

Nature, and knowing no duty of obedience to anyone, he fights his way towards the lifeboats like everybody else, and the final recognition that sovereignty has collapsed occurs when the Sovereign-captain himself recognises it and shouts 'Every man for himself'.³

THE SOURCES OF HOBBSIAN INDIVIDUALISM

We saw in the introductory section on the rise of social contract that social contract theory depends on a view of individuals as being in some important sense autonomous. We also saw that it is a vexed question where the idea of individual autonomy 'comes from'. In Hobbes's case, this difficulty does not arise. It has often been remarked how susceptible Hobbes was to the influence of the scientific and philosophical currents of his day, both English and continental. He had been Bacon's amanuensis, and he met Descartes and Galileo. Hobbes was also impressed by Harvey's discovery that the blood circulated, and by current ideas of motion and gravity. When Hobbes looked out of his window and saw the world, he didn't see it, as Aristotle and the scholastic philosophy did, as full of objects and creatures naturally at rest and having to be set in motion. What Hobbes saw was a world full of objects and creatures naturally in motion until they were arrested by some equal and opposite force. Motion, internal and external, is what constitutes human happiness. Unrestricted pursuit of human goods is what all men want, and moral rules and the positive law are ways found out by reason (and perhaps commanded by God) to ensure the maximum liberty to do that, combined with the minimum harm caused to others. Hobbes is an eminently physical, if not physiological, thinker. If the blood flows quickly and easily, unrestricted by hard arteries, and if men can go about their business in the world without bumping too hard against their fellow men, then a measure of human happiness and fulfilment is possible.

Long ago, Professor C.B. MacPherson (*The Political Theory of Passive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, 1962) taught us to look for aggressive, self-seeking, marketmen in Hobbes's political theory. Hobbes's men were possessive individualists, always in danger of coming into sharp and potentially damaging contact with others of their kind, unless regulated to an extent by law. The rush to acquire in a society rapidly becoming a market society in which the typical economic activity was buying and selling, including the buying and selling of labour, was always going to cause problems of disruption in the social and political orders as traditionally conceived. Hobbes offers one kind of answer to the self-seeking of market-men continually on the move, and that answer is the absolute Sovereign.

Self-moving, self-seeking marketmen are the rising bourgeoisie by another name, and historians have come to associate the bourgeoisie with a certain set of political institutions and practices: Parliaments; government limited by a constitution; political representation and the bourgeois freedoms of thought and expression. In short the rise of liberalism is often thought of as the necessary accompaniment of bourgeois domination of economy and society. Not by Hobbes: a rising bourgeoisie requires an absolutist state.

We once thought of this as an objection to Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan*. Hobbes

appeared to be saying: Enrich yourselves as much as you like within the law, but don't expect a share in the exercise of sovereignty. Hobbes seemed to be denying what was soon to become the commonplace in theory which it had always been in fact: the connections between wealth and political power. Where was *class*, it used to be asked, in Hobbes? Large differences of wealth were there, no doubt, but a society in which there were great concentrations of wealth but in which political power was entirely invested in a very sovereign Sovereign didn't appear to make sense. Capitalism without bourgeois power in the state, factories without parliaments and vice versa appeared to be impossible. As we have seen, Hobbes has an answer to that: no matter how sovereignty is exercised, it doesn't change its nature as sovereignty. And besides, political experience since Hobbes's day teems with examples of national bourgeoisies which have been perfectly content implicitly to bargain away their claims to political power in return for political influence. Any tin-pot military dictatorship keeping down the reds in a society with a bourgeoisie intent on making money shows this. (Look at South America.)

HOBBS AN ORIGINAL, AND THEREFORE NOT A PARTY MAN

Hobbes could never please a party because his arguments cut across all the current political positions of his day in England (and in continental Europe). In England, three current types of political argument stand out: the Divine Right of Kings, a version of social contract theory, and arguments from the idea of an ancient and inviolable constitution. If Hobbes's arguments in *Leviathan* hold, then none of these other arguments holds water.

The Divine Right of Kings so beloved by the early Stuarts (and by continental monarchies, particularly the French) will not stand a moment in the face of *Leviathan*. The Divine Right of Kings holds among other things that, in some mysterious way, God wants the eldest son of a previous king (or failing that, the next in succession) always and really to be king no matter who actually rules the state. Charles II always dated his reign from 1649, when his father, Charles I, was executed. The Divine Right of Kings owes whatever strength it has to sentimental loyalty to a dynasty. 'The King over the water' was to become the Jacobite toast in the eighteenth century. This kind of sentimentality is completely lacking in Hobbes. Your Sovereign really is the man (or group of men) who is actually, now, keeping the peace: Charles I in 1642, Cromwell afterwards, and Charles II after the Restoration in 1660. The charge of atheism levelled against Hobbes by Royalists was a thinly disguised accusation of treason: if you don't believe in God, then you can't possibly believe that God wants *that* specific king to be king.

Social contract argument really bit in 1649 when Charles Stuart was indicted on the grounds that he was 'an elected king' who had betrayed his trust by making war on his people. This implied the novel idea that the king could be guilty of treason, a contradiction in terms to believers in Divine Right. Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan*, as we have seen, treats the idea that a Sovereign can be put on trial as logical nonsense.

An ancient and inviolable constitution is probably logical nonsense too. Hobbes foreshadows Hume in insisting that the real constitution, like the real Sovereign, is the