflated. One commentator observes that Oakeshott subjects the universitas conception to "restrained abuse." We read that modern states have become "development corporations" in which the people are to be "made one in devotion to a pattern of 'enlightened' conduct." Government has become an indiscriminate enterprise in pursuit of "well-being" or "welfare": education has been transformed from an initiation into a moral and intellectual inheritance to the provision of an apprenticeship in technical skills so that the people may become assets to the state in pursuit of its enterprise. Government takes on the character of a "therapeutic state" intent upon remedying an ill-defined alienation, frustration, insecurity, guilt, or anomie, at the expense of all vestiges of civil association.46


The character of modern European government would appear to be hopelessly equivocal; the conceptions of societas and universitas have been contingently joined and thus confused. The character of the people suffers under this arrangement. "The member of such a state enjoys the composure of the conscript assured of his dinner. His 'freedom' is warm, compensated servility." Nevertheless, a glimmer of a superior conception of political association survives in European culture: "But, while those who are disposed to take the other path are, perhaps, fewer and are often denigrated as frivolous individuals merely out for the walk, no European alive to his inheritance of moral understanding has ever found it possible to deny the superior desirability of civil association without a profound feeling of guilt."

Oakeshott's complaint about the character of modern European government could be characterized as nothing more than a visceral revulsion at the growth of the state and at the spiritual condition of man under welfarism. However, in an essay in Political Studies, which appeared in a more popularized version in National Review, he argues that the confused self-understanding of contemporary polities represents a threat to the very authority of government. In these two articles, he conceives the state as composed of an office of authority, an apparatus of power, and a mode of

association. By an office of authority is meant the constitution by virtue of which we take governmental authority to be legitimate; the vocabulary invoked here includes that of "democracy," "republicanism," "monarchy," "autocracy," "tyranny," and the like. The apparatus of power is the administrative bureaucracy which government cannot avoid constructing. The mode of association is either societas, universitas, or some mixture of the two. Contemporary confusion is most acute with respect to the office of authority, argues Oakeshott. Government authority ought to be affirmed on the basis of whether it has been duly authorized, but the vocabulary of authority has been appropriated for the evaluation of the performance of government policy concerning some substantive purpose, usually the pursuit of general economic prosperity. We hear talk of democratic and autocratic economies rather than democratic and autocratic constitutions. This may indicate that the popular understanding of the legitimacy of government is based on evaluation of substantive performance rather than due authorization. Indifference to government authority may be the result; order may be endangered whenever economic performance suffers a significant decline.48

Politics as "Second-Best Deliverence"

Oakeshott argued that several features of the medieval realm anticipated the ideal form of societas. As he describes them, the duties of the ruler under this medieval realm are "to provide courts in which all his subjects might find redress for wrongs suffered and recognition for those of their actions which subscribed to authoritative procedures, to guard the realm against its enemies, and to collect the revenue needed in these undertakings." Is societas therefore to be identified with the "night-watchman state" of libertarianism, in which courts, police, the military, and the collection of sufficient revenue for these functions are stipulated to be the only legitimate functions of government?49

Typically, political theorists are quick to deny that their reflections partake of ideology or partisanship. Nevertheless, Oakeshott would appear to admit to a favorable disposition to the laissez-faire position. How does Oakeshott distinguish his attitude from an "ideology" in the pejorative sense? We must "read between the lines" to determine his attitude on this matter, since he does not address it explicitly. We might begin by examining one of the few instances in which he addresses "the issues of the day."

49Oakeshott, On Human Conduct, 212.
In the June 1951 *Cambridge Journal*, Oakeshott discussed a British government report on the activities of the B. B. C. We would expect that a partisan of the "night-watchman state" would call for the abolition of the B. B. C., leaving broadcasting to private entrepreneurs. Actually, Oakeshott's criticism stopped far short of this. He did treat with "restrained abuse" the notion of "social purpose," especially the concern to raise the level of public taste, which the B. B. C. has always taken as part of its mandate.50

Oakeshott did not hold the concern with broadcast standards to be illegitimate. "Of course there must be attention to standards; but it is not unreasonable to ask whether these particular standards and this particular, over-heated pursuit of a narrowly conceived social purpose is the proper object for broadcasting, or whether what is desirable is something less highfalutin'. For if we are bidden choose between broadcasting conducted in the manner of the B. B. C. and the supposed standardless bedlam of commercial broadcasting we are offered an incomplete range of alternatives." He did not oppose the continuation of the B. B. C.'s broadcast monopoly; he conjectured that commercial competition might result in less diversity rather than more. He objected to the B. B. C.'s manner of pursuing

its "social purpose" because it struck him as a form of "enthusiasm" in the pejorative sense. In particular, he was concerned that the B. B. C.'s movement toward "around-the-clock" broadcasting was threatening to turn radio into a kind of "background noise." He favored "monopoly joined with a less grandiose purpose than that which guides the B. B. C."51

Philosophically, Oakeshott placed concrete practice above abstract theory. His approach to the broadcasting issue reveals a political practice characterized by a particular sensibility or disposition, rather than the application of a programmatic ideology. We might conjecture that he would argue that it is this feature which saves his position from becoming an "ideology" in the pejorative sense. He praised the University of Chicago economist Henry Simons for the non-abstract character of his libertarianism: "The freedom which he is to inquire into is neither an abstraction or a dream. He is a libertarian, not because he begins with an abstract definition of liberty, but because he has actually enjoyed a way of living (and seen others enjoy it) which those who have enjoyed it are accustomed (on account of certain precise characteristics) to call a free way of living, and because he has found it to be good." On the other hand, he criticized Hayek for turning libertarianism into a "politics of the textbook" which

51 Ibid., 550-554.
reflected the kind of political "enthusiasm" which he opposed. "A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics."\textsuperscript{52}

Oakeshott's "man of conservative disposition" "believes that the more closely an innovation resembles growth (that is, the more clearly it is intimated in and not merely imposed upon the situation) the less likely it is to result in a preponderance of loss." Gradual change is preferable to a programmatic politics that would begin from a "blank slate" and attempt to construct a political association ex nihilo. The preference provides the connecting link between the "traditionalism" of the Rationalism in Politics essays and the elaboration of civil association or societas in On Human Conduct and "The Rule of Law." In these later works he was attempting to put into the form of postulates what were, in fact, the working traditions of British political practice as he understood them: a network of interlocking institutions, developed over centuries of practice rather than imposed on the basis of an ideologist's doctrines, which provided for a way of life in which overwhelming concentrations of power were avoided.\textsuperscript{53}


Such a network of institutions provided for a market economy, but not for what Oakeshott calls an "imaginary" laissez-faire program. His political prescriptions vary from those of an "absolutist" libertarianism at several points. For instance, he discusses Simons's advocacy of suppression of private monopoly; public operation may even be necessary in case of gross market failure. Rule of law may not be sustainable without certain qualifications; it is not necessarily compromised fatally if, for instance, local authorities provide certain substantive services to be paid for by a "rate."\(^5^4\)

It could be that just about any "qualification" of societas might be acceptable to Oakeshott, as long as it is put forward in the proper spirit; he is disturbed not so much by the substantive content of certain proposals as by the temperament of those who advocate them. Politics requires of us a "disinterested acknowledgment of all others as one's equal"; such disinterestedness may, given certain contingent conditions, require us to consider such "qualifications" of civil association as welfare measures. Proposals for such measures may originate in a want or a felt grievance, but Oakeshott insists that they "must lose this character and acquire another (a political character) in being understood, advanced and considered as a proposal

for the amendment of the *respublica* of civil association." Do the myriad proposals and demands put forward in contemporary politics have this specifically political character, or do they resemble "payoffs" to preferred interests or powerful voting blocs? Do political advocates have the capacity for detachment and deliberation to be expected of those to whom we would describe as statesmen, or do they more nearly resemble the charismatic leader around whom great masses of "anti-individuals" have been known to coalesce? The answers will determine whether these proposals and movements reflect the moderation that Oakeshott thought appropriate to politics, or whether they threaten to turn politics into an instrument of the passions.55

The above considerations suggest the possibility that Oakeshott's exacting effort to distinguish *societas* from *universitas* in *On Human Conduct* constitutes a diversion from the main current of his thought. Here he may have deviated from his general intention of capturing the essence of the living political traditions of British civilization, providing instead a pair of definitions according to which a society may be judged to have conformed to or deviated from an abstract ideal of political propriety. The discussion of *societas* and *universitas* may be the closest that Oakeshott

comes to providing a political "crib," an abridged account of the British tradition for those who are not conversant with it. He may have felt compelled to provide that which he criticized Hayek for proposing, an "ideology of freedom." Elsewhere, he seems more concerned with the spirit or temper characterizing a political tendency or proposal than its conformity or lack of same to an abstract definition of societas. The former concern predominates in most of Oakeshott's briefer essays on politics as opposed to the meticulous distinction between societas and universitas to be found in On Human Conduct.

Oakeshott's mention of the "World State (of H. G. Wells or anyone else)" recalls Strauss's concept of the "universal and homogeneous state." However, Oakeshott's opposition to such a project is not rooted in a concern for constitutionalism or for natural law as with Strauss, but in the perception that such a proposal does not display the sobriety that he thinks appropriate to politics. One measure of this sobriety (or its absence) might be the nature of the "salvation" or "deliverance" to be expected from politics. For Oakeshott, politics could only provide a "second-best" deliverance. In his introduction to Leviathan, he argued that while politics might provide something instrumental to "the good life," the achievement of this good was not to be equated with "the good life" itself. "We may, then, enquire of any political philosophy
conceived on this plan, whether the gift of politics to mankind is, in principle, the gift of salvation itself, or whether it is something less, and if the latter, what relation it bears to salvation. . . . the achievement in politics is a tangible good and not, therefore, to be separated from the deliverance that constitutes the whole good, but something less than the deliverance itself." For the Greeks, the end of politics was to make possible something beyond itself, the contemplative, intellectual life. The end of politics for Hobbes was more mundane than for the Greeks; it was not contemplation but felicity, "a negative gift, merely making not impossible that which is desirable," promising "neither fulfillment nor wisdom to discern fulfillment, but peace, . . . the only thing in human life, on Hobbes's theory, that can be permanently established." Hobbes brings sobriety to politics by stipulating that the political realm is to seek something less than an ultimate deliverance; Oakeshott, therefore, sees in him an ally where Strauss sees an opponent.56

56Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in Rationalism in Politics, 6-7; Introduction to Leviathan, lxiv-lxvi.
A survey of commentaries on Hobbes in twentieth-century political thought would be incomplete without a comparison and contrast of the brief but provocative remarks offered by Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin. Arendt, Voegelin, and Strauss are often categorized by American political theorists as the three great twentieth-century critics of modernity; the three are often spoken of as "backward-looking" thinkers who recall a "golden age" which serves as a standard in comparison with which contemporary disintegration is to be understood. Since they all regarded Hobbes with suspicion, a comparison among them may be instructive, although the treatments of Hobbes provided by the two thinkers discussed below are more fragmentary than that offered by Strauss.

To oversimplify, Strauss held Hobbes culpable for the undermining of philosophy, while Arendt implicated him in the degradation of politics, and Voegelin accused him of subverting spiritual life. According to Strauss, Hobbes had provided an opening for a modern, reductionistic, egalitarian version of natural right which endangered the ability of the philosopher to justify himself before the city. Arendt argued that Hobbes placed the right to material accumulation over the right to speak up in public, leading to a "mass society" of politically incapacitated,
solitary individuals. Voegelin claimed that Hobbes had made the spiritual the mere handmaiden of the political by giving the temporal sovereign the sole authority to judge the admissibility of religious opinions and doctrines.

Arendt emphasized the centrality of the capacities of speech and persuasion, as exercised in political discussion, to man's humanity. Her theory of contemporary "mass society" emphasized the atrophy of political engagement in the modern world. She first gained prominence with The Origins of Totalitarianism, in which she analyzed the Nazi and Communist phenomena as consequences of the confluence of several "subterranean" streams in Western culture that had come to the surface over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; this work includes her criticism of Hobbes. In The Human Condition she presents her conception of human action, which she holds to have been overwhelmed in the modern world by the activities of labor and work. In On Revolution she compared the American Revolution favorably to the revolution in France because of its emphasis on the political rather than the social aspects of revolution.

Voegelin, after attempting a standard history of political ideas (which was partially completed and published under the title From Enlightenment to Revolution\(^1\)), turned his attention from ideas to experiences, especially what he

called experiences of transcendence. Man's humanity is most fully realized when he is oriented to a reality beyond himself, he contended. His multivolume work, *Order and History*, was a study of civilizational symbols of transcendence, especially those of the ancient Greek and Hebrew civilizations, which he considered superior. Contemporary disorder is to be understood as symptomatic of a retreat from the civilizational achievements of Israel and Hellas. Prior to *Order and History*, Voegelin provided a more concise statement of his perspective in *The New Science of Politics*.

**Arendt on the Atrophy of the Political**

Arendt interpreted the contemporary civilizational crisis in terms of the eclipse of the political. She emphasized the human capacity for action as manifested in the exercise of the capacity for persuasive speech. Ancient Greek civilization was superior because it had taken the greatest care to create and preserve a space for human action—the *polis*. In Greek life, economic activity was confined to the household; in Aristotelian terms, economics was a matter of household management. To participate in the deliberations of the *polis* was one of the few reasons for men to leave the household, so that, to an extent, life was neatly divided into the economic activity of the household and the political life of the *polis*. The household may be identified with the private realm, the realm of necessity,
while the *polis* is to be equated with public life, the realm of freedom.

Arendt made her reputation as a critic of contemporary "mass society," which is marked by the development of the *social* realm—that which is neither public nor private. The social may be defined as that portion of our lives that is lived outside the household but which is nonpolitical nonetheless. Arendt's interpretation of mass society is that the social has grown to a point at which it has nearly driven out both the private and the public, the life of both the household and the *polis*. We spend most of our lives in the workaday world of "making a living," at the expense of both family and community life. Such an existence is marked by an experience of loneliness and atomization. Furthermore, such a mass society may become so politically inarticulate that it may lack the resources to face any political challenges which may confront it.²

For Arendt, the human condition was rooted in the circumstances of *plurality* and *natality*, in light of which human action is possible. Plurality is the *condition* of action: "If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action. . . . A life without speech and without action . . . has ceased to be a

human life because it is no longer lived among men." The circumstance of natality, of our being born into the world, suggests the possibility of action: "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted." This circumstance of natality suggests to man that there is hope that he might be able to initiate something new, including but not limited to a political foundation (the French and American instances of which Arendt would explore in On Revolution). Plurality, then, sets the condition for human action, while natality suggests its possibility. However, action exists alongside the parallel activities of labor and work, which may come to threaten it.³

In The Human Condition, Arendt elaborated upon the distinction among labor, work, and action, and upon the threat posed by the first two of these to the third under modern conditions, which she found increasingly inimical to her understanding of an existence fit for human beings. "The human condition of labor is life itself," she remarked. By labor she understood the continual reproduction of the conditions of life. Arendt would say that in the saying, "Woman's work is never done," what is here meant by work might better be conceptualized as labor. Cooking, disciplining children, and cleaning up after them are tasks

that are never really finished; they may cease for a short interval but they must soon be done over. Agriculture, the cyclical process of sowing and reaping, is also a paradigmatic example of labor, although traditionally it has been considered man's rather than woman's work. "Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor." Arendt contends that the ancient Greeks considered labor of this sort to be inherently slavish; they instituted slavery so that at least some citizens would not be bound by these necessities and could become the genuinely free citizens of the polis.4

"The human condition of work is worldliness." Work, as distinguished from labor, constitutes the fabrication of objects for use. Human artifice represents the sum total of work. Work, properly understood, is the "work of our hands as distinguished from the labor of our bodies." Used properly, the products of this work should not be used up or consumed, at least not immediately; work, as distinguished from labor, creates enduring objects. While work is indispensible, the danger arises that if it comes to be understood as the paradigmatic form of human activity, an

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4 Ibid., 7 and 79-93, esp. 82-84.
instrumentalist, utilitarian kind of thinking will come to predominate.\(^5\)

Of these three species of human activity—labor, work, and action—Arendt contends that the latter is the most truly human. It consists of the engagement of the intelligence of our fellows by means of our capacity for persuasive speech. Action is undertaken for extrinsic reasons—to take care of the public business—and for intrinsic reasons as well. Arendt contends that a life of action is a component of the Greek concept of eudaimonia, which may be translated roughly as happiness, blessedness, or well-being. Action consists not only of persuasion but also of self-revelation of one's potential or essence. By acting one overcomes human frailty and contingency by creating a public record of words and deeds that may enable one to attain an earthly immortality of a sort. The achievement of the ancient Greek polis was that it institutionalized a space for human action in this sense.\(^6\)

Arendt diagnosed the eclipse of the public space and the loss of concern with earthly immortality in the modern world as pathological. The public realm might be threatened by the private; in modernity it has been besieged especially by the social. The better part of most people's lives is occupied with neither public nor private concerns; we are

\(^5\)Ibid., 7, 136-139, 158.

\(^6\)Ibid., 17-21, 175-181, and 192-199.
now a society of jobholders, so that we characterize the activities with which we occupy much of our time as "making a living," which suggests the reproduction of life in the sense of Arendt's labor, not action or even work. From political opinions to relatively trivial matters of "lifestyle," we see a tendency toward conformism, such that we tend to become behavers, not actors. Our conformity does not constitute true public life because the workplace is not a true public place; instead, it resembles a little "household" removed from the home. With the possible exception of the learned professions, our work does not afford us an opportunity for expression that potentially can be seen by everyone in our neighborhood or community (much less our state or nation), such that we would have to transcend our own partial perspective. Men's sense of anomie may come from a withdrawal into self, a self-alienation from the world, dictated by the atrophy of the public realm, the true realm of human excellence, which provides a satisfaction that cannot be approximated by private or social life, even at their best.\(^7\)

To overcome the modern political incapacity, a reconstitution of the public space would be required. Public views, rather than an undifferentiated, anonymous "public opinion," must be built into the structure of government. Arendt contended that the need for such a

\(^7\)Ibid., 38-67, 126-135, and 248-257.
public space was well understood by the American founders:
"The Americans knew that public freedom consisted in having a share in public business, and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else."\(^8\)

Unfortunately in Arendt's view, the American Constitution failed to institutionalize the public space by means of the town meeting or township form of local government that had been employed so successfully in New England. Without such a feature, representative government cannot make political participation accessible to those who do not wish to make politics their career. Party politics tends to become oligarchic, even in such stable two-party system as America and Britain, where an atrophy of the public space may be noted. She notes approvingly a letter written late in Jefferson's career in which the American statesman proposed a system of wards or "elementary republics" as the basic units of local government, in order to preserve the political ideals of the Revolution.\(^9\)

Throughout her own career, Arendt remained attached to the ideal of a ward or council system of government. She saw such a system as the only way to prevent a "massified"


society that might be susceptible to totalitarianism. In her view, an important source of the tendency to totalitarianism was the appearance of a "mob" of "massified" men in whom political participation had atrophied, who were susceptible to being brought back suddenly into politics by being attracted to a charismatic totalitarian "leader." The Russian system of "soviets" may have approximated the form of government she preferred; ironically, the Soviet Union has neutralized these "soviets" in favor of rule by a hegemonic party. When that country invaded Hungary to put down a political uprising in 1956, Arendt was heartened nonetheless to hear reports that a council system had arisen spontaneously in the few weeks before the rebellion was suppressed. She memorialized these short-lived Hungarian councils in an epilogue to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "The rise of the councils, not the restoration of parties, was the clear sign of a true upsurge of democracy against dictatorship, of freedom against tyranny."10

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absolute solitude." Even under the most terrible tyranny known hitherto, martyrdom was possible; even if the tyrant could not be overthrown, the martyr's protest would go down in history. Arendt discovered that the Nazis had established conditions in the camps so demoralizing that the possibility of martyrdom was foreclosed. The inmates were convinced that no one would escape, hence no report of any protest would ever reach the world outside; it would be as though any protest had never happened. "To demonstrate when death can no longer be postponed is an attempt to give death a meaning, to act beyond one's own death," but "How many people here still believe that a protest has even historic importance? . . . When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony." Arendt concluded that, by effectively eliminating the possibility even of the most desperate of political acts, the Nazis had constructed an environment in which the inmates' political capacities had completely atrophied.\footnote{Arendt, Origins, 451. Reference is to David Rousset, Les Jours de Notre Mort (Paris, 1947), 464.}

Although the appearance of totalitarianism most probably involved an element of accident, Arendt believed that certain developments in European culture traceable back at least to the nineteenth century were contributing factors—in particular, anti-Semitism and imperialism. She viewed the rise of bourgeois man and bourgeois civilization
as implicated in the development of imperialism, and hence implicated in totalitarianism. Bourgeois civilization gave free play to a drive for power in the form of accumulation, as exemplified by Cecil Rhodes's comment that "I would annex the planets if I could." Eventually this drive for power would be directed toward the riches of Asia, Africa, and America. The European state would be put in the service of accumulation in the drive for imperial domination and colonization. Bourgeois civilization required ideological justification for its power drive, including its imperial ambition; the significance of the thought of Hobbes, at least in part, is that it contributed to this justification. Justification of bourgeois civilization included justification of imperialism, and justification of imperialism was likely to include an element of race-thinking, since the territories to be colonized were inhabited by nonwhite peoples. Hobbes may not have been a racist thinker himself, but he contributed to a civilizational movement of which race-thinking would later become a part.  

To Arendt, Hobbes was the paradigmatic philosopher of an emerging bourgeois civilization. He presented a political theory appropriate for a completely privatized

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12 For commentary on the remark by Rhodes, see Arendt, Origins, 124. For a discussion of nineteenth- and early-to-mid-twentieth-century race-thinking with respect to South Africa and its parallels with twentieth-century race-thinking in general, see Origins, 185-207.
mankind. The theory was based on a calculation of individual interests rather than the acknowledgment of a law or standard that surpasses particular interests. For such men, the fundamental political fact would be a drive for power rather than an orientation toward the good or the right. "He gives an almost complete picture, not of Man but bourgeois man, an analysis which in three hundred years has neither been outdated nor excelled. . . . A being without reason, without the capacity for truth, and without free will—that is, without the capacity for responsibility—man is essentially a function of society and judged therefore according to his 'value or worth . . . his price; that is to say so much as would be given for the use of his power.'"13

Arendt held that Hobbes presented a picture of man not as he was but "as he ought to become and ought to behave if he wanted to fit into the coming bourgeois society." Hobbesian man is a depoliticized, atomized being whose connections to his fellows are strictly instrumental and contingent.

Thus membership in any form of community is for Hobbes a temporary and limited affair which essentially does not change the solitary and private character of the individual . . . or create permanent bonds between him and his fellow-men. It seems as though Hobbes's picture of man defeats his purpose of providing the basis for a Commonwealth and gives instead a consistent pattern of attitudes through which every genuine community can easily be destroyed. This results in the inherent and admitted instability of Hobbes's

Commonwealth, whose very conception includes its own dissolution . . . an instability that is all the more striking as Hobbes's primary and frequently repeated aim was to secure a maximum of safety and stability. Along with several other commentators, Arendt thus concluded that Hobbes's political theory was contradictory and self-defeating in that men as he imagined them to be could never form a commonwealth. Hobbesian men are so dissociated from each other that "Hobbes's Commonwealth is a vacillating structure and must always provide itself with new props from the outside; otherwise it would collapse overnight into the aimless, senseless chaos of the private interests from which it sprang."¹⁴

Decisive for Arendt was her conclusion that political life as we commonly understand it would be wholly absent from the Hobbesian Commonwealth. So that he will be free to pursue his private interests, including the accumulation of wealth, Hobbesian man gives up his political rights to a sovereign who is to settle all political controversies by fiat. "Deprived of political rights, the individual, to whom public and official life manifests itself in the guise of necessity, acquires a new and increased interest in his private life and his personal fate. Excluded from participation in the management of public affairs that involve all citizens, the individual loses his rightful place in society and his natural connection with his fellow-

¹⁴Arendt, Origins, 140-143.
men." Such an anti-political tendency is a reflection of "the bourgeoisie's instinctive distrust of and its innate hostility to public affairs." Carried to its logical conclusion, however, the outcome of this hostility to the political would be ironic for bourgeois man, since, beginning from an inexorable drive to accumulate evermore power and wealth, this same bourgeois man ends up as a politically powerless subject, unable even to rise up against an oppressor.15

Arendt's point is confirmed unwittingly by the remarks of the Nobel laureate in economics, James Buchanan. For Buchanan, the state is more nearly a necessary evil than the end or perfection of man's nature. He argues that "the ideal society is anarchy, in which no one man or group of men coerces another." Man balks at being governed; each man's ideal is a world in which he is completely and utterly free, even to the extent that others are compelled to serve his desires; "That is to say, each person seeks mastery over a world of slaves." However, a moment's reflection by the rational actor suggests that for everyone to attempt to attain this "ideal society" in which "each man seeks mastery" immediately presents a problem analogous to that faced by Hobbesian man in the "state of nature." Therefore the rational actor decides to pursue his "ideal society" "at one remove," such that "the anarchistic regime of free men,

15Ibid., 141-147.
each of whom respects the rights of others, becomes the utopian dream." In *The Calculus of Consent*, Buchanan and his collaborator, Gordon Tullock, present a rationale for such an "anarchistic regime," which they contend will put an end to "feeding at the public trough" by insatiable special interests. In a foreword to Tullock's *The Politics of Bureaucracy*, Buchanan remarks: "Tullock distinguishes, basically, between the relationship of exchange, which he calls the economic, and the relationship of slavery, which he calls the political. I use bold words here, but I do so deliberately." For Buchanan and Tullock, the political realm represents the realm of slavery, whereas for Arendt the political represents the realm of *freedom*.16

Buchanan puts forward a procedure from which a political equilibrium emerges, but he cannot establish that this equilibrium process *justifies* anything. His procedure sounds suspiciously like the sequence that results in the establishment of the Hobbesian sovereign out of a state of nature; in fact, at the outset of his presentation he observes that "as Thomas Hobbes perceptively noted, in the

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state of nature each person has a 'right' to everything." In such a state, the distribution of "goods" will be determined by the distribution of "physical strength, cajolery, stealth," and "other personal qualities." Eventually an equilibrium is reached in the form of a "natural distribution"; employing "econo-speak," we might say that this is a state in which the "marginal utility" of further employment of physical strength, cajolery, and stealth approaches zero. Once everyone has had enough of this predatory competition, we have arrived at "a definition . . . from which contractual agreements become possible." Yet, as Buchanan notes, "This cannot properly be classified as a structure of rights." A detractor might suggest that this "equilibrium" resembles nothing so much as a peace settlement imposed by the stronger of two belligerents. Still, he claims that "It is appropriate to call this a genuine basis for the emergence of property rights." Such an appeal to the justice of pure procedure involves one in an infinite regress; at some point the justice of an "original" distribution would have to be established, and we have no reason to believe that Buchanan's "physical strength, cajolery, and stealth" might not manifest itself as far back as we could possibly look.17

Buchanan and Tullock profess an attachment to anarchy as an ideal, but to establish such an ideal may require an

17Buchanan, Limits, 23-25.
authoritarian element that they do not acknowledge. If we push their tenets to more of an extreme than they are willing to, we might end up with a regime in which political participation plays no part, because freedom has come to be defined as the right to undertake voluntary economic exchange rather than to participate in collective decision-making. Political agitation on behalf of collective action would be interpreted as a threat to undertake "political exploitation" and thereby to violate everyone's rights; the authorities might feel compelled to cut off political freedom as we understand it, in defense of their libertarian-individualist version of freedom. Such was the conclusion anticipated by Arendt when she conjectured that Hobbesian man, who is "flattered at being called a power-thirsty animal," ultimately would become "the poor meek little fellow who has not even the right to rise against tyranny," who "submits to any existing government and does not even stir when his best friend falls an innocent victim to an incomprehensible raison d'état."^18

Voege1in on the Atrophy of the Spiritual

While Arendt interpreted the contemporary crisis in terms of an eclipse of the political, Voege1in spoke of an eclipse of the spiritual. Man's humanity is to be understood in terms of his ability to transcend the mundane

^18Arendt, Origins, 146.
world. A partial or relative transcendence might be attainable by means of participation in one's community, but this transcendence, valuable though it might be, points to another, higher mode of transcendence. To transcend the temporal and attain an experience of an eternal, absolute reality would constitute the fullest realization of man's humanity, and would furthermore provide a perspective from which principles of social and political order could be derived. Modern disorder may thus be understood in terms of the loss of this experience of transcendence.

A turning point in Voegelin's career came when he turned his attention from political ideas to spiritual experience; henceforth, he regarded philosophy as an experiential rather than an ideational matter. As Eugene Webb notes, for Voegelin "the ideational expression of philosophy is the most superficial level of the philosophic life." Ideational language may sacrifice the richness of experience for the sake of clarity. What is required is analogical-mythical rather than logical-propositional language. "Voegelin has spoken in various places of the necessary grounding of philosophy in meditative experience" rather than propositional analysis, notes Webb.19

Voegelin's intent was to recapture the substance of a fundamental meditative experience that he believed had been

lost. In order to communicate this meditative experience, the philosopher must have recourse to symbolic language, without which this subject matter might prove utterly inscrutable. "Unless the spiritual substance of the order within the soul can be communicated through symbols, it can never become the ordering principle of a society," remarks Webb. Voegelin devoted much of his career to an exposition of the history of symbols of transcendence in ancient civilizations with the hope that he could thereby make transcendental experience more accessible to modern man. By so doing, he believed he might be able to make a contribution to the resolution of the contemporary civilizational crisis. "What may seem at times like abstract theory is in fact the expression of an effort to understand human concreteness and to offer an interpretation of man and his life in society that may help him to find a way to live less murderously with his fellows."20

Voegelin believed that contemporary tendencies toward positivism in political science were prejudicial toward any attempt to explore the implications of the transcendental dimension for the political sphere. By mimicking a natural-science model, we end up subordinating relevance to method. A distortion of this sort could be found in the attempt of Max Weber to found a "value-free" social science. Voegelin remarked that Weber himself ended up bringing "value-

20Webb, Eric Voegelin, 30, 151.
judgments" back into his projects in a "back-door" manner, by rechristening them as "legitimizing beliefs." 21

A richer language than that admitted by Weber was necessary in order to render the phenomena of politics intelligible. Voegelin took the matter of political representation as an example. In Western polities we commonly speak of representation as an arrangement in which a member of a legislature elected from a particular geographic constituency is said to represent that constituency. However, this cannot exhaust the meaning of representation. If we reflect a moment we will note that this common version of representation is effective only in a small percentage of the nations on earth, most of which are either in northern Europe or have their political roots in northern European civilization. In a state such as the Soviet Union, representative institutions of this sort are not effective; nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the Soviet government effectively represents Soviet society.22

Voegelin designated representation in the sense of correspondence of elected representatives to geographical constituencies as elemental representation. However, he held that any society represents itself in an existential sense through its governmental institutions, even if it lacks the institutions of elemental representation. Any

22Ibid., 27-37.
society may be said to have articulated a representative by the very fact of producing governmental institutions. Undoubtedly, the degree of representation attained in the representative institutions of northern European civilization is a great achievement; in such societies, "the membership of the society has become politically articulate down to the last individual, and, correspondingly, the society becomes the representative of itself." However, such an achievement is the culmination of a long historical development, the conditions for which cannot be created on demand. "Our own foreign policy was a factor in aggravating international disorder through its sincere but naive endeavor of curing the evils of the world by spreading representative institutions in the elemental sense to areas where the existential conditions for their functioning were not given."23

There can be representation in a transcendental sense as well as an elemental or existential sense; a society may come to understand itself as representing not just itself but something beyond itself. Representation in this sense has manifested itself in the clashes between empires throughout history. Voegelin discusses the clash between the Western and Mongol empires during the thirteenth century, in which neither empire was willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other; each empire saw itself as

23Ibid., 27-51, esp. 40, 51.
representing truth and the enemy as representing falsehood and disorder. He detected a parallel between the Mongol empire and the contemporary Soviet Union: "Its order is in harmony with the truth of history; its aim is the establishment of the realm of freedom and peace; the opponents run counter to the truth of history and will be defeated in the end; nobody can be at war with the Soviet Union legitimately but must be a representative of untruth in history, or, in contemporary language, an aggressor; and the victims are not conquered but liberated from their oppressors and therewith from the untruth of their existence."24

Ancient Greek philosophy represented a truth that challenged the truth of empire. Empires could represent themselves, but not a truth beyond themselves; this was reserved to reason in Greek philosophy and to revelation in Christian religion. Voegelin discerns parallels of the deepest significance between the Greek and Christian civilizations. Both elaborated a set of civilizational symbols that represented a maximum of "differentiation" as opposed to "compactness." They both separated strictly the truth represented by empire from that represented by reason or revelation, as opposed to both the Roman civilization and the modern totalitarian mass movements, which tended to collapse the two truths. Christianity had accomplished a

24Ibid., 52-75, esp. 59.
radical "de-divinization" of the world; only the Church, not a political power organization, could represent the spiritual destiny of man. The Roman government tried to accommodate Christianity, but the radicalism of the new religion made it incompatible with empire in a way that pagan religious practice was not.25

In the modern world, the experience of transcendence underlying this "de-divinization" of the world has atrophied, and disorder has followed. The notion that our ultimate fulfillment lies beyond this world lost its power over men. This development was accompanied by an impressive civilizational dynamism, but Voegelin questioned whether the benefits outweighed what had been lost, although he conceded that "an age that began to feel its muscles would not easily bear the Augustinian defeatism with regard to the mundane sphere of existence."

The historical result was stupendous. The resources of man that came to light under such pressure were in themselves a revelation, and their application to civilizational work produced the truly magnificent spectacle of Western progressive society. However fatuous the surface arguments may be, the widespread belief that modern civilization is Civilization in a pre-eminent sense is experientially justified; the endowment with the meaning of salvation has made the rise of the West, indeed, an apocalypse of civilization.

On this apocalyptic spectacle, however, falls a shadow; for this brilliant expansion is accompanied by a danger that grows apace with progress.

"The death of the spirit is the price of progress," Voegelin concluded. Civilizational progress had been accompanied by

25Ibid., 70-106.
a "re-divinization" of temporal existence. Men began to speculate that historical laws were pointing toward a qualitative transformation of mundane human existence. Such a speculation amounted to a claim to be able to discern the end or eidos of history, which Voegelin held to be unknowable; he discerned in such a claim a parallel with heretical claims to privileged spiritual knowledge which the Church had defeated during the early history of institutionalized Christianity. Such is the source of the term for which Voegelin has become so well-known, his designation of the modern phenomenon as "modern gnosticism." This "secular salvation" came to displace the Christian notion of an eschatological salvation; Voegelin characterized it as the pursuit of a fallacious "immanentization of the eschaton." The millennium was now to be attained within history, not beyond it. The development constituted not a neo-paganism but a secularized, immanentized version of Christianity. Since the temporal realization of the end of history is impossible in principle, men were likely to become frustrated when reality failed to conform to their expectations. This frustration led to evermore fanatical attempts to make reality conform to such an intoxicating speculation, culminating in the totalitarian excesses of the twentieth century.26

26Ibid., 107-132, esp. 119, 130-131.
Voegelin on Hobbes

A precursor of the modern ideological mass movements was the fanatical Puritanism with which Hobbes was confronted before and during the English Revolution, typified by its culmination in a fanatical insistence that the king be killed because this supposedly had been ordered by God. Voegelin acknowledged that Hobbes had been confronted with a genuine threat to public order that required a response, but he held that Hobbes's response itself constituted an ideological deformation.27

Voegelin remarked that Hobbes's theory had "purchased its impressive consistency at the price of a simplification which itself belongs in the class of gnostic misdeeds; but, when a fierce and relentless thinker simplifies, he will nevertheless bring a new clarity to the issue." Hobbes perceived that to defeat the Puritans, English society needed a new civil theology. This new political doctrine employed the following argument: A "law of nature" disposes men to live together in peace and to obey civil government. However, to be effective, this "law of nature" must be understood as the word of God. Therefore, effective rule requires the establishment of an all-powerful sovereign whose interpretation of the law of nature shall be accepted as definitive. Talk of a "law of nature" put a more pleasant gloss on a political justification based

27Ibid., 133-161, esp. 152-153.
exclusively on men's fear of violent death; subjection to force on pain of death replaces any orientation to a higher purpose or *summum bonum*.  

A crucial tenet of the new civil theology is that the sovereign shall have the authority to declare any opinion conducive to discord untrue *ipso facto*. "There will be no freedom of debate concerning the truth of human existence in society; public expression of opinion and doctrine must be under regulation and permanent supervision of the government." The sovereign will have power "to decide who will be allowed to speak in public to an audience, on what subject and in what tendency," as well as to censor books. Voegelin agrees with Arendt, then, that the subjects of the Hobbesian Commonwealth will not enjoy a substantive political life. They will, however, be free to pursue any other "peaceable, civilizational pursuits."  

The imperative to censor political debate extends to man's spiritual life as well. The sovereign's interpretation of scripture shall be authoritative; ultimately, scripture is to receive its authority not by revelation but by sovereign fiat. This must be so because otherwise someone might conclude that his religious duties conflicted with his duty to obey sovereign authority, thus placing the realm in the same danger that England faced from

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28Ibid., 152-153, 155-156, 162, 180.

29Ibid., 154-155.
the Puritan divines. It is this that Voegelin found most offensive about the Hobbesian political doctrine. In the Hobbesian Commonwealth, Christianity would be a truth of the state, not of the soul. What would be required is a mankind devoid of the experience of transcendence that might move him to question the official account of the substance of Christianity. For Voegelin, Hobbes's cure for the disruption represented by the Puritans was worse than the disease.30

"Hobbes countered the Gnostic immanentization of the eschaton which endangered existence by a radical immanence of existence which denied the eschaton," concluded Voegelin. His intention in constructing a devastating psychological portrayal of his Puritan opponents was admirable nonetheless: "His achievements in unmasking the libido dominandi behind the pretense of religious zeal and reforming idealism are as solid today as they were at the time when he wrote." However, the symbols Hobbes elaborated in order to defeat his opponents amounted to an ideological distortion; his psychology and anthropology accepted as normative a self-sufficient, power-hungry being that classical philosophy would have diagnosed as pathological, and his sovereign absolutism anticipated the prohibition on political debate that would characterize totalitarian regimes. "The Hobbesian principle that the validity of

30Ibid., 154-161.
Scripture derives from governmental sanction and that its public teaching should be supervised by the sovereign is carried out by the Soviet government in the reduction of communism to the "party line."

Perspectives on Hobbes: Arendt and Voegelin Compared

A recent contribution in political philosophy mentions an imperative "to prevent men, particularly the philosophers themselves, the politicians, and the theologians, from making politics and those disciplines that are related to it in the classics, especially economics, into a 'substitute metaphysics,' that is, into a full explanation in their own terms, of all that is." We are told next that "to argue that politics in particular is a prime, perhaps the prime candidate for this dangerous role, to be sure, need not constitute an attack on or an undermining of politics as such." We might wonder whether this latter statement represents a mere statement of fact or an expression of a fervent hope. A standard interpretation might be that Arendt is concerned with a contemporary "undermining of politics as such," while Voegelin's intent is to prevent politics from assuming a "dangerous role." Arendt opposes Hobbes because he undermines politics, while Voegelin

31Ibid., 178-180, 184-187.
criticizes him for usurping the spiritual on behalf of the political. Are these two intentions reconcilable?  

Both Arendt and Voegelin upheld the memory of the "Golden Age" of Periclean Athens as a standard to which politics ought to conform as nearly as possible. For Arendt, the Athenian polis represented the finest expression of genuine human action. According to a recent commentator, "Western history preserves the clear memory of at least one community of men who, for a brief moment, prized the web of human relationships--frail, frustrating, and paradox-ridden as it is--so highly that it can almost be said they lived for it alone." Athenian man "sailed forth into the polis to act and speak in the company of his true peers. . . . Here alone did the opportunity to reveal his individuality, to distinguish himself from all others, fully present itself."  

In Arendt's conception, political activity is to have both intrinsic and extrinsic significance. She spoke severely of those who would make politics into a mere means to some higher end, including those who conceived of the end of politics as the protection of the philosophers from their "vulgar" fellows. Her severity concerning Plato is 


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instructive, especially in contrast to the regard in which Voegelin held him.

Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether. The hallmark of all such escapes is the concept of rule, that is, the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey. . . . It is a common error to interpret Plato as though he wanted to abolish the family and the household; he wanted, on the contrary, to extend this type of life until one family embraced every citizen.

Arendt thus opposes conceptions of politics which depend on a strict separation of ruler from ruled (among which we might count the Hobbesian Commonwealth). Such conceptions present an analogy between politics and fabrication (Ar&rdt's "work"), rather than genuine human action. "The substitution of making for acting and the concomitant degradation of politics into a means to obtain an allegedly 'higher' end--in antiquity the protection of the good men from the rule of the bad in general, and the safety of the philosopher in particular, in the Middle Ages the salvation of souls, in the modern age the productivity and progress of society--is as old as the tradition of political philosophy." To secure the acceptance of such an arrangement, the rulers must propagate "the well-entrenched
notions that politics need not be everyone's concern, and that it is a necessary evil or even a dirty business."

Arendt detected in the American founding generation a conception of the intrinsic worth of politics that was more appropriate than that which she attributed to Plato. The Americans, she argued, sought something beyond what they had known as the "rights and liberties of Englishmen."

This freedom they called later, when they had come to taste it, "public happiness," and it consisted in the citizen's right of access to the public realm, in his share in public power—to be "a participator in the government of affairs" in Jefferson's telling phrase—as distinct from the generally recognized right of subjects to be protected by the government in the pursuit of private happiness. . . . The very fact that the word "happiness" was chosen in laying claim to a share in public power indicates strongly that there existed in the country, prior to the revolution, such a thing as "public happiness," and that men knew that they could not be altogether "happy" if their happiness was located and enjoyed only in private life.

Unfortunately, Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence spoke of the "pursuit of happiness" in such a way that this happiness could be understood as entirely private, contributing to the construction of what the world has come to know as "a specifically American ideology."

Nevertheless, Arendt's judgement was that this talk of private happiness carried little weight. More decisive were the remarks of Jefferson late in his life in a letter to John Adams, during a period in which they had begun to

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address, at least half-seriously, the possibility of an afterlife. "May we meet there again, in Congress, with our antient Colleagues, and receive with them the seal of approbation 'Well done, good and faithful servants,'" wrote Jefferson. Arendt remarks, "Here, behind the irony, we have the candid admission that life in Congress, the joys of discourse, of legislation, of transacting business, of persuading and being persuaded, were to Jefferson . . . a foretaste of an eternal bliss to come. . . . It is the applause, the demonstration of acclaim, 'the esteem of the world' of which Jefferson in another context says that there had been a time when it 'was of higher value in my eye than everything in it.'"35

As does Arendt, Voegelin speaks in glowing terms of the "Golden Age" of Periclean Athens. However, he speaks not so much of the Athens of the polis as of what he calls "the Athens of Marathon and the tragedy." In his discussion of the Suppliants of Aeschylus, for instance, he treats the tragedy as capturing the essence of Athenian politics. The ruler, confronted with a tragic choice, addresses the citizens in an attempt to come to a decision together with them, in conformity with a standard higher than (for example) a utilitarian calculation of losses and gains.

"The Peitho, the persuasion of the king, forms the souls of

35Arendt, On Revolution, 123-128. References are to Jefferson's letter to Joseph C. Cabell of February 2, 1816; to John Adams, April 11, 1823; and to James Madison, June 9, 1793.
his listeners, who are willing to let themselves be formed, and makes the Dike of Zeus prevail against passion, so that the mature decision represents the truth of the God."

Political persuasion conducted at this level includes an element of conversion or movement of the soul that Voegelin might argue is missing from Arendt's account of the activity of the polis. If people's souls are in such a condition that they are not even susceptible to such a conversion, then politics will take on the character of "splitting the difference" between passionate, irreconcilable interests rather than a reciprocal persuasive engagement involving men's souls and intellects.36

Voegelin's discussion of the Athenian tragedy represents one of his most affirmative statements about the value of the political. However, contemporary politics did not live up to the standards of the Athenian polis in his view. He appeared disgusted by most of what passed for political practice in the twentieth century. Instead of an engagement of men's intellects and souls, politics had degenerated into a passionate contest of interests, or, even worse, a fanatical expression of "modern gnosticism." In an earlier time, a proper civilizational symbolization gave men a sense of perspective with respect to the political and kept them from getting carried away with eschatological

political projects. Political action had now become a surrogate for the spiritual life in the souls of some men. He spoke of a "volitional gnosis" which assumed "the form of activist redemption of man and society, as in the instance of revolutionary activists like Comte, Marx, or Hitler."37

Such a perspective on political action represents a potential danger. Voegelin's (and Arendt's) criticism of the Hobbesian commonwealth for its alleged summary cutoff of political discussion has been discussed above. This criticism may afford us with a helpful perspective from which to consider Voegelin's attitude toward political reform. Recall, for instance, his praise of Hobbes's psychological analysis of the Puritan divines. "Under the impression of the Puritan Revolution one of the greatest psychologists of all times laid down the rule that men who are moved by their religious conscience to civil war . . . are guilty of pride, of superbia in the Augustinian sense, to the point of madness. . . . A conscience may be good in the moral sense and nevertheless thoroughly evil in the spiritual sense, as Hobbes's predecessor in this question, Richard Hooker, had already shown in his acid portrait of the Puritan, in the Preface to his Ecclesiastical Polity." From this psychological portrait of the Puritan, Voegelin appeared to generalize to the case of any contemporary reformer. His attitude suggested a summary cutoff of

37Voegelin, New Science of Politics, 124.
political discussion in the Hobbesian sense. No proposal for political reform can be taken at face value, because we are somehow entitled to assume that any reformer must exhibit the same psychological deformation as a Puritan revolutionary; discussion of reform proposals on their merits are to be bypassed in favor of an ad hominem attack to be directed against any reformer. Here we are confronted with the question of Voegelin's partisanship and the identification of him as an opponent of the party of reform on behalf of the conservative party; his students object vociferously to the characterization of his thought as partisan. Suffice it to say that Voegelin may not have made himself sufficiently clear on this point. As Webb remarks, "Voegelin has left comparatively undeveloped the area of practical political implications."\(^{38}\)

This much said, it may be conceded that men indeed have made religions out of their political doctrines, and that a proper politics requires an element of restraint and sobriety that have been missing for much of the twentieth century. Arendt herself assented to this in an exchange with Hans Jonas, who was an associate of Voegelin also.

\textbf{Jonas:} I share with Hannah Arendt the position that we are not in possession of any ultimates, either by knowledge or by conviction or faith. And I also believe that we cannot have this as a command performance.

because "we need it so bitterly therefore should have it."

However, a part of wisdom is knowledge of ignorance. The Socratic attitude is to know that one does not know. And this realization of our ignorance can be of great practical importance in the exercise of the power of judgment, which is after all related to action in the political sphere, into future action, and far-reaching action.

Our enterprises have an eschatological tendency in them—a built-in utopianism, namely, to move towards ultimate situations. Lacking the knowledge of ultimate values—or, of what is ultimately desirable—or, of what man is so that the world can be fitting for man, we should at least abstain from allowing eschatological situations to come about. This alone is a very important practical injunction that we can draw from the insight that only with some conception of ultimates are we entitled to embark on certain things. So that at least as a restraining force the point of view I brought in may be of some relevance.

Arendt: With this I would agree.39

Postscript: The Voegelin-Arendt Exchange of 1953

A comparison and contrast of Arendt and Voegelin would be incomplete without mention of the exchange prompted by his 1953 review of her The Origins of Totalitarianism. Despite his admiration for the work as a whole, he professed astonishment at her remark that in totalitarianism "human nature itself is at stake." To make such a concession was to imply that a change in human nature was indeed possible. That assumption meant that "the author, in fact, adopts the immanentist ideology; . . . These sentences . . . reflect a

typically liberal, progressive, pragmatist attitude toward philosophical problems."\(^{40}\)

Arendt did not dogmatically rule out the possibility of an unchanging human nature, but she held that if there is such a nature, man could not know what it is; only a god could know such a thing. She might say that for man to attempt to know his own nature would be hubristic. As she wrote in *The Human Condition*, "It is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves--this would be like jumping over our own shadows." Her biographer comments that "Voegelin thought that Arendt's viewpoint was disturbingly secular, but, in fact, it was respectfully and nondoctrinally religious."\(^{41}\)

Arendt objected to Voegelin's procedure--which seemed to her a kind of *petitio principii*--of treating "'phenomenal differences'--which to me as differences of factuality are all-important--as minor outgrowths of some 'essential sameness' of a doctrinal nature." She viewed such doctrines as ideological: "Ideologies always assume that one idea is


sufficient to explain everything in the development from the premise, and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction." Against Voegelin's insistence that totalitarianism and liberalism may "prove to be closely related on the level of essence," she held that her own approach was more properly empirical. To present a brief that liberalism was somehow culpable for totalitarian crimes was to ignore the unique horror of totalitarianism.

"Numerous affinities between totalitarianism and some other trends in Occidental political or intellectual history have been described with this result, in my opinion: they all failed to point out the distinct quality of what was actually happening."42

Arendt was not a "gushing optimist" about the possibilities of a changed and improved human nature; rather, she was afraid that the totalitarians would succeed in their project which threatened as it did those capacities which she held to be central to the human condition as she understood it. Her painstaking evaluation of the available evidence about life in the concentration camps, included in the closing chapters of the Origins, convinced her that they presented a danger of a "change in human nature" in the sense of "a change in human conditions radical enough to

make impossible the exercise of capabilities observable under other, less radical conditions . . . the destruction of any possibility for those capabilities to appear." For such a change to take place, "the world would have to be a concentration camp." We might ask, along with Arendt: Were the appearance of these tendencies in the camps just minor "phenomenal differences"? Furthermore, if the whole world were to be changed into a concentration camp, would nothing essential be changed?43

This exchange illustrates the distinctive Platonic essentialism of Voegelin as opposed to the Aristotelian empiricism of Arendt (at least from the perspective of a "standard" interpretation that Voegelin might reject). According to Barker, a paradigmatic example of this contrast is the matter of the relation of the universal to the particular, or "the problem of the one and the many." Barker asks, "Shall the one be destructive of the individual existence of the many, or shall the many retain that existence, while yet sharing in a common existence which 'blends, transcends, them all'?" His view is that Aristotle opts for the latter alternative. "In metaphysics, he holds, the one does not exist above and beyond the many: it is in and among, in the sense that it is predicable of, all its individual constituents." That this contrast was evident to Arendt may be shown by her comment that "I think that what

43Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt, 254.
separates my approach from Professor Voegelin's is that I proceed from facts and events instead of intellectual affinities and influences . . . [there may be such affinities and influences,] but such affinities would only mean that one has to draw even sharper distinctions because of the fact that liberals are not totalitarians.\textsuperscript{44}

CHAPTER 7: THOMAS SPRAGENS—HOBBESIANISM AND SCIENTISTIC POLITICS

Thomas Spragens, a political theorist of a newer generation than those discussed hitherto, is a party to the same argument about the nature of modernity as theorists of the era represented by Strauss, Macpherson, Oakeshott, Arendt, and Voegelin. He describes his most comprehensive work, The Irony of Liberal Reason, as "principally a work of synthesis and interpretation." The breadth and depth of his learning qualify him to attempt to adjudicate among the disparate interpretations of the contemporary crisis that are on offer. "I owe a large debt to others who have given us their thoughtful and provocative interpretations of the general problems that have concerned me," he notes; among these interpreters he includes Strauss, Voegelin, Robert Nisbet, Reinhold Niebuhr, Jürgen Habermas, and Michael Polanyi.\(^1\) He also offers an exhaustive and provocative interpretation of Hobbes, to whom he attributes a central place in the sequence of developments that have led to the civilizational impasse of the late twentieth century.

Spragens has been concerned with broad questions of theoretical approach in political science and practice, especially with respect to the intellectual transformation associated with the "scientific revolution." He argues that in the wake of this intellectual transformation, the social

\(^1\)Spragens, *The Irony of Liberal Reason*, xi-xii.
sciences have adopted a natural-science model as paradigmatic for all inquiry, leading to a theoretically impoverished political science and a "technocratic" political practice that belies the humane claims of liberalism.

Spragens holds that the contribution of Hobbes was central to the reductionistic turn in modern political thought. Actually, Spragens speaks as though Aristotle is implicated as well in this development. Both Hobbes and Aristotle accepted to some extent a "scientistic" epistemology in which scientific rigor is taken as the goal of all inquiry. According to Spragens, Hobbes's political theory preserves an Aristotelian form, but alters the content. Hobbes substitutes motion for Aristotelian inertia as a physical analogue for the political. For Aristotle, rest or inertia represented the end of motion; motion, not inertia, required explanation. Political activity, like physical motion, is presumed to be directed toward an end or telos. Hobbes's physics posits "motion without end," rather than inertia, as paradigmatic for the physical world; similarly, his political thought removes any notion of teleology or purpose. Such is the framework in which Spragens operates in his analysis of Hobbes's thought, The Politics of Motion. This chapter will explore Spragens's analysis of the scientistic corruption of liberal politics,
including his treatment of the thought of Hobbes as both exemplar of and contributor to this development.

**Politics, Epistemology, and Liberal Rationalism**

The makers of the "scientific revolution," in developing the techniques that have so vastly revolutionized our understanding of the natural world, made certain tacit assumptions about what constituted **reliable** knowledge. The achievements of modern science were so impressive that these standards of reliability were taken as the norm for **all** forms of intellectual inquiry. What could not be known with scientistic precision was held not to be knowable. Spragens contends that these assumptions are fatal to **moral** inquiry, including political theory, which differs qualitatively from the disciplines of the natural sciences.

Spragens detects two conceptions of **value** (a kind of "cover term" including but not limited to moral, ethical, and political knowledge) within the liberal rationalism that has developed in the wake of the scientific revolution. One is "value noncognitivism," which simply holds that there is no such thing as knowledge of value, or at least that no such knowledge is accessible to human reason. A common version of value noncognitivism is "emotivism," the view that value statements represent nothing more than visceral emotional reactions that are not susceptible to rational justification. An alternative to value noncognitivism is the "technocratic" conception, which admits rational
principles of value but reduces them to technical knowledge accessible only to a cadre of "technocrats" who are adept at the techniques of critical reason. Liberal rationalism therefore renders knowledge of principles of value either utterly inaccessible or accessible only to an elite. Both these versions of liberal rationalism are based on "unrealistic premises about the possibilities of human knowledge," Spragens argues.\(^2\)

The success of the new science cut short any reflection about the unreality of the premises of the paradigm of liberal reason. Thinkers as disparate as Locke and Descartes adopted the new program. Despite the usual distinction between Locke's empiricism and the rationalism of Descartes, Spragens contends that the two thinkers shared several fundamental assumptions. The search for knowledge was to begin with a "clean slate"; the traditions of scholasticism are to be replaced with distinct, indubitable foundations for knowledge. A mathematical mode of inquiry, stipulating precise rules of method, is to be the norm across all disciplines. Genuine knowledge is that which is verifiable and explicit. Such knowledge could only be a boon to mankind; the new paradigm would help to inaugurate a vast expansion of human powers and a new era of untold progress.\(^3\)


\(^3\)Ibid, 22-23.
Hobbes would find it convenient to adopt the program of liberal rationalism. It represented a weapon that he could employ against the Aristotelian-scholastic "pseudo-explanations" to which he was so vehemently opposed, which were of a kind with the speculations of the Puritan divines who represented such a threat to the English constitutional order during his lifetime. The new version of reason represented a weapon against religious enthusiasm; reason would never again be subjugated by authority. A mathematical-geometrical model of knowledge would help to break the "spell of words" cast by the religious enthusiasts. Concomitantly, any discipline that was incapable of producing unambiguous, precise definitions fell into disrepute. A monistic model was adopted to cover all inquiry; poetry and imagination came to be identified with superstition and prejudice and were shunted aside.\(^4\)

An alternative interpretation would be that Hobbes did not seize the new paradigm with enthusiasm, but was simply attempting to come to grips with the implications of the assumptions that had come to be accepted by the European intellectual elite. Spragens remarks that Hobbes "saw quite early that acceptance of the new philosophy made morality and politics problematic; it required establishing a conception of human order on a thoroughgoing nominalist and materialist footing." Nevertheless, Hobbes's contemporaries

\(^4\)Ibid., 23-30.
reacted to his initiatives with revulsion. "His ideas were universally reviled from the pulpit and almost uniformly rebutted by academicians. The hunting of Leviathan became a popular late-seventeenth-century British preoccupation." The more observant of his contemporaries realized that Hobbes was not trying to be merely eccentric or provocative; he was trying to face the genuine intellectual challenges which confronted European civilization. "If Hobbes's answer was not persuasive, the questions he had confronted could not be shunted aside so easily."5

Other liberal reformers were not as perceptive about the difficulties as Hobbes may have been, persisting as they did in the pursuit of secure foundations for knowledge. Locke, for instance, pushed forward with the construction of a reductionistic ontology of simple primary quantities, as opposed to a theory of Platonic essences or Aristotelian forms. "Sensations could no longer be 'of' substances, for there were none. Sensations could, therefore, only be impressions of corpuscular 'data,' since that was all there was out there for them to register." Genuine knowledge is to be understood as knowledge of these "simples," which define the limits of the knowable. There is no knowledge other than knowledge of these "simples"; the theory of "simples" establishes a clear and distinct boundary between the knowable and the unknowable. Spragens remarks that this

5Ibid., 198.
is "a conception remarkably different from the real, concrete, experience of everyday life, but it is nevertheless presented as what, at bottom, 'experience' really is. . . . It is not a description of experience; it is instead a description of what experience must be, given the corpuscular construction of the world."®

The liberal reformers seemed to think that the new epistemology and the accompanying reductionist ontology would engender a "moral science" that would reinforce and validate traditional standards. What really happened was the appearance of a full-fledged reductionism that would threaten these very standards. Hobbes attempted to put forward a relatively modest version of the new moral science. Given human self-interest, all that was necessary was foresight of consequences. Knowledge of consequences would enlighten those in power, who could use the new knowledge on behalf of the existing order. Such was the substance of the "politically conservative liberalism" that Spragens attributes to Bacon, Locke, and Descartes as well as to Hobbes.®

This "politically conservative liberalism" was not the only political doctrine that could follow from the new moral science, however. Spragens identifies at least three other possibilities. One would be the "democratic natural-right

®Ibid., 209.
®Ibid., 66-76.
liberalism" of Concordet, Jefferson, or Paine. Here, the source of political improvement was to be not merely an enlightened ruling class but an enlightened public opinion, filtered through the institutions of representative government. Another version might be the "natural-reconciliation-of-interests liberalism" of an Adam Smith, although in Smith's own thought it appears that social order is to be generated from man's "moral sense" as well as from natural equilibrating forces. Finally there is the "artificial-reconciliation-of-interests liberalism" represented by the intricately balanced governmental institutions constructed by Madison in the Federalist Papers, in which institutional artifice is to generate the general interest out of the confluence of private interests. Spragens contends that this artificial reconciliation could take a more sinister, less limited form; if the new science promises us the domination of nature for the sake of progress, why could not human nature itself be included within the nature to be dominated? The result might be a politics of domination that could be tyrannical as well as beneficent. "For the beneficent and scientific legislator, human nature should present no more of an obstacle to the construction of the good society than would any other part of the cosmic mechanism. His knowledge would enable him to
divine the requisites of social order and to shape men accordingly.®

Hobbes and Liberal Empiricism: The Politics of Motion

Spragens suggests that Hobbes's "politically conservative liberalism" may not be sustainable. Others, working from the same assumptions as does Hobbes, might produce a politics of domination and manipulation. Spragens holds that Hobbes made a crucial contribution to the development of a political paradigm that inclines contemporary polities toward just such manipulation and domination. An elaboration of the sources and implications of Hobbes's assumptions was Spragens's intent in The Politics of Motion.

Spragens insists on a consideration of Hobbes's thought as a coherent whole. He breaks with the thesis of Taylor and Warrender, which holds that Hobbes's political thought and his cosmology are independent of each other. He argues that this Taylor/Warrender thesis "involves a laborious separation of what Hobbes equally laboriously strove to reconcile, namely, his psychological postulates and his account of the origin of political obligation." Spragens's view is that Hobbes's attraction to modern science influenced his political philosophy, although "the impact of

®Ibid., 76-90.
Hobbes's natural philosophy upon his political philosophy is not the product of purely deductive derivation."^9

Spragens emphasizes Hobbes's obsession with the problem of motion. Hobbes reacted against the Aristotelian conception of motion as a synapse from potential to actual. Aristotle assumes that an object's natural state is one of rest; rest or inertia represents the end, fulfillment, or final cause of motion. It is a teleological conception of motion in which motion is held to seek its end in a state of rest. Hobbes in his theory of motion would eliminate this element of tension between the potential and the actual.\(^10\)

Aristotle presents a universe of beings (including both physical and human phenomena) who desire to become what they essentially are. In the physical world, it is movement that requires explanation; movement is expected to terminate itself in a state of rest or inertia. However, the account of the motion of projectiles proved to be the "Achilles' heel" of this Aristotelian physics. The modern physics initiated by Galileo proved to be its downfall. "This impressive conceptual framework concerning the phenomenon of motion was totally abandoned as a piece of unintelligible

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^10Spragens, Motion, 57.
and obscurantist nonsense by the principal thinkers of the seventeenth century," remarks Spragens.\textsuperscript{11}

Hobbes followed Aristotle in making motion the key to reality, but he broke with Aristotle in disposing with rest or inertia as the end of motion, making motion the whole of reality. Where Aristotle turned to biological growth, Hobbes adopted a geometric model as the paradigm of motion. Teleology disappears; final and formal causality are abandoned in favor of efficient causes only. We are left with a "rest-less" world in which motion lacks an end. In this monism of motion, life is taken to be nothing but motion, which tends to persist; life's motion lacks any telos other than striving to persist. Will, intellect, and emotions are all held to be reducible to motion; even knowledge and the intellectual faculties are understood as, at bottom, nothing but motion. Motion admits of no qualitative distinctions; it is nothing but a vector, lacking form or substance.\textsuperscript{12}

Not only did Hobbes replace inertia with pure motion, he also substituted mere body for the Aristotelian concept of substance or ousia. Aristotle's ousia is a broad concept designating that which makes something what it is. On this basis, Aristotle constructs what might be taken as an incipiently materialistic world of "nesses." His procedure

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 59-61.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 63-71.
is to anthropomorphize the physical. Hobbes reverses this, physicalizing the human realm at the expense of politics. Once the Aristotelian conception of movement is lost, substance is converted into the "empty vehicle" of body. A world of undifferentiated body is a world of Hobbesian nominalism, in which definitions lose their explanatory function. Order is now to come from motion, not substance.\textsuperscript{13}

The Hobbesian universe overthrows the Aristotelian sense of the orderliness and coherence of nature. Lost is any sense of man as having a social nature that could serve as a source of obligation; also lost is any sense of the polity as prior to the individual in the sense of being the individual's final cause, completion, or fulfillment. Nature is characterized by enmity, not sociability; ruthless egocentrism is understood to be natural. Simple, dissociated components, rather than a state of fulfillment or coherence, are taken as the starting points for reasoning about politics.\textsuperscript{14}

Although Spragens disagrees with Macpherson in holding that a certain degree of "power-lust" is part of human nature, rather than being specific to capitalist society, he agrees that Hobbes's "natural man" is an abstraction from civilized man as Hobbes knew him; Hobbes arrives at his

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 77-92.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 97-106.
state of nature by speculating about how a society of typical seventeenth-century men would behave if political authority were suddenly removed. In general, for Hobbes we arrive at nature by performing an act of analytical dissolution on the whole, "resolving" the whole into its fundamental components. The whole is not natural; nature is intrinsically dissociated.\(^{15}\)

Spragens acknowledges the importance of Macpherson's insight into Hobbes's "disassociationism" with respect to its implications for the political. Hobbes can speak of "meer nature," which, as Spragens notes, would have been unthinkable to the Aristotelian tradition. If nature is essentially dissociated rather than holistic, then it cannot be the source of ethical or political injunctions. Order will have to be a wholly artificial creation of the sovereign. Ethical statements will be understood only as expressions of will or preference. As Spragens notes, "The ramifications of this position extend into Hobbes's doctrines in the area of political economy and economic justice."

Viewing economic activity as only one aspect of a broader human order, the Aristotelian tradition placed certain limitations upon it which followed from the larger order. The demands of economic justice were expressions of the belief that commerce must be integrated into a wider framework of human nature, and these demands had been elaborated in theories of just price, commutative justice, and distributive justice. Here, as elsewhere, however, the concept of justice is

\(^{15}\textit{Ibid.}, 106-107.\)
an ontological one, and Hobbes's destruction of the classical ontology leaves him no basis for these traditional theories of economic justice. Hobbes therefore concludes, again quite logically from his premises, that the only criterion of value is 'appetite,' and hence there is no distinction between value and market price.

When the tenets of laissez-faire capitalism were pushed to their logical conclusion, an anguished response was provoked in the form of the Marxian theory, Spragens argues. "Marxian economics . . . is actually a systematic restitution of economics to a contingent place within the entire human economy and has a root affinity with the classical concepts of just price and distributive justice." Hobbes's premises left no basis for the limitations on economic activity that Western polities had inherited from the Aristotelian tradition. Whereas the Marxian system "was normative in the classical sense, that is, anchored in a humanized ontology," Hobbes's position represented "a complete relinquishing of moral control over the market. Rather than being a contingent facet of human social life, economic relations become the autonomous standard to which all other facets of political order must conform."16

16Ibid., 107-111. On the relation between Marx and Aristotle, see also Richard W. Miller, "Marx and Aristotle: A Kind of Consequentialism," in Kai Nielsen and Steven C. Patten, eds., Marx and Morality, Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Volume VII, 1981, 323-352; Arendt, The Human Condition, 254, n. ("Incidentally, the influence of Aristotle on the style of Marx's thought seems to me almost as characteristic and decisive as the influence of Hegel's philosophy"); and George Grant, Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism, Carleton Library No. 50 (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1982), 56 ("Marx is not purely a philosopher of the age of
We might conclude, then, that Aristotle would have been repulsed by Hobbes's conclusions regarding the relation of the economic to the political. According to Spragens, however, there are some aspects of Aristotle's thought that leave his system susceptible to reversals of content at certain crucial points, allowing Hobbes to draw the conclusions he does. Both Aristotle and Hobbes are antidualistic thinkers, insisting on the unity of the world. Both conceive the world as a universe, conferring no special status on man. Furthermore, they both agree that science should aim at certain, demonstrable knowledge. Both seek definitions, but they disagree on the nature of the definitions.\textsuperscript{17}

Aristotle is a realist who believes that the universe is susceptible to real definitions. Hobbes replaces this realism with nominalism. There are no essences, just explications of names. Aristotle deals in the induction of natural essences; Hobbes, in the resolution of nature into its smallest components. To arrive at a natural state, we first resolve it into its components, then recompose it into an artificial whole. The resolutive-compositional procedure puts Hobbesian science in a better position to claim precision than does the approach of Aristotle. "That is, progress; he is rooted in the teleological philosophy that predates the age of progress\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{17} Spragens, \textit{Motion}, 129-139.
for Hobbes, unlike for Aristotle, political science is a theoretical science—a form of knowledge which can be precise because it deals with necessary truths." Hobbesian science yields pleasures which are not purely intrinsic; it is oriented toward *action*—action that will help the sovereign ruler to manipulate the realm so that violent disorder may be avoided.  

In sum, Spragens's view is that Hobbes preserved an Aristotelian form, but reversed the substance of Aristotle's theory at certain crucial points. Both thinkers insisted that nature is an integrated whole. Furthermore, both of them adopted the "externalizing" perspective of modern science to some extent, with the scientist as a detached outsider looking down upon nature. Both took motion as their starting point. However, whereas Aristotle's motion was analogous to biological growth, Hobbes employed the analogy of a mere vector, a quantity rather than a quality, tending only to persist rather than to grow. While the circle was the symbol of the Aristotelian universe, for Hobbes the symbol was a line. The Hobbesian model of motion, taken as an analogy for politics, led to the rejection of any intelligible end or *summum bonum*. Lacking an intelligible fulfillment or completion, politics becomes concerned with passion rather than reason. Men are taken to be naturally antisocial rather than social; they act

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18Ibid., 139-158.
politically to avoid meeting their natural end, that of violent death. In a state of irremediable anxiety, men must seek an excess of power to stay ahead of others. Politics consists of the management of passion; ironically, passion leads men toward disaster, up to a point at which a latent passion (fear of violent death) is awakened, bringing salvation.¹⁹

How Liberal Reason Corrupts Politics

According to Spragens, this Hobbesian reversal of the substance of Aristotelianism constituted a philosophical reductionism that set the stage for a vulgarization of politics. Instead of understanding the political on the basis of an Aristotelian analogy with biological growth and development, Hobbes presents a mechanistic model for politics. The political mechanism could be understood as a self-regulating machine that operates according to its own law, or, in a potentially sinister interpretation, as a machine to be manipulated from outside itself. This manipulative model for politics opens the possibility of a "technocratic" politics of "social engineering."²⁰

For instance, in Locke's doctrine of sensationalism we have a close analogy to a Hobbesian universe of "mere" body rather than Aristotelian substance. The mind at birth is to

¹⁹Ibid., 163-197 and 203-204.
²⁰Spragens, Irony, 91-93.
be understood as a "white paper," its content determined strictly by the sensations it receives. Aristotle also suggests the analogy of the tabula rasa, but for him the mind at least contains a potentiality that awaits actualization; at least there were limits to the ways in which this potentiality could be actualized. The moderns understood the emptiness of the mind as constituting utter plasticity. Locke was not able to carry this line of thought through to its logical conclusion. Spragens notes that he leaves a "ten percent residual category" of men who were "self-made" rather than being completely the products of their environment.21

The modern version of the mind-as-tabula rasa theory was a development concomitant with the modern reversal of the Aristotelian concept of nature. Where Aristotle understood the nature of something to be its end in the sense of a final cause, the moderns associated nature with origin or beginning. Sensationalist or other reductionist doctrines of mind merely involved emptying the mind's origins of all content. When Hobbes and Locke traced the origins of political man to a state of nature, the inhabitants of this natural state were still recognizably human, but by the time the process they initiated was

21Ibid., 94-101.
complete, man's nature was understood as nothing more than the mere capacity to receive sensation.22

Sensationalist conceptions of mind notwithstanding, it would be argued that some people were capable of breaking out of the deterministic circle suggested by the new theories. While most men might be mere "objects" who inhabit the realm of necessity, those in possession of the knowledge provided by the new sciences were "subjects" who could attain the realm of freedom. Spragens suggests that this development amounts to "the fashioning by a well-intentioned power-seeking intellectual class of their own legitimacy myth." When enthusiasts of the new sciences claim that "we" can put science in the service of human progress, they may only be revealing their ignorance of what Spragens calls the "'we, who?' problem" of "technocratic" politics.

Who is this "man" who is nothing more than the product of his education? And who, then, is the producer? Who are the "they" whose hands will hold "the instrument of their greatness and felicity"? Who are the "we" who "may learn how to cherish and improve" some passions and affections while "checking and rooting out" others? Who, in short, are the educators and who the educated? Who are the knowers and who are the known? Who controls and who is controlled?

Although the solution to these problems is rarely clear (since it remains cloaked in the rhetoric of "man making himself"), it seems clear that we are not really talking about the same people in each case. Instead, one "class" of man is envisaged as educating or improving another "class." And this difference provides the escape from fatalism.

22Ibid., 101-104.
The possessor of positive science becomes the "ideal legislator" whose task it is to fabricate the good political order. "Rousseau stated the qualifications of the technocratic Legislator; Helvetius declared them attainable; and Bentham applied for the job," remarks Spragens. He argues that this "technocrat" represents a "sentimentalized version" of the Hobbesian sovereign.

The "technocratic" conception makes politics into a science of rewards and punishments. As Spragens notes, all polities must engage in the application of rewards and punishments to some extent—in the application of a criminal code, for instance. What distinguishes the technocrat is the unbounded scope given to such scientistic reasoning. Technocracy attempts to control the environment for the purposes of education and character formation; in so doing, it runs the risk of becoming morally reductionistic, rendering liberty meaningless. Social control replaces political interaction. Malleable man would seem incapable of holding politically accountable the technocrats who are able to so thoroughly manipulate him. The moral content of the traditional understanding of politics becomes unintelligible. Technocratic leanings may be seen in the conservative, liberal, or radical varieties of modern politics. Spragens thinks that the reason that

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23Ibid., 105-109.
"technocracy" has not developed into a full-fledged ideology is simply that its assumptions are so ubiquitous.\textsuperscript{24}

In technocratic politics, social-scientific techniques are endowed with an authority sufficient to override the requirements of democratic consent. Social scientists such as Lester Frank Ward and B. F. Skinner sought a scientific "cure" for "pathological" social dynamics; they professed to be baffled by the "irrational" resistance they sometimes encountered in their "subjects." Such "technocrats" tend to make optimistic assumptions to the effect that their schemes will require a minimal amount of coercion. Dr. Karl Menninger's discussion of the "crime of punishment" could be taken as an exemplification of technocratic tendencies. Menninger seeks to mitigate the cruelties of the penal system by converting the criminal into a deviant to be treated rather than punished. He fails to realize that in so doing he has converted the criminal into a mere "object" to whom responsibility cannot be attributed. Society, not the criminal, is spoken of as responsible, but this evocation of societal guilt is followed by an arrogation of power. This conceptual shift culminates in the abuse of psychiatry, in which psychiatric "treatment" becomes indistinguishable from a prison sentence with no hope of appeal.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 110-129.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 161-195.
It will be recalled that in Spragens's presentation the major modern alternative to a "technocratic" conception of value is "value noncognitivism." One exponent of noncognitivism was David Hume, whose political thought Spragens characterizes as degenerating into emotivism and irrationalism. His phenomenalism parallels Locke's sensationalism in that it holds that there is nothing to reality but impressions. Such a philosophy can provide nothing more than a conventionalist moral theory in which we are to accept habit and custom because they are safe; the desire for stability corresponds to Hobbes's fear of violent death. Standards of value were to be found only in such internal standards, not the external world. Hume spoke of an internal moral sense "which nature has made universal in the whole species"; evidently, "moral taste" was to do the work of Aristotelian substance. However, a reductionistic metaphysics of impressions could not account for a phenomenon so complex as moral taste. Immanuel Kant would try to save ethics by appealing to the radically free will as a standard of value, but Spragens asserts that neither Hume nor Kant could avoid "importing" traditional moral content into his theory.26

It turns out, then, that the only alternative available to the scientific rationalist who wishes to avoid a

technocratic politics of domination is a skeptical denial of the possibility of a rational standard for political life. Scientific "value noncognitivism" places the political outside the realm of the rationally apprehensible, culminating in political irrationalism. Such a skepticism can affirm nothing positive; debunking and critique are its strong suits, but Spragens thinks that this "animus against enthusiasm is itself an enthusiasm." In its conservative form, such an irrationalism appeals to custom in opposition to affirmative political standards. Liberal irrationalism denies metaphysical holism or transcendentalism, seeing appetite or desire as the only reality. Radical irrationalism appeals to imaginative fantasy in a romantic reaction against pretensions to rational political discourse. Spragens remarks that "the radical irrationalist may turn out to be anything from a relatively amiable absorband to a furious nihilist--from a Yippie to a terrorist." 27

A Non-Reductionistic Standard for Political Knowledge

Spragens concludes that neither the technocratic nor the value-noncognitivist conception of value can provide us with an adequate theoretical framework for political science. Both these versions of modern rationalism rule out any recourse to norms of completion or fulfillment in an

27 Spragens, Irony, 256-261.
Aristotelian sense, without which politics cannot be rendered intelligible. The influence of positivistic rationalism has had a deformative effect on several otherwise fruitful theoretical developments in contemporary political science. Without any reference to political purposes, an Eastonian "systems model" may generate nothing more than a universalized "pork-barrel" politics. Robert Dahl's version of democratic theory preserves Madison's concern with "constitutional engineering," but it eliminates Madison's intent to limit the "mischiefs of faction," since on its assumptions the term "faction" cannot be "operationalized." Perhaps the most poignant instance of positivistic theoretical impoverishment has been in the area of development theory, the very mention of which carries Aristotelian overtones. A truly profound theory of development would have to refer to a substantive standard for a good society to which development ought to contribute. Lacking a theoretical framework that can speak of "the good society" intelligibly, development theory has, in Spragens's view, lapsed into a kind of ethnocentrism in which "development" is taken to be equivalent to conformity to the patterns of the Western industrialized world.28

From Spragens's perspective, a wholesome intellectual development has been the rise, and especially the fall, of

logical positivism in the twentieth century. Logical positivism represented a radicalized, unsentimental version of the program of liberal reason; it may be considered the culmination of the development initiated by Hobbes, Locke, and Descartes. The logical positivists' standard of "verificationism" parallels the Hobbesian procedure of "resolution." However, logical positivism quickly encountered difficulties. For one thing, on the basis of the verification principle, logical positivism appeared incapable of giving an account of itself. The verification principle insists that only empirical statements are admissible, but the principle itself appears to be normative or regulative, purporting as it does to settle questions about what uses of language are "proper," the protests of positivists to the contrary notwithstanding. It appears, then, that the verification principle is not self-reflexive. Furthermore, protests were heard to the effect that positivistic verificationism gave a distorted account of investigative procedures in the natural sciences. Scientists objected that scientific statements are universally context-laden; there is no such thing as a completely theory-neutral observation. Representative of all these developments was Wittgenstein's shift from the program of the *Tractatus* to that of the *Philosophical Investigations*; in the latter work he rejected the "picture
theory" of language and its implication of a radical separation of observer and object.29

Wittgenstein initiated a version of linguistic analysis that was not reductionistic. The notion of "simples" was abandoned; it was accepted that language represents an irreducibly complex reality. Language was seen as not susceptible to purification; an absolute boundary between the knowable and the unknowable could not be drawn. This Wittgensteinian shift was soon reflected in a new turn in the philosophy of science on the part of thinkers such as Michael Polanyi and Thomas Kuhn. Knowledge was now seen as contingent and subject to interpretation. Scientific knowing contains an ubiquitous element of tacit judgment. Science can attain "warranted beliefs," not "positive" knowledge. Any verification of scientific knowledge is necessarily intersubjective and therefore less than totally certain. The new philosophy of science puts forward a "lower" standard for knowledge in that it stipulates that not all ambiguity and uncertainty can be eliminated.30

Spragens characterizes the new philosophy of science as part of a quiet intellectual revolution. Ironically, political science embraced positivism just as it was being discredited. In any case, the political implications of the more modest conception of scientific rationality are clear.

29Spragens, Irony, 319-332.
30Ibid., 347-356.
On the one hand, it becomes obvious that a degree of humility is appropriate to politics. If the natural sciences cannot obtain absolutely certain knowledge, it is clear that all claims in an area such as politics must be regarded as dubitable. "Technocratic" politics loses its warrant; we may be able tentatively to identify some people as mistaken, but within a proper understanding of politics it will be stipulated that the mistaken are to be persuaded, not coerced. On the other hand, if our "post-liberal" understanding dictates that the aims of politics are to be somewhat modest, this understanding also rehabilitates politics in an important respect, because we are freed from the constricting dogma of the fact-value dichotomy and may make evaluative statements with a clear conscience. "Value noncognitivism" and its concomitant political irrationalism may be set aside.31

In adopting the model of the natural sciences as paradigmatic for the study of man and society, modern liberals failed to realize that the successes of modern science have been due to its political institutions as well as its technical virtuosity. The "scientific republic" enforces norms of consensus, authority, and freedom, just as a well-ordered polity does. The scientific enterprise is predicated on a consensus on behalf of the pursuit of truth; it accredits scientific authorities who are charged with

31Ibid., 357-368.
determining what does or does not constitute a legitimate advance in scientific knowledge. Within this context, science affirms the competence of the human mind to apprehend truth, and so it enforces norms such as those of academic freedom in order that free inquiry may proceed. Political enterprises are of a different order from those of science, but both undertakings attempt a "progressive adaptation"; science seeks to narrow the gap between observation and theory, while politics attempts to adapt extant institutions to the requirements of human existence properly understood. Reason is not simply equivalent to either science or politics, but according to Spragens it is reason that makes science "scientific" and politics "political," rather than "military": in either undertaking it is reason that allows us to arbitrate between competing claims of authoritativeness. Spragens hopes that a more appropriate understanding of reason and its role in politics will enable our political enterprises to attain their legitimate ends. "Perhaps a revised appraisal of human understanding will permit us to escape the strange oscillation between pride and despair that has characterized political life in the modern West--to replace that unhappy pattern with a more felicitous dialectic of hope and humility."32

32Ibid., 368-395.

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Fallibilism and Absolutism: An Uneasy Coexistence?

Spragens offers a provocative interpretation of the philosophical vulgarization of liberal politics and of the role of thinkers such as Hobbes in this development. To save liberalism from itself, in the sense of preserving its better rather than its worse tendencies, is his intent. His view is that the most defensible tenet of modern liberalism is its epistemological fallibilism—the view that certain truths are apprehensible only imperfectly. A fallibilist in the realm of ethics, for instance, would argue that there are ethical truths to be known, but that our minds can apprehend them only imperfectly—in opposition to the view of a relativist who would argue that there are no such ethical truths that the mind is capable of apprehending. Fallibilism argues from the fallibility of all views, not their equivalence or parity. "The strongest part of the relativist and empiricist justifications of liberal and democratic institutions is their common focus on epistemological fallibilism. . . . if the limitations of the human mind are such as to render all moral beliefs somewhat uncertain, then the case for the politics of freedom and toleration improves dramatically."33

This epistemological fallibilism represents something of a two-sided philosophical coin. On the one hand, what can be known is only known with some uncertainty, but, on

33 Ibid., 285-286.
the other hand, there is definitely something to be known. The latter consideration apparently has prompted Spragens to become attracted to philosophical absolutism of a sort.

The accreditation of "objective" values can contribute and has contributed to the ethos of liberal democracy, especially when this absolutism is transcendentalist (or at least sees perfection as an unreasonable expectation for historical existence) and includes an appreciation of the contingencies of human knowledge—if, for example, it realizes that these absolute goods are perceived "through a glass darkly". . . . Indeed, the argument for toleration may be based on theological grounds, . . . [ i. e.] in the contention that the claim to know God's will is a sinful presumption. While it respects the pluralist element in democracy, moreover, this kind of philosophical "absolutism" can also provide the basis for insisting on the justice, the human dignity, and the intrinsic limits on the legitimate scope of government that are the essence of political constitutionalism—which is, in turn, a crucial element in Western liberal democracy.

Can Spragens have both absolutism of this or any sort and also epistemological fallibilism? One could probably come up with any number of absolutists who were unwilling to admit any uncertainty regarding their absolutist tenets. One might even argue that the two requirements of absolutism and fallibility are contradictory. If one claims for one's tenets the status of absolutes, why admit that their truth is known with anything less than absolute certainty? If there is uncertainty, are the absolutes really absolute?

For science, the nearest thing to a philosophical absolute is the disinterested inquirer's commitment to the truth. This commitment requires an affirmation by the

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34Ibid., 290.
inquirer of the ability of the mind to apprehend reality; such an affirmation is not susceptible to the empirical verification demanded by the logical positivist. According to Spragens, "we must confess our faith in this complementary rationality of known reality and knowing person to be finally just that—a faith," albeit a "not unreasonable faith." Such faith must underlie the "uneliminable act of intellectual judgment on the part of a responsible knower" which is a component of any inquiry. The irreducible necessity for this intellectual judgment reveals the "tacit coefficient in all knowledge" in light of which the project of the logical positivist is rendered obsolete.35

Talk of "faith" may suggest that the commitment of the disinterested inquirer is to be equated with religious commitment, but that this is Spragens's intent is not clear. He speaks, for instance, of the political theorist's attaining transcendence, but this transcendence is explicitly described as a relative transcendence. The theorist is to be aware of his own personal and social milieu so that he can move beyond his own limited perspective and take into account the viewpoints of others. In so doing, the theorist's perspective "reaches what might be called a relative transcendence of its origins; it can move beyond its partiality to a more comprehensive vision, 

35 Spragens, Dilemma, 148-149.
but it can never escape from its grounding in the contingency of historicity."

The import of Spragens's critique of liberal reason is that liberals have failed to acknowledge the tacit component of human knowledge and have, as a result, pursued either a discredited verificationism or a politically nihilistic value noncognitivism. The influence of thinkers such as Hobbes was crucial to this development. Spragens sometimes speaks as though the thought of Aristotle were also implicated; it will be recalled that he detects continuity as well as divergence in his comparison of these two theorists. Both thinkers insisted upon "the demonstrative character of scientific knowledge." The movement toward an insistence on radical certitude may be traced back to ancient Greek thought: "Once one has apprehended the *ousia* of anything, he may feel confident that his understanding will retain its validity forever, because the lines of substance, the species of being, are assumed to be eternal. . . . It was conceivable to Aristotle that the entire cosmos could be exhaustively represented by a complete set of univocal definitions."  

Spragens may have jumped to a conclusion in drawing such a close parallel between Hobbes and Aristotle. Not all his statements concerning Aristotle on this matter are

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36Ibid., 153.

37*Spragens, Motion*, 138-139; *Dilemma*, 139-141.
consistent. Any claim of certain knowledge on the part of Aristotle would have to refer to theoretical reason only, not practical reason, as Spragens acknowledges. Perhaps the fairest statement by Spragens on this matter is his observation that the "Aristotelian claim that the first principles of science are known 'with certainty' is either mistaken or else it simply refers to a quality of belief--to strength of conviction."\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38}Spragens, \textit{Motion}, 156-157; \textit{Irony}, 143, 351-353.
That the mention of Hobbes continues to arouse fear and suspicion is testified to by the enduring tendency of political partisans to hurl the epithet "Hobbesian" at their opponents. The accusation of Hobbesianism is not entirely neutral in its political implications; Hobbes's title "Leviathan" has been appropriated by those who wish to portray the contemporary state as monstrous in its proportions, as in discussions of "the Leviathan state." "Hobbesianism" thus has become a weapon of the libertarian right against the "collectivist" left; those who would shrink the state point their fingers at those who would maintain or expand it, calling them Hobbesians.¹

Two of the commentators on Hobbes discussed herein present themselves as critics of the proportions of the contemporary state. Strauss, a critic of Hobbes, portrayed modern governments as moving inexorably toward the establishment of a "universal and homogeneous state," a goal acknowledged tacitly and almost unanimously, as though it had been enacted as official doctrine by a Hobbesian sovereign. It may have been an embarrassment to Strauss to find that Oakeshott, an admitted admirer of Hobbes, agreed nevertheless that the contemporary state had overextended

itself, that it resembled a universitas that threatened to smother individuality rather than a societas that left people free to pursue their own life plans and projects. Macpherson, who sympathized somewhat with Strauss as a critic of Hobbes, should be considered a critic of the contemporary state only in a highly qualified sense, because of his Marxian leanings; given a choice between maintaining the contemporary state and limiting it in the way that an Oakeshott might, he would probably take the former option. Strauss considered Macpherson an advocate of the "universal socialist society," a thinly veiled equivalent of the "universal and homogeneous state"; it will be suggested below that Macpherson may indeed have left himself open to such a sinister portrayal.  

In considering whether a thinker ought to be acquitted or convicted of the charge of Hobbesianism, not only his stance toward the contemporary state but also his position regarding the openness of political discussion and debate should be considered. Voegelin's remarks about the Hobbesian proclivity to censor political discussion should be recalled, as should Arendt's contrast between the classical Greek emphasis on political action and the Hobbesian tendency toward subjection to an absolute

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3See chapter 2, 46 above.
sovereign. Such concerns are shared by Macpherson in his
criticism of the passive consumer society that has driven
out participatory democracy, and by Spragens in his
observations about the danger that technological
manipulation will come to supplant politics. Hobbes and
Aristotle, to whom Hobbes so often set himself in
opposition, provide an instructive contrast for the
illumination of the issues of the place of the state and of
open political discussion. For instance, passing
consideration at least should be given to the attitudes
toward Hobbes and Aristotle of contemporary classical
liberal "anti-statists," who so effectively have
appropriated the Leviathan symbol for polemical purposes.

Aristotle, Hobbes, and the Latter-Day Hobbesians

In Spragens's presentation, Aristotle puts forward a
holistic metaphysics, whereas Hobbes propounds an atomistic
ontology in which everything is to be resolved into its
simplest components. Borrowing from biology, Aristotle
speaks of motion in terms of growth, which points toward a
natural state of full development or completeness. Hobbes,
taking his inspiration from Galilean mechanics, identifies
the natural not with development but with origin or
beginning; his motion amounts not to growth but to mere
persistence, a never-ending "motion after motion" within an
"end-less" universe. The Galilean model eventually
supplanted the Aristotelian conception as a more successful
explanation of the motion of physical bodies. "What is absurd in the context of physical motion is not so absurd in the context of human action, however," Spragens argues. 4

Hobbes presents a universe in which motion is devoid of termination. The opposing Aristotelian metaphysics contains a principle of inertia. Motion is not expected to continue without end; it requires explanation. Motion is presumed to terminate in a state of rest, which represents the final cause or telos of motion. The Hobbesian universe disposes of such talk of an end or telos, constructing instead a universe in which the Aristotelian formal and final causes are subsumed under either materia? or efficient cause. Hobbes thus constructs a purposeless universe, devoid of ends, both in the sense of termination and the sense of a goal or purpose toward which things tend and in terms of which they may be explained. 5

The Hobbesian metaphysics implies a political theory that a devotee of Hobbes would probably describe as realistic and unsentimentalized; others find it stark and demoralizing. Men in the state of nature are capable of doing to their fellows absolutely anything that their strength and guile permits them to get away with; at this stage, there exists nothing to provide a basis for a sanction against unprovoked violence, for instance. To

4Spragens, Dilemma, 133. See also Motion, 97-110 and 189-97.
5Spragens, Motion, 53-74.
escape from such a state, men rush for the cover to be provided by the Hobbesian sovereign, but even after the sovereign is acknowledged, they may not be sanguine about their circumstances. In return for the sovereign's protection, men must place themselves at their mercy. No matter what burdens the sovereign places on his subjects, no rebellion is legitimate--unless, of course, a successful rebellion takes place, in which case it may be spoken of as legitimate "after the fact."

Contrastively, Aristotelian politics places natural limits on both rulers and their subjects (including limits on the accumulation of wealth). Men as well as natural objects have an end, the polis, which is the appropriate environment for an existence fit for human beings. That a political community is man's natural setting is revealed by his natural capacity for speech, which makes possible discussion, persuasion, and political action generally. "Nature, according to our theory, makes nothing in vain; and man alone of the animals is furnished with the faculty of language." There is a sense in which the community is prior to its members, just as a hand or foot cannot perform its natural function when severed from the rest of the body. Genuinely human existence cannot be achieved outside of the political community; it would be perverse for a man to insist on living in isolation. "The man who is isolated--who is unable to share in the benefits of political
association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient—is no part of the polis, and must therefore be either a beast or a god." The collective has an interest, but in the normal case this does not constitute a pretext for the sacrifice of the individual; the interest of the community is nothing apart from the full development and truly human existence of its members.®

Strauss considered Aristotle to be the source of one of three versions of the doctrine that he called "classic natural right," along with Plato and Aquinas. He thought that this doctrine dictated an opposition to the contemporary tendency which he identified as culminating in the "universal and homogeneous state." Before we accept the conclusion that the teaching of classical political philosophy requires a campaign to shrink and diminish the state, we should examine the attitude of other opponents of the "Leviathan state" concerning the issues dividing Aristotle and the classics from Hobbes and the teachings of modern political philosophy.7

It might be thought that Strauss, as an opponent of the "universal and homogeneous state," would be sympathetic to the perspective of F. A. Hayek, whose contributions have been the inspiration of much of the "anti-statist" tendency


7Strauss, Natural Right and History, 146, 156-63.
in recent right-of-center thought. Even a casual comparison, however, will reveal that Strauss and Hayek have little in common beyond their mutual political dislikes. Far from hearkening back to the tradition of classical political philosophy, Hayek celebrates the achievements of modern civilization, in particular the development of an "extended order" featuring free economic markets and an interdependent network of exchange that exceeds by several degrees of magnitude the scale of the classical Greek polis. In such an extended order, Aristotelian teleology has no place, since order emerges spontaneously, without anyone intending it, out of the interaction among individuals, each acting to attain his or her own purpose, in or out of the economic sphere. Each of us has an intimate, tacit knowledge of our own immediate environment; no single person or group could have access to sufficient knowledge to act to achieve the purpose of the entire social organization, conceived in Aristotelian fashion. In fact, in his most recent monograph, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, Hayek explicitly dismisses Aristotle and the Aristotelian approach to politics.

"Aristotle spoke from his instincts, and not from observation or reflection, when he confined human order to the reach of the herald's cry," claims Hayek at the outset of *The Fatal Conceit*. He objects to any attempt to impose limits on the scale of human organization or economic
accumulation based on teleological considerations foreign to the rational calculator of economic theory. He has no use for a world-view in which, according to Barker's description, "everywhere things are regarded as determined towards an end." Indeed, he blames such a Weltanschauung for a corruption of political language, due to its tacit assumption that where there is order there must be an orderer. He argues that "the naive or untutored mind ... tends to assume the activity of mind or spirit wherever it imagines that there is purpose." He goes so far as to attribute to Aristotle "a naive and childlike animistic view of the world," comparable to that described by Jean Piaget (The Child's Conception of the World). For Hayek the Aristotelian "postulated perfection of social life" mentioned by Spragens is inadmissible. In his earlier statement on politics, The Constitution of Liberty, Hayek remarked that "it has been perfectionism of one kind or another that has destroyed whatever degree of decency societies have achieved." 8

John Gray, an Oxford political philosopher, has attempted to synthesize the contributions of Hayek and other

contemporary right-of-center theorists such as James Buchanan, along with borrowings from thinkers as diverse as Kant, Rawls, and John Stuart Mill, into a coherent libertarian-individualist outlook that would destroy the pretensions of the intellectual left. Gray, along with Hayek and Buchanan, affirms a "modern" idea of freedom in which political participation plays little part. The ancient Greek and Roman idea of freedom "rarely connoted any immunity from control by the community, but only an entitlement to participation in its deliberations. The ancient idea of freedom is so far in sharp contrast with the modern one." However, there does appear an intimation of modern liberal freedom at one crucial point in ancient Greek history: Gray cites the Funeral Oration of Pericles as "a statement of liberal egalitarian and individualist premises." The liberal outlook of Pericles was shared by others of the "Great Generation" of Periclean Athens, "which encompasses the schools of the Sophists, Protagoras and Gorgias, and of Democritus the atomist." In Gray's view, Plato and Aristotle form a reactionary opposition to this "Great Generation." "In the works of Plato and Aristotle, we find, not the further development of the liberal outlook of the Great Generation, but instead a reaction against it."\(^9\)

A theory of justice based on this "liberal outlook," in which justice is based not on nature but on convention or agreement, is offered by economist James Buchanan. Buchanan equates justice strictly with the outcome of agreement among men, independent of any substantive evaluation of the terms of agreement. To "offer a description of the 'good society' ... often promotes intellectual and moral arrogance," he remarks. "By contrast, my natural proclivity as an economist is to place ultimate value on process or procedure, and by implication to define as 'good' that which emerges from agreement among free men, independently of intrinsic evaluation of the outcome itself." Buchanan further affirms his affinity with a political theory of "conventionalism" when, in an appendix to his and Tullock's *The Calculus of Consent*, he remarks that "initially we look to Glaucion in Plato's *Republic*, to Thomas Hobbes, and to Benedict Spinoza."¹⁰

Strauss was familiar with a political science which identified justice and the public good with "the rules of the game," but he identified such an approach with the pluralist democratic theory of contemporary political scientists such as Robert Dahl rather than with free-market economics. He thought that this approach emptied the notion of 'common good' of any substance, such that "even if an

objective is to the interest of the overwhelming majority, it is not to the interest of all. . . . Everyone is by nature the sole judge of what is to his interest: his judgment regarding his interest is not subject to anybody else's examination on the issue whether his judgment is sound." Such a perspective was not original to contemporary political science, observed Strauss; "it was stated with the greatest vigor by Hobbes."¹¹

A prohibition on intersubjective evaluation of individual judgments of self-interest is a feature of the principles of justice stipulated with economistic precision by Buchanan and Tullock in The Calculus of Consent. These principles are subsumed under the rubric of a term of technical economics, "Pareto optimality." Under the Pareto criterion, the "welfare" of the whole group of individuals is said to be increased if either "(1) every individual in the group is made better off, or (2) if at least one member of the group is made better off without anyone being made worse off." Buchanan and Tullock observe that the standard of "Pareto optimality" is "a criterion that is implicit in the individualist conception of the State itself"; to be precise, no one is to be "made worse off" (i. e., taxed) for the sake of anyone else. Such a criterion for political and

economic "betterment" enables the economist (or the political scientist) to be "scientific" in the strict sense. To adopt any other criterion would be presumptuous and intellectually arrogant; the economist, unlike the "collectivist" intellectual, "cannot play at being God, no matter how joyful the pretense; hubris cannot be descriptive of his attitude." The social scientist can at least avoid the subjectivity inherent in "interpersonal comparisons of utility"; "No external observer is presumed able to make comparisons of utility among separate individuals." Such talk of a prohibition on "interpersonal comparisons of utility" represents a restatement in economists' jargon of the Hobbesian premise identified by Strauss, that no evaluation may be made of individual judgments about self-interest. The Pareto criterion implies, in Buchanan and Tullock's interpretation, that majority rule in politics ought to be replaced, at least in principle, by a rule of unanimity, in order to prevent "deliberate political exploitation." As a practical matter, they concede that to enforce a unanimity rule in a modern nation-state would render collective action impossible; in their terms, the "decision-making costs" would be astronomical. They are, in a magnanimous concession to reality, willing to replace the unanimity rule in practice with a requirement for a "supermajority" rule--the closer to unanimity the better--in
order at least to place limits on "political exploitation" of the taxpayer.\textsuperscript{12}

Buchanan and Tullock's refusal to make "interpersonal comparisons of utility" is a reflection of their acceptance of the "fact-value distinction" that has come to predominate in modern social science under the influence of Max Weber. As Buchanan writes, "Positive science is concerned with the discovery of 'what is'; normative science, with 'what ought to be' . . . . Political economy has a non-normative role in discovering 'what is the structure of individual values.'" Economists are charged with the collection of empirical data in the form of the preferences expressed by persons. It may not be possible to eradicate a degree of subjectivity in drawing a conclusion about what a person's preference is, but "the presence of subjective evaluation of the outside world (which includes the preference fields of other individuals) does not imply the infusion of an individual value judgment concerning the 'goodness' of the proposal presented."\textsuperscript{13}

Strauss addressed the fact-value distinction in several of his books and essays; he regarded it as a tenet of a degenerate modern political science which was

\textsuperscript{12}Buchanan and Tullock, \textit{Calculus}, 171-74, 13-14; Buchanan, \textit{Limits}, 1; \textit{Calculus}, 43-46.

constitutionally incapable of understanding political phenomena. To continue to study politics while under the spell of the fact-value distinction, the political scientist must draw parasitically upon the fund of commonsensical, pre-scientific political knowledge possessed by the citizen or statesman; in fact, such common-sense knowledge is probably involved even in Buchanan's assumption that the economist is entitled to make a "subjective evaluation" of what persons actually prefer. "The citizen does not make the fact-value distinction. . . . The distinction between facts and values is alien to the citizen's understanding of political things."\(^{14}\)

It should be clear by now that the radical curtailment of the state proposed by the libertarian-individualists cannot be reconciled with Strauss's Aristotelian natural right. For example, Foster argues that when Aristotle remarks that "the end of the state is not mere life; it is, rather, a good quality of life," he initiates an argument directed against the radical "limitation of the state's functions," in Lockean or Hobbesian fashion, contemplated by Hayek, Buchanan, and Gray. Buchanan goes so far as to compare the collective unconstrained by unanimity or "supermajority" rules to a thief. Barker identifies this "taxation-is-theft" argument with the teachings of the

\(^{14}\text{Strauss, "Crisis," in Graham and Carey, eds., }\text{Post-Behavioral Era, 225.}\)
Radical Sophists, which were rebutted by Aristotle. "The State is no artificial construction, whereby the weak have defrauded the strong of the right of their might, and defeated Nature's intentions; it is the natural supplement of the weakness of us all, which has grown inevitably out of our needs and instincts."  

According to both Barker and Foster, this anti-Sophistic posture follows directly from Aristotle's most fundamental metaphysical tenets. When he asserts in the Politics that "the polis belongs to the class of things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature an animal intended to live in a polis," and that political participation is natural to man because "nature, according to our theory, makes nothing in vain; and man alone of the animals is furnished with the faculty of language," his basic metaphysics of natural movement toward an end, of the actualization of natural potential, is reflected. In Aristotelian metaphysics, "everywhere things are regarded as determined towards an end," remarks Barker. In contrast to Hobbes, the final state or condition is regarded as more natural than the origin, so that the polity is viewed as more natural than whatever primeval condition might have preceded it. "While he holds primitive society to be

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15Aristotle Politics 3.9.1280a; Michael B. Foster, Plato to Machiavelli, vol. 1 of Masters of Political Thought, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), 127 (see also 122); Buchanan, Limits, 42-43; Barker, Plato and Aristotle, 272.
natural (like Hobbes), he also holds the final State to be natural, and still more natural (whereas Hobbes would regard it as artificial)."\(^{16}\)

**Against Strauss on the "Universal and Homogeneous State"**

From a Straussian perspective, it might appear that Hayek, Buchanan, and Gray have committed a litany of sins against "classic natural right." It would seem strange, then, that Harvard philosopher John Rawls has been selected for a "fire-breathing" Straussian attack while the individualist-libertarians have been passed over; the admiration for Rawls expressed by both Buchanan and Gray suggest the affinities among them. The explanation must be that Rawls provides a wedge by means of which the redistributive state may slip in, and this places him on the side of the "universal and homogeneous state" in the eyes of the Straussians. In fact, the critique of the "universal and homogeneous state" represents only one of several objections (on the part of Voegelin and Oakeshott as well as Strauss) to an apologetic on behalf of the contemporary state, the Aristotelian rationale offered above notwithstanding.\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\)Aristotle *Politics* 1.2.1253a; Barker, *Plato and Aristotle*, 218-222.

Talk of the "universal and homogeneous state" tends to partake of mystification. Apparently, Strauss has been gifted with an intuitive understanding which allows him immediately to "see" the parallel between the tyranny of Hiero and the modern welfare state; those incapable of perceiving this connection simply lack the appropriate intellectual gifts. As Gourevitch has remarked, "Strauss's interpretations enjoy an immunity not enjoyed by interpretations of Strauss," as Kojève and others have discovered.18

At no point in Strauss's discussion of "the universal and homogeneous state" do we find reference to the discussion of the preservation of kingships and tyrannies offered by Aristotle in book 5 of the Politics, the content of which closely parallels Xenophon's Hiero. This discussion does not present the difficulties of interpretation due to dramatic setting that so occupied Strauss with respect to the Hiero, since Aristotle speaks straightforwardly for himself. Furthermore, Aristotle's presentation is obviously moral. A tyrant might pursue one of two courses of action to preserve his rule; the first of these comprises measures which we would consider authoritarian, but by pursuing the second course "his rule


will be a nobler and more enviable rule . . . and he will himself attain a habit of character, if not wholly disposed to goodness, at any rate half-good—half-good and yet half-bad, but at any rate not wholly bad."\(^{19}\)

It is not clear that the political program recommended to the tyrant by Aristotle can be placed precisely along the contemporary left-right spectrum. The tyrant is to "plan and adorn his city as if he were not a tyrant, but a trustee for its benefit," but at the same time "he should levy taxes . . . in such a way that they can be seen to be intended for the proper management of public services. . . . He should act in the role of a guardian, or steward, who is handling public revenues rather than private income." A tyrant, then, could be either frugal or a spendthrift; so might a legitimate ruler. Neither course is intrinsically tyrannical. In matters of expenditure, the tyrant and the legitimate king might pursue the same policies. In fact, it is Aristotle's view that while authoritarian measures "plumb the depth of wrongdoing," the tyrant who pursues the Stagirite's second, preferred course "should be the opposite of nearly everything which we have previously described as characteristic of tyrants."\(^{20}\)

A tyrant might be a spendthrift, but to be a spendthrift is not intrinsic to tyranny; the tyrant could

\(^{19}\)Aristotle *Politics* 5.11.1315b.

\(^{20}\)Aristotle *Politics* 1314a-1314b.
just as easily adopt a program in which he would, in the words of Barker, "tax lightly and spend rightly."

Aristotle's non-authoritarian tyrant is to pursue aims which "exactly correspond to the general principles for the preservation of constitutions which we have already studied." To follow such principles would make the tyrant less of a tyrant, either by acting to "adorn the city" or to "tax lightly." Aristotle's treatment of this matter does not indicate that he attributes to it the same central importance given by Strauss to Xenophon's Hiero, in spite of the similarity in subject matter. The scale of government expenditures is not Aristotle's measuring rod for judging whether a regime is tyrannical. One is left to wonder whether the whole stream of speculation stemming from Strauss's development of the concept of "the universal and homogeneous state" is not illicit. In any case, there is no reason to believe that, given his generally affirmative attitude to the political community and his disinclination to narrow the sphere of government, Aristotle would accept that a more extensive state which "adorns the city" is tyrannical ipso facto.21

Strauss is forced to admit that not every extension of the state represents a step in the direction of the tyrannical "universal and homogeneous state." Suppose, for instance, that there were to come into existence a worldwide

21 Barker, Plato and Aristotle, 494-96.
federation of nations for the sake of preventing a thermonuclear war. Such a federation would not qualify as a "universal and homogeneous state" because it would preserve the existence of the individual states, whose boundaries would be accepted tacitly as legitimate, within the federation. Similarly, not every expansion of the domestic state represents a step toward universal tyranny; some such initiatives are undertaken in order to preserve an existing state with respect to some of its crucial particulars.22

The anthropologist Karl Polanyi emphasized the Aristotelian insistence on a natural limit to trade and accumulation in economics. When Aristotle remarks that "it is the business of nature to furnish subsistence for each being brought into the world; and this is shown by the fact that the offspring of animals always gets nourishment from the residuum of the matter that gives it its birth," he offers us an alternative to the "scarcity postulate" of modern economics. We are provided with subsistence naturally, and our economic arrangements should do no more than augment the abundance that has been provided for us by nature. When, instead, those arrangements become positively destructive to us, that is a perversion of the natural limits of the economic against which political authority may legitimately be invoked. Therefore, Aristotle (paraphrased

by Polanyi) stipulates that "trade that served to restore self-sufficiency was 'in accordance with nature'; trade that did not, was 'contrary to nature' . . . prices should be such as to strengthen the bond of community; otherwise exchange will not continue to take place and the community will cease to exist." Keeping such strictures in mind, what might Aristotle say about a proposal to throw a nation's borders completely open to international trade, regardless of the effect on stable communities of textile, steel, or automobile workers, for instance? Do these policies "strengthen the bond of community"? Of course, to enforce restrictions on trade, government bureaus will have to be created and officials appointed in order, perhaps, to collect import duties, but these measures are taken not in order to construct a universal state but to preserve our particular communities because we value them as they are. Polanyi contends that these considerations apply to the entire program of economic protection (broadly interpreted) that contemporary states have enacted. If contrary policies are pursued, this is due to (paraphrasing Aristotle once again) "a misconceived notion of the good life as a desire for a greater abundance of physical goods and enjoyments," for which we ought to hold responsible not the state but the seductive appeal of advertising and the market. 23

Aristotle's insistence on a natural limit on trade and accumulation represents a defense of the "micro-order" against the "extended order" upheld by Hayek, who often during his career has encountered a visceral reaction against the requirements of this "extended order": "That this tradition arouses great resistance we already know and will witness again repeatedly." His "extended order" "requires further restraint on the innate feelings of the micro-order . . . for these instinctual feelings are often threatened" by it. If we may speak of such a thing as human nature, these "innate feelings of the micro-order" may be a constituent part of it, such that Hayek is in the position of placing himself in opposition to human nature, or at least to a deep-seated human tendency; Polanyi argued that a spontaneous protective reaction always accompanies any attempt to establish a self-regulating market order. Is it the critic or the advocate of an "extended order" who comes nearer to the advocacy of a "universal and homogeneous" condition?24

**Tyranny and Technology**

A more subtle line of argument suggests that the modern state partakes of tyranny as a result of its efforts to free its citizens from the constraints of physical necessity. Indeed, the Aristotelian political theory holds that while

the *polis* is the realm of freedom, the household is the realm of necessity; it would therefore be unsuitable for the free man who is to participate in politics to be required to perform household labor. The Athenians sought to secure this freedom for a portion of the population—those designated as citizens—by having the more menial tasks performed by slaves. Moderns have attempted to secure for everyone the freedom of the Athenian citizen by means of an economy of affluence. In large part, this affluence has been attained through the exploitation of technology; critics of technology argue that the very means by which we have achieved a partial "freedom from want" have contributed to the perfection of techniques of control and regulation to such a degree that they now threaten our political freedom. As George Grant, Canadian political theorist and follower of Strauss, argued, those who "want both high standards of spontaneous democracy and the egalitarian benefits accruing from technique . . . share, with those who appear to them as enemies, the deeper assumptions which have made the technological society." While the ancient Greeks enslaved some of their fellow men, we have attempted to subjugate nature, argues Grant; the techniques that have enabled the subjugation of nature are so powerful that they may turn out to be the means of our own enslavement.25

The argument appears to be that the contemporary state is tyrannical because it seeks to subjugate and enslave nature, just as the ancient polis enslaved certain men; furthermore, the conquest of nature may permit the enslavement of men in a far more efficient fashion than was available to ancient regimes. If the argument is meant to imply that the ancient Greek polis was itself tyrannical by virtue of its institution of slavery, its exponents may have misperceived the nature of ancient Greek slavery. The Athenian practice was different enough from the institution of the ante-bellum American South that the same term perhaps ought not to be applied to both. As Barker describes the conditions under which slaves lived in Attica:

Their lot was comfortable; there were no features of dress to distinguish them from the ordinary citizen. . . . Legally as well as socially, they were not degraded; they were protected from ill-usage by the State; and they could not be punished by death except by its tribunals. . . . The Athenian policeman was a slave; and slaves also filled the lower posts in the civil service. Emancipation was not difficult; the slave might even purchase his own freedom. . . . One feels, too, the difference between this domestic slavery, in which the slave is not separated by a gulf from his master, and the slavery of the modern plantation, with its deep lines of demarcation, and its exploitation of the slave to the uttermost farthing.

A summary condemnation of Athenian slavery neglects the moral dimension of the Greek version of the practice. As Foster notes, "slavery is justified from the point of view of the master. . . . But it is also justified from the point of view of the slave." A natural difference in capacity between the master and the slave is assumed here. The slave
working in a master's household could at least share in Athenian cultural and political life in a way that the mechanical laborer who was not a slave could not. Furthermore, to be a master is justified only insofar as one utilizes one's slaves to attain moral and intellectual excellence; virtue, not wealth, is the end of the institution.\textsuperscript{26}

The Greeks believed in the relevance of natural differences. They may have assumed more of a clear and distinct difference between the capacities of slaves and masters than was justified. If so, this may be attributable more to a failure of Greek political science, sociology, and anthropology than to a broader moral failure. In any case, it appears that the substantive conditions to which the Greek slave was subject were certainly no worse than those of the menial laborer of the present-day world. It should also be remembered that Aristotle's defense of slavery condemned the practice as it often existed, as when slaves were taken as part of the spoils of military conquest. In justifiable slavery there should obtain "a community of interest . . . between master and slave," but this will not be present when "slavery rests merely on legal sanction and superior power."\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26}Barker, \textit{Plato and Aristotle}, 360-61; Foster, \textit{Plato to Machiavelli}, 134-35.

\textsuperscript{27}Aristotle \textit{Politics} 1.6.1255b.
Arendt acknowledged the problematic of necessity, slavery, and technology when she wrote that "man's wish to emancipate himself from life's necessity . . . was the core of slavery." In fact, when Arendt argues that "it is only the rise of technology, and not the rise of modern political ideas as such, which has refuted the old and terrible truth that only violence and rule over others could make some men free," she might appear to leave herself open to the accusation that she shares the assumptions of Grant's "technological society." For instance, the category of necessity was central to Arendt's analysis of the difference in outcome between the French and American Revolutions. In the former case, impoverished masses manifested themselves in the political realm, primarily not for the sake of political freedom but rather to relieve their misery. The poor carried with them as they entered the political sphere an irresistible force and a violent rage which culminated in terror; "The result was that necessity invaded the political realm, the only realm where men can be truly free." Thus it would appear that Arendt's political philosophy might embrace the power of technology to overcome necessity and establish the conditions under which men can participate freely in politics.28

In fact, it was not technology alone but the existence of the vast frontier that enabled America to overcome the

poverty of the European masses and avoid the excesses of French revolutionary politics. Arendt stresses that the American founders upheld public, political freedom, not private wealth, as the justifying principle of their revolution. They insisted on frugal ways and simple manners not out of prudishness but because they thought luxury incompatible with freedom. "For abundance and endless consumption are the ideals of the poor; they are the mirage in the desert of misery. In this sense, affluence and wretchedness are only two sides of the same coin; the bonds of necessity need not be of iron, they can be made of silk." Indeed, the American notion of republican virtue would come under pressure with the closing of the frontier and the arrival of millions of European immigrants seeking material prosperity. The development of American mass society raises the possibility that affluence and consumption may supplant public freedom, as people come to conceive freedom as the right to be left alone in the pursuit of private wealth. Arendt remarked hopefully that "There exist today as many signs to justify hope as there are to instill fear."29

As it turns out, Arendt is far from an uncritical enthusiast of technology. Technology presents a temptation to withdraw from public freedom into private happiness, at the same time that it may help to secure the necessary conditions for the exercise of that freedom.

29Ibid., 134-37.
The American dream, as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the impact of mass immigration came to understand it, was neither the dream of the American Revolution—the foundation of freedom—nor the dream of the French Revolution—the liberation of man; it was, unhappily, the dream of a "promised land" where milk and honey flow. And the fact that the development of modern technology was so soon able to realize this dream beyond anyone's wildest expectation quite naturally had the effect of confirming for the dreamers that they really had come to live in the best of all possible worlds.

However, despite her reservations about its temptations, we should not attribute to Arendt the view that a renunciation of technology would be appropriate. She probably would hold that the virtues of Aristotelian moderation and of practical wisdom or phronesis would provide a sufficient framework for the supervision of technology. Such wisdom and moderation would probably require that some technologies be judged to be so intrinsically dangerous that they should not be exploited. Arendt would not go so far as such critics of the "technological society" as Grant and Jacques Ellul, for whom technology appears as a diabolical force whose utilization to any extent at all involves a violation of sacred restraint. Ellul himself was not willing to accept the full implications of such an attitude, as he reveals in his remark that "the book of Revelations says that the glory of nations will enter the New Jerusalem. The glory of nations also includes technology. Hence, our attitude is not antitechnological; rather, it is a critical acceptance of technology." It would be Arendt's view that as long as we retain a sense of the priority of public freedom over
private affluence, our perspective will be broad enough to sustain a sufficiently critical attitude toward technology. It was for his reversal of this priority that she criticized Marx, who believed that developments in the sphere of "relations of production" would eventually supersede the political realm. As she remarked before a 1972 conference in her honor, "I do not share Marx's great enthusiasm about capitalism."³⁰

Teleological Politics and the Bios Theoretikos

Even if the above considerations are taken as decisive against the view that the modern regime must inevitably take the form of an irresistible "universal and homogeneous state" in the service of an ever-expanding "technological society," those who would uphold the centrality and integrity of the political are faced with yet another challenge founded upon philosophical premises opposite those of the libertarian-individualist "neo-Hobbesians," which nevertheless may give aid and comfort to the "anti-statist" position. The political realm is "caught coming and going" between one school which holds that man's strivings have no telos and another school which holds that such a telos lies entirely outside the sphere of politics. The latter view,

that the justification of the political lies solely in its enabling the solitary philosopher to live the *bios theoretikos* or contemplative life, was criticized vociferously by Arendt.\(^3\)

Short of an exhaustive discussion of such a position, which has been attributed to both Strauss and Voegelin, a few preliminary remarks may be offered. In the *Politics* we find the remark of Aristotle that "the end of the state is not mere life" but rather "a good quality of life." He contrasts the genuine state with a mere alliance for common defense or commercial intercourse, in which "neither of the parties concerns itself to ensure a proper quality of character among the members of the other." Based on the interpretation offered by Strauss and Voegelin (or at least by some of their followers), it would appear that whenever we encounter reference in Aristotle to "the end of the state," "a good quality of life," "a proper quality of character," or, in general, human happiness or *eudaimonia*, we are to understand that what is meant is only the solitary contemplation of the philosopher or the mystic. An alternative interpretation of *eudaimonia* is that it signifies the development of a talent or excellence that varies from person to person, the action of each in accordance with his own spirit or *daimôn*, be that the

\(^{3}\)Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220-330; see also chapter 6, 238-40 above.
excellence of a philosopher, a statesman, or an artisan. (According to Arendt, *eudaimonia* "has the connotation of blessedness, but without any religious overtones, and it means literally something like the well-being of the *daimón* who accompanies each man throughout life, who is his distinct identity, but appears and is visible only to others.") That Aristotle affirms the "imperial" status of the solitary mystic is not immediately obvious to most readers. As Strauss admitted, a reading of Aristotle's discussion of happiness in the *Rhetoric* indicates that "our ordinary notion of happiness is not different from the ordinary notion analyzed by Aristotle." Such happiness consists of no more than a "reasonable contentedness," consisting of good friends and children and a reasonable degree of health and wealth.\(^2\)

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* we do find a passage that appears to uphold the "imperial" claims of the contemplative over the active life by virtue of its being more "self-sufficient." The controversy revolves around whether the authority of this passage can be established over and above those remarks which appear to confirm the "common-sense" notion of happiness. The "standard" interpretation points to an apparent difference of attitude between the Aristotle of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the

author of the *Politics*. As Barker remarks, "While we leave the *Ethics* with the feeling that in the speculative life of each man lies the height and depth and breadth of his being, we begin the *Politics* with the sense, that, the individual being essentially a citizen, his essential life is that of civic action." It should be remembered that by the height of Aristotle's career we are removed by about a century from the peak of the "Golden Age" of Periclean Athens, which was followed by a period that both Plato and Aristotle regarded as an era of decline and corruption, such that the passage to which Voegelin and Strauss attribute so much authority may represent the single most pessimistic, defeatist passage in the Aristotelian corpus concerning man's political potential. In any case, Barker's view is that the active and the contemplative life are not mutually exclusive: "Active thought on the deepest of moral questions is necessary to the political life, and the statesman is a philosopher as well as a politician." Therefore, "Man may either find his happiness in a political life . . . or, if his capacities are not for such a life, he may look for happiness to a philosophical life of active thought."33

Despite his awareness of both Voegelin's and Strauss's perspectives, Spragens concurs with Barker insofar as he depicts Aristotelian politics as derived from the

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observation that "the immanent strivings of human nature depend upon a political setting for their fulfillment." He is so bold as to claim that for Aristotle "the strivings of political action were not considered to be adequately explicable without such a postulated perfection of human life." Here Spragens recalls the image of Aristotle the empiricist, the zoologist to be precise, despite Hobbes's disparagement of his metaphysical speculations. Both Aristotle's zoology and his politics are derived from empirical observation, with the difference that he could explain the immanent strivings of the animals without reference to political organization, whereas this was not possible with respect to human strivings.34

Spragens's mention of a "postulated perfection" raises the issue of the perfectability of man, the impossibility of which is a central tenet of some political theories. Talk of human "perfectability" carries with it an ambiguity about the extent of the perfection being contemplated. Aristotle's universe is full of potentialities being actualized; the actualization is a more perfect state of being than the potential. However, no such actualization brings about a perfect world, strictly speaking; furthermore, instances of failure of actualization abound. This account of actualization is no less applicable to human striving. For instance, if I develop my musical talents,

34 Spragens, Motion, 99, and Dilemma, 45.
then once I become an accomplished musician I am a more perfect being than before, because I have actualized what was merely potential. I have "perfected" myself, but I have not thereby brought about a simply perfect world. Such efforts at "perfection," properly understood, should be no more out of bounds in the political realm than in the musical. Trading on the observation that "all progress is not positive," some political theories go too far in denying that any positive political progress is possible in the sense of the development, indeed the perfection, of our political potential, stopping short of an unattainable absolutely perfect world. Unsuspecting political activists, no doubt unclear in their own minds about the extent to which human perfectability, have unwittingly left themselves open to being classified as proto-totalitarians with their loose talk of the "perfectability of man."

If we may include "magnanimity" within the catalogue of Aristotelian virtues (as listed in Nicomachean Ethics, book 4), we might question whether the attitude of Strauss's philosopher is properly magnanimous. Is it worthy of the philosopher to regard all other excellences as rivals of philosophy? Such a stance smacks of immoderation, while Gourevitch tells us that "moderation is quite literally central to the classical political philosophy that Strauss wants to restore." That the polity ought to be judged solely according to its ability to sustain the philosophers'
solitary reflections may be an absolutism that may have to be set aside, at least tentatively, lest it prove a destructive assumption for the guidance of our actions in the political realm, in which we most assuredly will not enjoy solitude. If it is feared that to affirm the political excellences will threaten those solitary virtues which are most excellent of all, we might offer by way of reconciliation the remark of Grant that "it is of the nature of things that we come to know and to love what is good by first meeting it in that which is our own--this particular body, this family, these friends, this woman, this part of the world, this set of traditions, this country, this civilization." His understanding of the excellences is not that they are rivals of each other, but that they are arranged in a hierarchical "great chain of virtues," such that we must engage ourselves in those excellences that occupy the lower ranks of the chain before we can ascend to the higher ones.  

Human Nature and Institutional Reform

For both Strauss and Voegelin, the primacy of the bios theoretikos implies the unchangeability of human nature, a tenet which forms the Archimedean point of their politics. For Strauss, the ubiquity of natural inequality suggests that the many can never become philosophers; the imperative

of the "universal and homogeneous state" to provide a condition of equal advancement, material and otherwise, for all amounts to an implicit denial of this common-sensibly obvious natural inequality, such that the attainment of the "world-state" would be concomitant with a change in human nature. For Voegelin, the experience of Christianity meshed perfectly with the implications of the primacy of the contemplative life. Man is but a creature, created with an unchanging nature; otherwise he would be subject to an infinite malleability. Man realizes his creatureliness by virtue of his capacity contemplatively to attain transcendent experience, which is the highest capacity natural to him.

Such a perspective inclines both Strauss and Voegelin, as well as Spragens, to oppose adamantly Macpherson's suggestion that power lust or libido dominandi differs for different men and can be affected by institutional arrangements. "Hobbes's model of human vainglory and lust for power . . . has more perennial relevance than MacPherson's analysis tends to imply," Spragens remarks. "For example, contemporary ethological investigations into the sources of aggression in animal and human behavior would indicate that the libido dominandi is neither confined to,
nor predominantly the product of, any particular form of social organization."36

Macpherson, for his part, purported to have demonstrated that is was the view of Hobbes, no sentimentalist about the pacific tendencies of human nature, that the lust for domination was not innate to all men. Admittedly, the issue turns on ambiguous passages in the Hobbesian corpus. For instance, we find in chapter 11 of Leviathan the statement that "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power" is "a general inclination of all mankind." Immediately afterward, however, we find that "the cause of this, is not . . . that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well . . . without the acquisition of more." According to Macpherson's interpretation, Hobbes holds that while all men require at least "a moderate power," and some men seek ever more power, it is only when free rein is given to predation that all men are compelled to protect themselves by seeking an excess of power over others. Macpherson holds that market society is just such a "predatory" society, in which one's man's power is constantly being invaded by another's.37

36Spragens, Motion, 35; see also Strauss, review of Macpherson, in Strauss, Platonic Political Philosophy, 230 (see chapter 4, 132-33 above).

37Hobbes, English Works 3:85-86; see also Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, 38-45, and chapter 4, 133-34 above.
Voegelin would object to Macpherson's interpretation because for him it points the way all too quickly to a program of institutional reform of the "predatory" society. Such "reformism" suggests that man is an utterly malleable product of his environment, lacking freedom, which is a reductionist degradation of his true nature. Voegelin argues that Aristotle's criticism of Plato's communistic scheme centered on "lack of consistent reliance on the educative process and in his short circuit into institutional remedies." According to Webb's reading, Voegelin argues that "progressive" thought misses "the irresolvable mystery of human freedom and the concomitant limitations of institutions."^38

Voegelin overdraws the distinction between the "educative process" and "institutional remedies," as can be seen from Salkever's discussion of Aristotle's views on the stability of democracies. According to Salkever's version of Aristotle, the good democracy, or for that matter the good regime generally, is one which inculcates "a certain opinion about the good life" among the citizens. The regime secures this opinion by education of a sort, but not by didacticism; "The easiest way of securing this opinion is not by direct instruction," but by regulations. As an example of the kind of "instruction" engaged in by the good

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38Voegelin, Plato and Aristotle, vol. 3 of Order and History (Baton Rouge, La.: 1957), 323; Webb, Eric Voegelin, 247.
regime, Salkever cites Aristotle's "Jeffersonian" defense of agrarianism as the most stable form of democracy:

It is evident that this form of democracy [the form based on a farming populace] is the best; and the reason is also evident—that the populace on which it was based possesses a definite quality. In the creation of such a populace some of the laws which were generally current in earlier ages may all be of service—laws, for example, forbidding absolutely the acquisition of property in land beyond a certain amount, or, at any rate, forbidding it within a fixed distance from the city centre or the city boundaries.

Salkever's point is that institutions educate, albeit indirectly. If he is correct, it may be that the justifications usually given explicitly for many of our institutions are not the genuine ones: "Welfare spending is not a mode of economic efficiency; universal suffrage not a way of electing the best people, jury trials not a means for reaching the best verdicts." Criminal sanctions are among the best examples of educative institutions, at least according to the deterrence theory of punishment, in which punishment is not directed primarily at the criminal but as an example to the public at large.  

Voegelin equates "educative measures" with man's spiritual side, and he sees institutional reforms as directed strictly against material ills; thus, a program devoted completely to institutional reforms suggests that

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man is not a spiritual but a material being. However, if Spragens is correct in suggesting that man is neither "autonomous" nor "heteronomous" in a Kantian sense (that is, neither completely free nor completely determined), then the relationship between the spiritual and the material will be a reciprocal one, and the legislator in his function as an educator will not be able to disavow all concern with institutional reforms. Barker's discussion of Aristotle's criticism of Plato's communism recalls that of Voegelin: "No material cure will heal a spiritual evil; only spiritual means will produce a spiritual result. To heal disunion and division of spirit, one must employ a common education, which will put all men on the same spiritual level, and initiate them into the same spiritual community." In bringing about this spiritual result, however, the legislator will not be without a role.

Private property is not simply pronounced right by Aristotle: it is pronounced right when, and in so far as, it subserves the moral end. It is not to be simply retained; it is to be retained when it has been "improved and perfected by proper customs and proper legislation regulating its use." And thus in practice it will come to pass that property, being used as such an instrument, and as a means to charity and munificence, will become public as well as private, and common as well as individual. . . . Private possession will bring its economic and moral advantages: common use, not merely dictated by law, but flowing from a proper spirit, will issue in that unanimity which Plato so greatly desired.

Aristotle criticized Plato's communism, but he did not hold that private property was to be left completely unregulated;
there is, he believed, a natural limit beyond which the accumulation of wealth should not proceed.⁴⁰

Despite their disparagement of the "micro-order," thinkers such as Hayek and Buchanan do acknowledge in their discussion of what may be called the "scalar problems of the modern economy" that Aristotelian natural limits on the size of our communities and the dynamism of our economy may have been breached. These problems are concomitants of the growth of our communities to such a scale that they exceed the natural boundaries of the individual's moral actions. Hayek mentions that "modern developments, especially the development of the large city, have destroyed much of the feeling of responsibility for local concerns which in the past had led to much beneficial and spontaneous common action." Buchanan observes that person now find themselves inhabiting an "extended community of arbitrary and basically amoral size." He asks, "What can a person be predicted to do when the external institutions force upon him a role in a community that extends beyond his moral-ethical limits?" He speculates about the causes of this development:

The generalized public-goods dilemma of politics can be kept within tolerance limits only if there is some proximate correspondence between the external institutional and the internal moral constraints on behavior. This century may be described by developments that drive these two sets of constraints apart. An increase in population alone reduces the constraining influence of moral rules. Moreover population increase

⁴⁰Barker, Plato and Aristotle, 394-95. For Spragens's remarks on freedom and determinism, see Irony, 356-61, esp. 360.
has been accompanied by increasing mobility over space, by the replacement of local by national markets, by the urbanization of society, by the shift of power from state-local to national government, and by the increased politicization of society generally.

As a solution to these scalar problems, Buchanan proposes a revival of federalism, if not of secession: "Where is the Quebec of the United States? . . . Who will join me in offering to make a small contribution to Texas Nationalist Party?" However, if Aristotelian political science is correct, an entity the size of Quebec or Texas still does not meet the requirement of being, in Strauss's words, "not too large for man"; Aristotle, as Hayek remarked, "confined human order to the reach of the herald's cry." We are left to consider whether a revived federalism would be adequate to offset the effects of Buchanan's "increasing mobility over space," "replacement of local by national markets," and "urbanization of society." Are not all these developments the outgrowths of the workings of Hayek's "extended order"? Would not an Aristotelian limitation upon economic dynamism and accumulation be a more appropriate remedy?

Where, then, is Voegelin left with respect to the preference he stipulates for "educative measures" over "institutional reform"? What will it profit us to undertake "educative measures" once the scale of our institutions has

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exceeded the moral capacities of human nature? Voegelin, along with Hayek and Buchanan, has not heeded the strictures on the size of the state laid down by Aristotle in *Politics* 7.4:

*Experience shows that it is difficult, if not indeed impossible, for a very populous state to secure a general habit of obedience to law. . . . States, like all other things (animals, plants, and inanimate instruments), have a definite measure of size. . . . These considerations indicate clearly the optimum standard of population. It is, in a word, 'the greatest surveyable number required for achieving a life of self-sufficiency'.*

These Aristotelian strictures suggest that our contemporary urban commercial civilization is, in some important respects, unfit for human beings in that its scale is disproportionate to the capacities of human nature. If we cannot escape urban civilization entirely, we have no alternative but to attempt to manage its most deleterious effects by means of "institutional reforms" that are marginally coercive in that they require the collection of taxes and other restrictions on the absolute right to free economic exchange. That the state must expand to a scale corresponding to the civilization it is to govern is no objection. We are attempting to adjust ourselves to an expensive way of living, and our tax bill is just one of the costs that this way of life exacts. To say, for instance, that it would impede "individual responsibility" to enact "institutional reforms" in the form of measures of economic protection on behalf of steel, automobile, or textile
workers in communities affected unfavorably by foreign trade would be to ask the individual worker to take responsibility for worldwide economic trends which even the most sophisticated Wall Street analyst can predict only with limited precision; such trends manifest themselves over a range far in excess of Buchanan's "moral-ethical limits."42

The Aristotelian objection to the Sophistic limitation of the state's functions has been mentioned above. Aristotle's most decisive statement of this objection occurs in Politics 3.9, where he stipulates that the state is not a mere commercial or security alliance; "But the end of the state is not mere life; it is, rather, a good quality of life." When Voegelin distinguishes between permissible "educative measures" and illicit "institutional reform," does he not slip into the same distinction between permitted "persuasion" and impermissible "coercion" drawn by vulgar, "Sophistic" libertarianism? While he aligns himself explicitly with Aristotle and especially with Plato, he has at least given aid and comfort to a more vulgar doctrine by letting libertarianism slip in "through the back door." Strauss, for his part, is compelled to concede that "if restraint is as natural to man as is freedom, and restraint must in many cases be forcible restraint in order to be effective, one cannot say that the city is conventional or against nature because it is coercive society." Strauss,

42Aristotle Politics 7.4.1326a-b.
incidentally, would appear here to be the best critic of his own strictures against the supposedly "universal and homogeneous state."\(^{43}\)

The most compelling textual evidence Voegelin can provide for an Aristotelian warrant for his position is to be found in the criticism of Plato's communism in \textit{Politics} 2.5, where Aristotle suggests that the evils to be remedied by Plato's schemes are due not to the absence of communism but to "the wickedness of human nature." The conclusions drawn by Voegelin from this passage are not, however, incorrigible. Barker echoes Voegelin's position when he mentions the injunction of the Gospels to "mend your hearts, and not your governments" in connection with this discussion, but he also recalls the Aristotelian insight that "the State, as a compound, varies as its \textit{constitution} varies. For that is it scheme: that is the way in which the citizens, who form the parts of the State, are arranged in relation to each other." The relevance of this latter consideration to the present problem is that the prospect of a great accumulation of wealth can have a seductive appeal. If this seductiveness is left unchecked, the citizens may come to look upon each other only as either potential partners in a lucrative "deal" or potential "suckers" to be taken advantage of to the maximum extent possible. In that

\(^{43}\)Aristotle \textit{Politics} 3.9.1280a-1281a; Strauss, \textit{Natural Right and History}, p. 132. See also chapter 3, 65-66 above.

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case, the practice of what Polanyi (echoing Aristotle) called "hucksterism" would drive out fellow-feeling and public-spiritedness. If the regime does not undertake "institutional reforms" to restrain this "hucksterism," subsequently it may find that the citizenry has been ruined and that government requires far harsher measures that may have been necessary at one time, because the polity is now "constituted" by "hucksters" instead of public-minded citizens. 

The Common Good and the Contemporary State

In stark contrast to his usual Hobbesian disparagement of the active political life, Buchanan acknowledges the human capacity to articulate a public-spirited conception of the common good when at one point he makes reference to the ennobling tendencies of democracy. "Voting choice does provide individuals with a greater sense of participation in social decision making, and, in this way, it may bring forth the 'best' in man and tend to make individuals take somewhat more account of the 'public interest.'" He must have in mind here considerations of the same sort that prompted the remark of Oakeshott about how "a proposal which may begin in a want ... must lose this character and acquire another (a political character) in being understood, advanced and considered as a proposal for the amendment of the respublica

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44 Aristotle Politics 2.5.1263b; Barker, Plato and Aristotle, 395, 302; Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," 101.
of civil association." Oakeshott here invokes that feature of political discussion in which we achieve objectivity in an intersubjective process. A want may prompt us to put forward a political proposal, but in so doing we must make an argument in general terms in which we attempt to persuade others that our proposal is in the general interest. In so doing we are forced to take into account perspectives other than our own, so that our proposal takes on a character opposite to that of a sheer childlike demand for want-satisfaction. We may begin with a simple individual want, but the requirements of political discussion compel us to adopt a broader perspective.\(^{45}\)

The implications of the discussion of the educative function of institutions presented above are recalled. Particularly apt is Strauss's evocation of the discussion of citizenship and constitutions in the early chapters of the Aristotle's *Politics*. The theme of this discussion may be summarized by Strauss's remark that for Aristotle "the regime gives to the city its form." The presentation emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between political institutions and the character of the citizens, and in so doing it captures the true meaning of the observation that political remedies, to get to the root of things, must be

spiritual, not material. For instance, "If we take a simple view of democracy, it looks up to equality, and this gives it its character." What, then, is the character of a state which is conceived as nothing but a framework for economic exchange, and what will be the political character of the people born, raised, and educated to be inhabitants of such a state? Buchanan and Tullock invoke the authority of the economist Sir Dennis Robertson on behalf of the tenet that the state ought to "economize on love"; the other-regarding virtues, such as love, are so precious that we ought to be sparing in or dependence on them. However, if institutions teach, what is taught by an arrangement in which we depend on voluntary private exchange to the maximum extent, instead of on the public virtues? What is taught is: "We depend on the other-regarding virtues for little or nothing in this regime; you will almost never be called upon to manifest them." We should not be surprised when the people acculturated to such a regime bring the same self-interested, calculating tendencies of the economic side of their lives into whatever political culture they might have. Such considerations may explain the remarkable "empirical fit" which Buchanan and Tullock claim for their approach; if people inhabit a regime in which rewards are reserved almost exclusively for the self-regarding virtues, we should expect
that these will be the only virtues that will manifest themselves in public as well as in private life.\textsuperscript{46}

Oakeshott, acknowledging an affinity between the thought of Hobbes and his own highly restricted account of the political, makes no provision for the cultivation of the character of the citizens as part of the engagement of politics. Oakeshott holds that his version of Hobbesian sovereignty need not partake of authoritarianism; it "implies no frenzy for regulation or passion for interference" in any sphere including that of political discussion. However, as Voegelin pointed out, the Hobbesian regime permits no freedom of debate, at least not in principle; freedom of debate would be permitted only at the pleasure of the sovereign. In a regime conforming to the constraints stipulated by Oakeshott, in which so little of substance is accorded to the political engagement, it might be that political discussion would become superfluous.\textsuperscript{47}

Gray notes the preference shared by Oakeshott and Hayek for a "nomocratic" regime, with its disavowal of "common good" or "public interest," over a "teleocratic" regime. Indeed, Hayek wants to purge the word "social" from the political vocabulary, suggesting as it does in its use in


\textsuperscript{47} Oakeshott, Introduction to Leviathan, xliii; Voegelin, New Science of Politics, 154-55.
such phrases as "social justice" a teleological standard for the evaluation of the economy; he blames Plato and Aristotle for providing a pretext for the admissibility of such a "weasel word." However, the early Oakeshott objected only to an "overwrought" conception of public purpose. Apparently, it was only after several decades of "ideological hardening" that he formulated the strictly drawn distinction between universitas and the preferred societas. He attempts in On Human Conduct to reconcile his views with those of Aristotle, but his remarks are fragmentary and unconvincing. He contends that Aristotle's political relationship has "no extrinsic substantive purpose," that it is more "diluted or 'watery'" than either friendship or the "'household' relationship," and that the "end" of the political relationship is "not for him a substantial purpose but a formal condition."^8

Coates remarks that Oakeshott's civil association is "a kind of fidelity more 'watery,' urbane and moderate than those of a tribe, race, nation or religion, or the 'political friendship' of the polis (itself formed from tribes or villages)." Corroborating Coates's account, Arendt argues that the very Latin terminology used by Oakeshott to specify his "watery" relationship—terms such as

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as *societas* and *lex*—actually convey a more intimate connection when properly understood. For instance, we read that the word *societas* originally "indicated an alliance between people for a specific purpose," suggesting a connection of the kind Oakeshott specified by the term *universitas* rather than *societas*. Elsewhere we find that "the original meaning of the word *lex* is 'intimate connection' or relationship, namely something which connects two things or two partners whom external circumstances have brought together," as when two former enemy peoples are reconciled to each other within a single regime upon the conclusion of a war. In such a circumstance, the warring parties "now become partners, *socii* or allies, by virtue of the new relationship established in the fight itself and confirmed through the instrument of *lex*, the Roman law."49

Spragens and Strauss both argue that appeal to the public interest, incorporating the more intimate connection discussed by Arendt, is an irreducible element of the political, at least if any element of the non-reductionistic classical understanding is retained. Recalling Plato's mention in the *Republic* of the existence of an "honor among thieves," Spragens argues that the felt necessity of even the most authoritarian, repressive rulers to resort to an appeal to the common good is evidence of the inescapability

of such a concept. Strauss remarks that "the consistent denial of the common good is as impossible as every other consistent manifestation of the break with common sense."50

The contemporary liberal state does not require the absolute subjection of the individual to the common good, but it does place some limits on the pursuit of self-interest. The liberal state might appeal to Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the Nicomachean Ethics for a rationale for the balance it attempts to achieve between self-interest and the common good. The true egoist has the same regard for his friends that he does for himself. From this it follows that genuine self-interest implies a due regard for others. What this "due regard" entails will depend on circumstances. Under certain conditions, for instance, an extensive state and an accompanying tax obligation that some may find burdensome may be required. If the tax load is so burdensome that it becomes the occasion for political division, this suggests that the political community and the accompanying bureaucratic-coercive apparatus have grown to a scale greater than is optimal for the human good. Nevertheless, as long as we shy away from a back-to-the-land policy of depopulation of cities, after the fashion of the "agrarian policy" adopted by the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, we may have no alternative


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but to continue to maintain the "big government" apparatus. To refuse to do so would be the mark of a base and ignoble egoism. The contemporary liberal state allows a fairly robust pursuit of economic self-interest, but it also insists that due regard for others be paid in the form of taxes and the fulfillment of other political obligations.\(^5\)

D'Souza suggests that from the perspective of Strauss there is no cause for any criticism of unregulated capitalism: "Strauss's students say he did not spend time attacking capitalism because he understood there was no better alternative." Spragens, however, recognizes the half-truth upon which such a posture rests: "Western capitalism has, in fact, averted a Marxian cataclysm only by implicitly repudiating the unfettered Hobbesian theory through new channels of distributive justice such as the progressive income tax." What, then, are the purposes that liberalism hopes to serve by exacting the fulfillment of such obligations as the income tax? What ends are served?\(^6\)

Actually, the liberal state does not adopt as extensive a set of ends as it might. As Barker notes, "One of the saddest things in our modern life is the man who has no place, and who has yet full capacity and every desire to fill a place." The nations of the Communist bloc purport to

\(^5\)Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.4, 9.8.

\(^6\)D'Souza, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss," 38; Spragens, *Motion*, 111.
provide a place for everyone; the liberal state has not attempted this, in part out of considerations of sheer feasibility, reinforced by the difficulties experienced within the Communist bloc itself. Still less does the liberal state attempt to secure for everyone the "meaningful work" suggested by Marxian thought as a requisite of a truly human existence. The aims of the liberal state are more modest, the size and growth of its state apparatus notwithstanding. All the liberal state attempts to do is to alleviate some of the highest-order violations of what it understands as the necessary circumstances of the human good. For instance, the liberal state regards some kinds of work as not fit for a human being, as in the case of the person who might find that the only work he could secure was that usually assigned to a "beast of burden." Common usage describes such work as "menial," which essentially means "demeaning." The liberal state tolerates a condition in which many people do work which partakes of servility to one degree or another, but it attempts to supplement their incomes by means of either welfare benefits or minimum-wage regulations, so that they can at least afford some amenities. Furthermore, the liberal state understands that the good for man includes a modicum of community stability, of which stability of residence and of occupation are components. Therefore, if the "extended order" is to be justified in terms of the material prosperity and well-being
that it brings us, the liberal state reserves the right to
regulate that order when along with (or instead of) that
prosperity it brings the "creative destruction" mentioned by
Gray but originally identified by Joseph Schumpeter. On
this basis the liberal state justifies such measures as
import duties, tariffs, quotas, price supports, labor laws,"social security" programs which include retirement,
disability, and unemployment payments, and "industrial
policy."53

Contemporary liberalism insists upon a mitigation of
the "blindness of legal justice" remarked upon by Strauss, a
feature of law that is at the center of the debate between
"rule of law" and "rule by the wise" in classical political
philosophy. As Gildin remarks, even the Aristotelian
requirement for unequal treatment of unequals may permit an
egalitarian principle as a "rule of thumb" under the
conditions of a dynamic market economy. The legislator of
liberal inclinations supports measures of economic
protection, broadly defined, out of considerations similar
to those that led to the incorporation of principles of
equity into the common law. Oakeshott claims the law of
equity can be subsumed within his "considerations of lex,"
but how can this be justified apart from teleological
appeals to mitigate the severity of the law in the name of

53 Barker, Plato and Aristotle, 372-73. Gray, in
Liberalism, 71, refers to Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and
the good for man? One can easily imagine a libertarian-individualist "moral radical" who would urge not only that the legislature refuse to undertake any measures of regulation but also that the common law be purged of any principles of equity. Such an interpretation of the rule of law rules out any incorporation of Aristotelian phronesis or practical judgment of particulars; what the contemporary liberal regards as legitimate exercises of phronesis, the radical economic liberal disparages as mere "expediency."54

"I do not identify necessity and goodness," remarks Grant in the course of an objection to the program of contemporary liberalism as making too much of a virtue of necessity. He thinks that the contemporary liberal program incorporates an attitude of ingratitude toward nature on account of her being insufficiently beneficent. On the other hand, it is hard to argue with Spragens's invocation of a "reality principle" as the test of political proposals. If we can equate "necessity" with "reality," we can conclude that the contingencies of our contemporary situation, admittedly less than optimal from an Aristotelian perspective, provide sufficient justification for the measures we have undertaken, carping criticisms aside. Grant, citing Strauss, seeks to restore an appreciation of

the "beneficence of nature." He seems to hold the contemporary liberal political program, rather than the dynamic market economy, culpable for an ungrateful attitude toward nature. Yet while Strauss describes our current condition as an "economy of abundance" as opposed to the ancient "economy of scarcity," we should recognize the ironic twist that is revealed when we reflect that Aristotle's "economy of scarcity" with its strict limits on accumulation was itself based on the assumption of the beneficence of nature, while our "economy of abundance" with its proliferation of products and gadgets is premised on the assumption of scarce resources with which to satisfy unlimited wants. In any case, we should recall that, according to Strauss, the ancients' acknowledgment of the beneficence of nature was consonant with a demand for "the strict moral-political supervision of inventions"; it is hard to imagine how we could be true to the ancient spirit while refusing to regulate that most innovative of all inventions, the self-regulating market economy.55

"In the following chapter, Karl Marx will be criticized," remarked Arendt as she set out to draw the threefold distinction among labor, work, and action in The Human Condition. She criticized Marx for his failure to

acknowledge the centrality of the political, which she would subsume under the category of "action." At the same time, she did not wish to be included among the corps of "professional anti-Marxists." We may surmise that her position was that the reasons cited by Marx for the justification of a revolutionary supersession of the political are, instead, good reasons for the moral-political supervision of the economy on behalf of the common good.56

"Vanguard" Politics and Political Breakdown

Arendt's criticism of a "revolutionary supersession of the political" recalls the matter of the "problem of the vanguard," raised and then dropped by Macpherson in a somewhat casual manner. His remark that "the debased people are, by definition, incapable of reforming themselves en masse" will be recalled. He mentions the problem of a "vanguard party," but then stipulates that "in the circumstances we are talking about, there seems to be no less dangerous way." It will be argued here that the "vanguard mentality" endorsed here by Macpherson provides the best pretext for considering the politics of contemporary liberal and leftist parties to be "Hobbesian."57

56Arendt, The Human Condition, 79.

57Macpherson, The Real World of Democracy, in chapter 4, 157 above.
Voegelin spoke of the Occidental polity as having achieved "an articulation of society down to the individual as a representable unit." Arendt, commenting on the political achievement of the American Revolution, commented on "the enormous power potential that arises" from "a country which was articulated from top to bottom." She criticized the Americans for not providing for the entire country in the Constitution the system of political articulation of the New England "town meeting." She believed that the conditions of twentieth-century "mass society" required such a system in order to provide the ordinary citizen with an opportunity to participate in politics without making a career of it, although she provided no detailed blueprint for a reform which would bring such a system into existence. She professed a sentimental attachment for the "council system" propounded by European workers' parties during the nineteenth century, which functioned in the Soviet Union for a short time after the Bolshevik Revolution. She believed that an intimation of such a system had appeared in the form of the committees which formed spontaneously during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution before they were put down by the Soviets ("When Soviet-Russian tanks crushed the revolution in Hungary, they actually destroyed the only free and acting soviets in existence anywhere in the world.") Her advocacy of such a council system stemmed from her conviction that politics
properly understood requires us to conduct a political discussion to which everyone in the polity is a party—although under the circumstances of the contemporary nation-state this can only be achieved "in principle."\(^{58}\)

Such a political discussion involving, in principle, everyone in the polity is what America has most assuredly lacked, at least since the nineteen-sixties. The political breakdown can be traced back to the elevation of racial issues such as civil rights and school integration in the nineteen-fifties. The American liberal and radical communities determined, after almost a century of neglect, that the condition of American blacks constituted a political emergency. The measures that followed amounted to a supersession of the normal processes of politics. Reforms were initiated not by legislatures but by decisions of the Supreme Court. For whites (white Southerners at first, but this would apply eventually to whites in all sections of the country), what was taken for granted all their lives now had lost respectability almost overnight. They found spokesmen in the national media shaking fingers at them for opposing changes felt to be deeply personally threatening; their point of view found no expression in these media. Suddenly, it was as though a large fraction of the population had been banished from the national political discussion. Arendt

contended that those questions that a polity declines to discuss publicly provide a wedge by means of which totalitarian propaganda could enter public consciousness and become plausible: "From these sore spots the lies of totalitarian propaganda derive the element of truthfulness and real experience they need to bridge the gulf between reality and fiction." Americans are lucky that things have not gotten worse than they have in this country, given the gap between (for example) the moralizing lessons about race being propagated in the mass media and the conversations on this matter that might take place across a typical American coffee table, in a barber shop, or at a gas station.  

Civil rights for blacks, and, later, the Vietnam war, may have been legitimate political emergencies. As the nineteen-sixties progressed, however, the American left generalized the approach of the civil-rights and antiwar movements to almost every matter on the national political agenda. The "movement politics" approach eschewed the normal channels of political persuasion in favor of a confrontational politics of "consciousness-raising." This

59 Those who doubt that race has been the originating factor in the political upheavals that have affected America since the nineteen-sixties should consult Kevin Phillips, The Emerging American Majority (New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House, 1969). See also Arendt, Origins, 353; for Arendt's explicit views on racial issues, see "Reflections on Little Rock," Dissent 6 (Winter 1959): 45-56; she replied to criticisms in Dissent 6 (Spring 1959):179-81. Arendt's biographer (Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt, 315-18) notes that Arendt somewhat modified her views, which were taken as conservative, in a private correspondence with Ralph Ellison in response to a published interview with Ellison.

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latter phrase suggests the component of this style of politics that many have found morally condescending: the conviction of the activist that only he and those of his compatriots have a sufficiently "raised consciousness" to understand what is at stake. The subsequent political activity more nearly resembles an attempt to secure a sort of conversion than it does conventional political persuasion. This "let's-go-have-a-sit-in" style of politics has now been embraced by enthusiasts of a broad range of ideologies: radical feminism, environmentalism, pacifism, civil libertarianism, "gay" rights, and now even animal rights and anti-vivisectionism.

No phenomenon illustrates the reality of an American political breakdown so dramatically as the divergence of world views between "left-activists" and a conservative, mostly white middle class, whose reservations about liberalism are manifested most dramatically in the form of the "religious right"; the spirit of the warring sectarians observed by Hobbes during the English Civil War is recalled. The political scientists Carmines and Stimson distinguish between issue voting on "hard," technical issues and issues that are "easy" to take a position on because they are so antagonistic; liberals as well as the left have chosen to pick a fight with the middle class over the latter. To defend their positions on the "easy" issues, liberals have had to resort to a strategy that is in a deep sense
apolitical, relying on the Constitution and the federal courts to maintain that which cannot be sustained within the popular branches of government. This strategy gives an observer such as Strauss a pretext for saying that the willing consent necessary to distinguish constitutional government from tyranny is missing. Especially with respect to the matters of abortion and of several closely related, highly sensitive matters involving education, liberals and the left have put themselves in the position of maintaining that a traditional religious perspective is inadmissible in public debate, giving Strauss and his followers a pretext for claiming that liberals are "forced to suppress every activity which might lead people into doubt of the essential soundness" of the liberal state, that they must "forbid every teaching, every suggestion" that might conflict with the program of that state. The liberal state, legitimated only by the constitutional courts and not the popular branches, interposes itself between the state and local governments and their constituents, as well as between parents and their children. In so doing it ignores Barker's evocation of the state as "embracing, not negating, other organizations," as well as Mure's advice that "You must not try wholly to sweep away the lower levels."60

Spragens, reflecting the influence of Voegelin, diagnoses the "vanguard mentality" as an instance of the tendency of liberal rationalism to conceive political knowledge as a technical science accessible only to experts, and thus to divide mankind into "knowers" and "nonknowers," as manifested by the tendency of "sophisticates" or "cosmopolitans" to disparage "unsophisticated," "parochial" opinion. Against this tendency, Spragens insists that the politically 'mistaken' must be persuaded, not manipulated. There may be political and moral experts, but their expertise is only tentative; they must take account of the point of view of the other, treating others has peers whose political consent must be secured. Of course, what has happened is not so much that the 'mistaken' have been manipulated as that they simply have been bypassed. As a result, the judgment has been rendered in some quarters that liberals and the left are snobbish and intellectually arrogant, not to mention constitutionally incapable of securing acceptance of the measures of economic "protection," broadly conceived, that it deems to be so irreducibly necessary. The sympathies of liberals and the left do not extend widely enough for either to be capable of securing the consent necessary to govern. What is called for is a religious, racial, and sociocultural "settlement,"


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not essentially different from the settlement sought during the English Civil War. We shall let Kojève have the last word on this matter, with his observation that it is tyrannical when one faction imposes its authority "without 'coming to terms' with the others, without seeking any 'compromises' with them, and without taking into account their ideas and desires."²¹

The suggestion here, then, is that setting aside "vanguard" politics may enable us to win consent for the measures of "protection," broadly understood, that are upheld by contemporary liberalism. If it is Voegelin's argument that a spiritual conversion could obviate the need for any institutional reform, then we must object; but if his argument is that political consent for liberal reforms cannot be achieved apart from a process of persuasion which requires a "change of heart" that partakes of the spiritual, then we see no reason to dissent. With the accomplishment of such a "change of heart," our reforms will, in Barker's words, be "not merely dictated by law, but flowing from a proper spirit." To attain such a "change of heart," we need to reconvene a comprehensive political discussion from which, in principle, no one is to be excluded. Such a comprehensive discussion should yield at least an intimation of a genuine polity; since ours is a mass nation-state of

hundreds of millions of people, an intimation is probably the best we will be able to do. We cannot escape living in a polity; a polity on our scale will probably partake of some of the "untidiness" that Hayek, Buchanan, and Gray find so objectionable. Such a state may indeed be a "necessary evil," although that would be due strictly to considerations of scale, if the Aristotelian approach is the correct one. Nonetheless, we have no choice but to live in such a state, no matter how untidy.

Once such a comprehensive political discussion is reconvened, we should reconsider those policies that have made the national government the antagonist of Mure's "lower levels." In so doing, we could bring about a qualified revival of "federalism" and could mitigate some of the deleterious effects of "large-scale" politics. The matters at issue here should be addressed with proposals capable of winning popular assent, not just "swept under the rug." At the same time, we should set aside our attitude that any exercise of political authority, especially in the economic sphere, is proto-totalitarian. As we have seen from our consideration of the individualist-libertarian "neo-Hobbesians," such an attitude can itself have authoritarian implications. Against the tendency of a thinker such as Gray, whose "moral radicalism" would prohibit both economic intervention and legal moralism, we hold that both such policies have costs that, utilizing Aristotelian phronesis,
must be weighed against their benefits; unfortunately, many contemporary liberals and leftists have embraced just such an inappropriate "moral radicalism," at least with respect to legal moralism. They risk falling into the trap described by Crick, in which "we fear so much the perversion of the political tradition that was totalitarianism, that we do not dare try for the republic."  

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