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THOMAS HOBBS'S LEVIATHAN: A STUDY IN INTERPRETATION

by

JOHN ANTHONY LONG

B.A., Montana State University, 1961

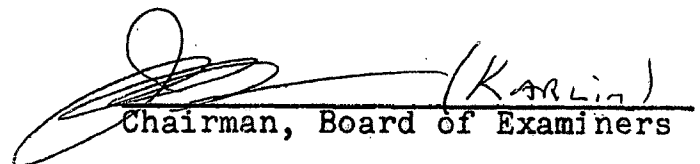
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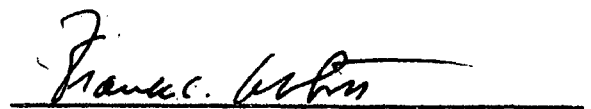
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
I. THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION.	11
II. THE NEW INTERPRETATIONS.	36
III. REBUTTALS AND COUNTER-REBUTTALS.	67
CONCLUSION.	107
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	114

INTRODUCTION

Seventeenth-century England, characterized by a struggle for ascendancy among manifold ideological forces, is analogous to the present world, seemingly marked by a conflict among democracy, totalitarianism, and their various deviations. Today, however, the doctrine of force is often cunningly disguised under scores of seductive appellations, whereas in the seventeenth century this doctrine was more readily visible. It is remarkable, therefore, that the ghost of a man who terrorized certain inhabitants of that past century still haunts the scholars of today, for at the present time at least a score of political theorists and philosophers are arguing over what Thomas Hobbes really meant. Hobbes, a cynical old determinist, has outlived his pious contemporaries. It is perhaps also remarkable that a majority of the participants are from Hobbes's own homeland, a country from which, at one time, Hobbes was forced to flee for his very life.

The intellectual polemics concerning the political philosophy of Hobbes are the results of seemingly insoluble differences among the various schools of interpretation. From their first appearance Hobbes's writings were interpreted in a relatively consistent manner. Since 1936, however, there has arisen a variety of new interpretations of his moral and political philosophy. These departures

from the norm have been greeted by skepticism on the part of those who endorse the traditional interpretation. Skepticism is rarely welcomed, and so the innovators in turn have been forced to strengthen their own positions.

This thesis is an attempt to examine the various interpretations and the controversies that have resulted from them by analyzing the works of representative authors of these approaches. Only representative writings have been utilized, for an examination of everything that has been written on Hobbes would be a task of immense magnitude. It is necessary, however, to consider the philosopher in question before examining the various explications.

Hobbes's experiences during his lifetime made a definite impression on his theories, for his life was unusual. Hobbes and fear were born twins, and it seems that fear plagued him the rest of his life. Upon hearing rumors of the Spanish Armada, Hobbes's mother, a simple woman of yeoman stock, apparently thought that Malmesbury, where she and her husband were then residing, would be the natural objective of the invading force. The result was the premature birth of her son, Thomas, on April 5, 1588.¹ Not long after Thomas's birth, his father, a semi-literate Anglican vicar, was forced to

¹Sir Leslie Stephen, Hobbes ("English Men of Letters"; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904), 3.

flee into obscurity for striking a fellow parson at the church door at Westport. Fortunately for the Hobbes children they had a prosperous, childless uncle who assumed charge of the deserted family. At the age of four Hobbes was sent to a church school where he learned to read and write. When he became proficient in these tasks, he was enrolled in a Latin school in Malmesbury. Because he was a precocious youngster, Hobbes entered Magdalen Hall, Oxford, at the age of fifteen. Magdalen Hall was at that time dominated by Puritanism. Hobbes left Oxford in 1608, thoroughly convinced that it was intellectually sterile. This feeling of contempt probably stemmed from two factors: firstly, Hobbes was not a good formal student, and secondly, Oxford was perhaps in an intellectual ebb. In any event, upon graduation, Hobbes became a tutor to young William Cavendish, later to become the second Earl of Devonshire. In 1610, Hobbes and his young pupil made a grand tour of Europe, concentrating on Italy and France. Upon returning to England, Hobbes spent the next eighteen years with the Cavendish family, reading the works of poets and historians. It was at this time that he became acquainted with Thucydides, a writer who greatly influenced Hobbes's thought. Hobbes, by virtue of his position, was also able to associate with the great and near-great men of England. In 1628 the second Earl died, leaving a frugal widow who promptly curtailed expenses and dismissed Hobbes. Hobbes, forced to seek other means of support, obtained a

position as traveling tutor to the son of Sir Gervase Clinton. For the second time Hobbes and a pupil went on a grand tour. This time they stayed in France, and Hobbes entered French intellectual circles. It was also at this point that he was introduced to Euclid's geometry. He was so amazed with Euclid that thenceforth he conceived philosophy from the scientific and mathematical side.¹ In 1631 he was invited to return from Paris to tutor the third Earl of Devonshire, a boy about fourteen years of age. Two years later, Hobbes went on his third grand tour of the continent. On this visit he met Galileo, who was living near Florence as a prisoner of the inquisition. After leaving Florence, Hobbes journeyed to Paris where he met Mersenne, a scientist whom he instantly admired. The third tour ended in 1637, and by this time Hobbes was becoming well known. Hobbes's future was slowly being shaped.

Meanwhile, the political situation in England was becoming more unstable. Parliament was in its eighth year of suspension, and in the North the Scots were becoming troublesome. In 1640, when Charles was forced to appeal to parliament, Hobbes began his literary career. He wrote a small pamphlet, A Short Tract on First Principles, in which he declared that sovereignty was vested in the crown. Hobbes felt that the Long Parliament might find time to

¹Ibid., 19.

deal with the author of this little treatise, so he fled to France, where he spent the next eleven years. The result of his growing interest in the civil war was De Cive, finished in 1642. Apparently it was only intended for a few European scholars, for it was printed in Latin, and only a small number of copies were distributed. During this time he also wrote Elements of Law which, however, was not published in England until 1650. With De Cive out of the way, Hobbes began to compose the Leviathan, his major work. His writing was interrupted, however, when he was appointed mathematical tutor to the Prince of Wales, then an exile in Paris. In the middle of 1651 the Leviathan was finished, and was promptly published in English.¹ Doubtlessly, the Leviathan was intended for English readers.

When Charles II reached Paris after his defeat at Worcester, Hobbes, with all good intentions, presented him with a manuscript copy of the Leviathan. Unfortunately for Hobbes his book was not well received in the royal circles, so he was forced to retreat to England.² Three months later Hobbes walked to an Anglican chapel and took the sacraments. He also made his submission to the Council of State. There-

¹All references to the Leviathan in this thesis will be to: Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946).

²Stephen, op. cit., 41.

after, Hobbes remained in England. In 1653 Hobbes once again became a member of the Cavendish family, spending most of his time reading and writing in their small house in London. When Charles II returned to England, Hobbes arrived at the court and swore his allegiance.

Hobbes's ability as a polemicist was by this time firmly established, and he seemed to plunge into one controversy after another. The old gentleman made the mistake of saying that he had squared the circle, whereupon he was promptly "torn apart" by John Wallis, a mathematics professor at Oxford. Hobbes's prior denunciation of Oxford perhaps served to increase Wallis's vigor. In any event, Wallis remained Hobbes's most formidable opponent for the rest of his life. The great plague of London occurred in 1665, and was followed the next year by the great fire. The great fire might be excused as being caused by the Papists, but surely they could never have been responsible for the plague. To the English this was undoubtedly a manifestation of divine wrath; and the most satisfactory way of appeasement would be to rid the country of atheists. Hobbes began to worry when a bill was brought into Parliament for the suppression of atheism and profanity, and a committee was instructed to seek information concerning the Leviathan. Some of the bishops even made a motion to have the old fellow burned at the stake. The fervor, however, was only short-lived. But in any event, Hobbes went to church more regularly from that time on. In 1668

Hobbes, by this time in his eightieth year, published the Behemoth. However, its publication was suppressed by Charles II. Even at eighty, Hobbes was still taking an active part in the controversies he had fostered. After a few years Hobbes retired from taking part in intellectual disputations to a new type of occupation -- translating. In 1673 he published a translation of the Voyage of Ulysses, followed a year later by complete translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey. It is remarkable that so old a man could translate such difficult text. Two years later Hobbes left London and moved to the Cavendish country homes at Chatsworth and Hardwick. On December 4, 1679, he died "...glad to find a hole to creep out of the world at."¹

Hobbes's entire life, then, was one of the mind; it was dedicated to the regime of thought. Outside of the intellectual field his life was essentially placid. In analyzing Hobbes's life one must remember that Hobbes was supported during its entirety by the English aristocracy. Consequently he could be an innocent bystander at the political events of his time. He owed no real allegiance to any faction in English politics, a factor that must be considered in interpreting the Leviathan. And, fortunately for Hobbes as a political theorist, he lived in one of the most violent and exciting periods of English history.

¹Ibid., 63.

As Hobbes did little formal reading, he could view events with a fresh eye, for he was not bound by the theories of the past. This lack of respect for tradition was perhaps valuable for Hobbes, who was trying to substitute a new scheme of thought, built upon entirely new foundations.

Hobbes's experiences abroad also put a definite stamp on his thinking. In all, he spent about seventeen years on the continent, broken into four visits. On each visit he learned something new. The first made him aware that the Aristotelianism then taught in England was everywhere else being abandoned. It also sent him back to the study of classical languages and their non-philosophical literature.¹ On the second trip he looked into a copy of Euclid's geometry and was so impressed by what he saw there that he used it as a basis for a system that would cover the whole spectrum of rational knowledge.² On the third visit he began the study of natural philosophy, particularly under the influence of the scientist, Mersenne. By the time of his last visit, the result of voluntary exile, he was recognized by the great philosophers of France, a factor that contributed to his intellectual conceit.

Hobbes impressed English thought, then, almost entirely by vigorous opposition, for the Leviathan was perhaps the most un-English book ever written on the state by an

¹T. E. Jessop, Thomas Hobbes, No. 130 ("Writers and their Work"; London: Longmans, Green, 1960), 10.

²Ibid., 11.

Englishman.¹ It contradicted almost all the English orthodoxies in politics, morals and religion. Because he was so unorthodox, the reaction of Hobbes's contemporaries was bellicose. John Watkins characterized the attitude of these critics in the following paragraph:

What was new and unheard-of to Hobbes's contemporaries in De Cive and the Leviathan was their sheer monstrosity. Angry bishops and royalists and Presbyterians did not complain about Hobbes's heavy emphasis on authority in which they were staunch believers themselves. Where he had gone shockingly wrong in their eyes was in conceiving authority, not as something remote and august and touched by God, but as a bureaucratic engine of civil order built to the specifications of nakedly selfish human beings. They feared his ideas not because they were authoritarian, but because they were subversive of extra-human authority.²

As time passed, however, the reaction became less bitter, and Hobbes was not without his advocates. The first was Spinoza, who adopted a considerable portion of Hobbes's political philosophy. In the eighteenth century Rousseau took Hobbes's view of law and transmuted it into his theory of the general will. Even Marx was familiar with Hobbes's philosophy, having met it in Holbach. Europeans were not the only ones who endorsed Hobbes's ideas, however, for here in America he had his disciples. Daniel Leonard used Hobbes's theories to support Great Britain in the Revolution.³

¹Ibid., 17.

²W. N. Watkins, "The Posthumous Career of Thomas Hobbes," Review of Politics, XIX(1957), 352.

³Ibid., 354 et passim.

Alexander Hamilton was also a Hobbesian in his concept of government. He favored an all-powerful presidency, and even after he became the Secretary of the Treasury he continued to insist on security and order as the primary functions of the state.

It is difficult to explain why Hobbes has always held the interest of political theorists and other scholars alike. Perhaps they are attracted to his writings because of their iconoclasm. Or perchance his harsh view of man and his denial of any transcendent good draw their attention. In any event, if a theorist may be judged by the duration of his effect, then Hobbes must be classified as a theorist of the first order.

CHAPTER I

THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

The political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, as manifested in the *Leviathan*, has occasioned the rise of a standard interpretation that is commonly accepted as being correct. This interpretation owes its origins primarily to Hobbes's contemporary critics, that is, it issued from Hobbes's theories as those theories impressed themselves on the minds of these contemporaries. The propagation and augmentation of this exegesis have been accomplished by various scholars of the subsequent centuries.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine this interpretation of Hobbes's theory by discussing the opinions of those seventeenth-century critics and the scholars of later years who are representative of this tradition. Although these various savants have many differences, as the reader will easily note, the common thread which runs through each opinion is sufficient to bind it to the traditional interpretation.

John Bowle, an Oxford scholar, ably discusses the opinions of certain contemporary censurers of Hobbes in his work entitled Hobbes and His Critics.¹ These men, for the

¹John Edward Bowle, Hobbes and His Critics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952). John Bowle, an astute histo-

most part, were prominent and learned, and so their criticisms of Hobbes have been well-respected throughout the years. For the purposes of this survey, however, each critic will not be discussed in detail, instead only certain of their opinions will be considered. Bowle divides the criticisms into four main categories.¹ Firstly, he contends, all agree that Hobbes's materialism is confounded by natural law. One will recall that the basis of Hobbes's political theory is a radical materialism, a crude behaviorist outlook that regards matter and motion alone as real. Hence the metaphysical and religious sanctions of traditional political thought are only pretence to Hobbes.² Like Marx,

he claimed to give a 'scientific' explanation of human behavior, which he regarded as determined by reflex actions, and to provide a political theory which was based on conduct so determined.³

This concept of a materialist basis of society, however, only served to antagonize the critics of Hobbes's age, because for them society and government were sanctioned by a mystical order. John Whitehall states, "what stuff this

rian, was born in England in 1905. He obtained his education from Balliol College, Oxford, where he was a Brackenbury Scholar in 1924. He entered the teaching profession as a lecturer in modern history at Wadham College, Oxford. In 1950 he was promoted to a professorship of political theory. His publications are numerous, including Western Political Thought, and The Unity of European History. Who's Who (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), 322.

¹Bowle, op. cit., 186.

²Ibid., 44.

³Ibid.

is to ground any government upon...It is as full of damnable opinions as a toad is of poison."¹ In Lord Clarendon's opinion Hobbes's state would not stand, for it would command no "awful veneration."² Philip Hunton regards sovereignty as an "indivisible beam of divine protection," since it reflects a cosmic order.³ The faith of the critics in the traditional laws of nature is illustrated by Archbishop John Bramhall's attack on Hobbes for his "gross mistake of the Laws of Nature...A moral Heathen would blush for shame to see such a catalogue of the Laws of Nature."⁴

¹Ibid., 191. John Whitehall was perhaps the least high-minded of all the contemporary critics of Hobbes. An attorney educated in the Inner Temple, he supported the supremacy of law and property. Although a royalist, his attack on Hobbes was from the viewpoint of a constitutionalist. Ibid., 35-38.

²Ibid. Edward Hyde, better known as the first Earl of Clarendon, was born in 1609 and died in 1674. He was educated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, from which he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1626. A man who held great prestige, he favored the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. X, ed. Sidney Lee (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1908), 370-389.

³Bowle, op. cit., 189. Philip Hunton was born in 1604 and died in 1682. A scholarly critic, he received a Master of Arts degree from Wadham College, Oxford, in 1629. In 1651 he was appointed Master of Cromwell's Northern University at Durham. Hunton's sympathy for a limited monarchy was illustrated in his work, A Treatise of Monarchy, published in 1643. Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. X, 312-333.

⁴Bowle, op. cit., 189. John Bramhall, Archbishop of Armagh, was born in 1594 and died in 1663. He received his education from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, from which he received four degrees, the highest being a Doctor of Divinity. His thesis was strongly anti-papal. During the Civil War he supported the royalist cause. Dictionary

Secondly, contends Bowle, all are adverse to Hobbes's cynical and deterministic view of human nature. They refuse to regard man as a cog in a mechanistic universe. Sir Robert Filmer asserts that Hobbes's state of nature could never have occurred among the "descendants of Adam," for "God was no such niggard at the creation."¹ Bramhall contends that the Hobbesian man was non-existent, for "there was never such degenerate rabble in the world that were without all religion, all government, all laws, natural and civil."² The Reverend John Eachard is representative of the critics when he maintains that human nature is not so "vile" or "raskally" as Hobbes supposed it to be.³

Thirdly, these various Englishmen are opposed to the Hobbesian allegation that nothing is morally right or wrong until the sovereign commands or forbids it, and in consequence there is no standard by which the ruler may himself be judged. Whitehall feels that

of National Biography, Vol. II, ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 1111-1114.

¹Bowle, op. cit., 16. Sir Robert Filmer was born in 1588 and died in 1653. He was a royalist, an astute scholar, and a country gentleman of an independent mind. Filmer favored patriarchal absolutism, and is perhaps best known to posterity for his Patriarcha, a defense of monarchy, which Locke so ably ridiculed. Ibid., 15.

²Ibid., 124.

³John Eachard, a great wit and humorist, was born in 1636 and died in 1697. In 1675 he became Master of St. Catherine's Hall at Cambridge, and in 1679 vice-chancellor of the University. Eachard possessed a great knack for colloquial satire, as is shown in his book, Mr. Hobbes's State

if all religion and morality have no sanction but fear and the ruler's command, the 'vilest Indian superstitions' rank with civilized religion. But just as the scripture would have been valid without the Church, so natural law is independent of institutions.¹

Clarendon contends that the killing of innocent subjects by Hobbes's sovereign, which he has a moral right to do, would violate natural law and injure God. As Bowle avers, "all were provoked to assert the moral basis of society, its ultimate authority over and distinction from government."²

Lastly, the critics agree unanimously that Hobbes's system of government is impractical. "Hobbes," declares Bramhall, "labours under a hopeless disadvantage: he has no idea of practical politics."³ Clarendon perhaps epitomizes the views of the critics when he states:

It is a very hard matter for an architect in state and policy, who doth despise all precedent, and will not observe any rules of practice, to make such a model of government as will be in any degree pleasant to the governor or the governed, or secure for either.⁴

Bowle's personal interpretation of Hobbes's political doctrine will suffice for a summary of the above

of Nature Considered in a Dialogue between Philautus and Timothy. Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. VI, 302-303.

¹Ibid., op. cit., 178.

²Ibid., 199.

³Ibid., 200.

⁴Ibid.

views, for their opinions are mirrored in his thoughts. This Oxford scholar believes that Hobbes attempted to provide a materialistic, egotistical underpinning for a new political theory, based on the supposition that the conduct of men can be determined by observation of their reflex actions in a mechanistic world. The goal of the Hobbesian state is the promotion of individual felicity, which arises out of greed and egoism. The state must be an authoritarian conciliator of selfish interests, for only when life is ordered can individual felicity in any degree be obtained. In regard to Hobbes's religious views, Bowle feels that if Hobbes was not an atheist, he was at the least an agnostic. Bowle's feelings about Hobbes are summarized very adroitly in the following statement:

He is the prophet of a cynical, deterministic and utilitarian political theory, which discards the old sanctions of natural reason reflecting a Divine order, and which replaces it with the imposition of arbitrary power as the price of security. He repudiates the alternative--the standard by which government, as distinct from society, is to be judged. He attempts to destroy the concepts both of a constitutional frame of society superior to executive government and of a cosmic order superior to man-made institutions...and by advocating the subordination of religion to political authority, and his dislike of corporations within the commonwealth, he paved the way for modern utilitarianism, concepts of positive law, and concentrated state power.¹

The outlines of the standard interpretation having

¹Ibid., 56.

been drawn by Hobbes's contemporaries, it is now necessary to discuss the various writers who have filled in and augmented the above sketch. Sir Leslie Stephen is perhaps characteristic of these writers.¹ His book, published in 1904, is still widely cited by contemporary scholars.² Stephen divides his work into two main parts: a biography of Hobbes; and a discussion of Hobbes's view of the world, man, and the state. However, since this paper is concerned primarily with Hobbes's political philosophy, Stephen's treatment of this matter will be more heavily emphasized.

Before Stephen's exposition of the Hobbesian state is discussed, however, it is necessary to comment briefly

¹Sir Leslie Stephen, a man of letters and a philosopher, was born in 1832. His higher education consisted of a short attendance at Kings College, and four years at Trinity Hall at Michaelmas, Cambridge. From Cambridge he received a Goodbehere Fellowship. In 1856 he obtained a junior tutorship at Trinity Hall, and three years later he took religious orders. However, after reading Mill, Comte, and Kant, he rejected the historical evidences of Christianity. Thus he was forced to resign his tutorship, which was contingent upon his being a priest. At the end of 1864 Stephen left Cambridge for London in order to embark on a literary career. Early in 1865 he relinquished his religious orders.

For the remainder of his life Stephen pursued a career of writing and working as an editor of various magazines. Religious and philosophical speculations also held his interest, however, and in 1876 he composed a two volume History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. Six years later he produced his Science of Ethics, in which he summed up his views of the fundamental problems of life, in light of his study of Mill, Darwin, and Spencer. During the same year he also assumed the editorship of the Dictionary of National Biography, a position he was to hold for nine years. In 1904 Stephen died. Dictionary of National Biography, 2nd Suppl., Vol. III, ed. Sidney Lee, 398-405.

²Sir Leslie Stephen, Hobbes ("English Men of Letters"; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904).

on his interpretation of Hobbes's philosophical system. This Cambridge alumnus feels that Hobbes was attempting to construct a complete system in which the method of the physical sciences would be coordinated with a theory of the civil state, i.e., Hobbes wanted to expound a mechanical theory of the universe where every phenomenon would be explained as the effect of known causes, and where motion and matter are the two universal actualities, by which even man may be explained. Stephen, in describing the Hobbesian man, declares, "man is an automation; thought is a motion in his brain; and all his actions can be explained by the laws of motion, like the motions of a clock."¹ His perceptions, calculations, and motives are movements in his brain, caused by the impact of external bodies on the organs of the senses.² Here one finds a mechanistic explanation of physiological entities. Stephen notes a break in the continuity of method when Hobbes discusses human nature, for he contends that although Hobbes still attempts to use his theory of motion, he is forced to rely on empirical psychology. However, as this particular topic is not of great importance to this thesis, it will suffice at this time to explain Stephen's elaboration of the social characteristics of the Hobbesian man.

¹Ibid., 84.

²Ibid., 104.

Stephen's opinion of the Hobbesian man can best be illustrated by his description of the Hobbesian state of nature. In this condition all men possess two characteristics in common: they are naturally equal; and all seek power over others. The results of this equality and desire for power are obvious: there will be war by all against all. Stephen deviates somewhat from the opinion of Hobbes's contemporaries when he states that Hobbes did not imply that men are evil by nature. "The desires are not themselves wicked," Stephen states, "although at times they may cause wicked actions."¹ The Cambridge scholar advances this contention a step further when he asserts:

A modern world would maintain, like Hobbes, that in admitting the part played by selfish force in the development of society, he does not assert the wickedness of human nature. He only asserts that the good impulses cannot acquire the desirable supremacy until a peaceful order has been established by the complex struggles and alliances of human beings, swayed by all their passions and ambitions.²

Men get out of this degenerate state by using their reason to discover the laws of nature. The laws of nature, however, Stephen believes, are not properly laws but rather theorems of what are conducive to self-preservation. "The Law of Nature, we see, is simply an application of the purely egotistic law of self-preservation."³ These theorems be-

¹Ibid., 185.

²Ibid., 186.

³Ibid., 189.

come laws as binding commands when they are delivered in the word of God. They are always binding in foro interno: you are always bound to desire that they should come into operation, because they are conducive to self-preservation. They are not always binding in foro externo, however; you are not obliged to put them into practice, for to do so in the state of nature would be a hindrance to individual self-preservation.

Stephen asserts that Hobbes realized

that the development of morality implies the growth of a certain understanding between the individuals composing the society, and that until this has been reached ideal morality proper to a higher plane of thought is impracticable if not undesirable.¹

Apparently, Stephen is suggesting the absence of any type of morality outside of political society. As for the question of morality in civil society, Stephen is in essential agreement with Bowle that government creates moral values. Stephen believes that Hobbes identifies law and morality. He himself feels that the actual morality of a race is evolved in constant correlation with its social organization.² Stephen avers,

Hobbes, who substituted the social contract for this process, and regarded sovereignty as the sole bond of union, could only approximate to this doctrine

¹Ibid., 191.

²Ibid., 216.

by making moral obligations a product of the sovereign will.¹

But Hobbes contends that the sovereign creates morality by making honesty and gratitude, which are precepts of the law of nature tending toward self-preservation, obligatory. But the problem arises, what if the sovereign makes immoral laws? At this point Stephen begs this question by saying that the sovereign cannot commit injustice or injury in the proper signification. The subject has no right to protest or disobey because of the immorality of the sovereign, the reason being that the only alternative is anarchy. Bad laws are better than no laws.² So ultimately Stephen is put in the position of saying that the sovereign can make any law that he desires, so long as he maintains order.

As stated above, Stephen regards Hobbes's laws of nature as theorems conducive to self-preservation. But every man has a possible right to everything in the state of nature, by virtue of the fact that this is necessary for his individual felicity and self-preservation. It is evident that in a situation of this type no man's life or happiness is secure.³ Therefore the fundamental theorem of nature is that every man should seek peace and then maintain it, for peace nullifies the necessity for self-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 217.

³Ibid., 187.

defense. Consequently, a man should lay down his right to all things if others will do the same. At this point Stephen elaborates Hobbes's definition of obligation, duty and justice:

A man may simply renounce or he may transfer a right. In either case, he is said to be 'obliged' not to interfere with the exercise of a right by those to whom he has abandoned or granted it. It is his 'duty' not to make his grant void by hindering men from using the right; and such hindrance is called 'injustice.'¹

Stephen asserts that obligation in the Hobbesian sense is obedience to the terms of a contract, whether it is implicit or explicit. Carrying this definition into the civil state, one can discern that the Hobbesian man must obey his sovereign because he has contracted to do so. The violation of the contract on the part of the subject would create a breach of duty or injustice. He presumably has the right to breach the contract only if the sovereign can no longer provide security, or in some way endangers his physical being. The subject is obliged to obey the law because he has contracted with his fellow subjects to do so, i.e., he and his fellow subjects have authorized the sovereign to legislate for them.

The final part of Stephen's interpretation which will be considered is that dealing with the relationship between church and state. Stephen declares that Hobbes's essential position is quite simple. Since actions often

¹Ibid., 187.

stem from opinions, these opinions must be directed in order for actions to be controlled.¹ Consequently the sovereign is bound to forbid the utterance or propagation of opinions by which his authority may be subverted, regardless of whether these opinions are uttered by a priest or a citizen. But a more crucial question is involved here, for the presence of an independent ecclesiastical authority would split the sovereignty. For Hobbes, then, the church, as a law-making or governing body, must be fused with the state.² When discussing Hobbes's atheism, Stephen advances the following argument:

Hobbes declares that the only proof of God's existence is the creation of the world, and that we cannot possibly know whether the world was or was not created. In any case, as we have seen, Hobbes always asserts most emphatically that we really know nothing of God's attributes, except his existence.³

Stephen concludes by saying that it is sufficient to remark that Hobbes's system would be more lucid if he simply omitted any reference to theology.⁴

The next savant to be considered is H. R. Trevor-Roper, a professor of modern history at Oxford.⁵ Trevor-

¹Ibid., 220.

²Ibid., 223.

³Ibid., 151.

⁴Ibid., 152.

⁵H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Fear as the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy," New Statesman and Nation, XXX(1945),

Roper's main thesis is that the basis of Hobbes's political philosophy is fear, that is, fear as related to the fundamental law of self-preservation. This Oxford professor alleges that the Hobbesian man is "by nature unpolitical and irrational, a mechanical creature moved by strings and springs, and driven by fear and emotions derived from fear."¹ Man never moves toward positive ends except away from fear. Trevor-Roper contends that Hobbes believes there are two answers to this basic problem of mankind. One is religion that exploits the fear of the unknown. Hobbes, however, considered religion not as a safeguard against fear, but rather as a parasite on it. At this point Trevor-Roper clings to the views of Hobbes's contemporary censurers when he asserts that Hobbes was a complete atheist, "regarding all religion as a deliberate fraud invented by the priests to fool the people."² The other solution to the problem is the Hobbesian civil state. Trevor-Roper interprets Hobbes as saying that man, to escape the consequences of his bestial, yet timid nature, must erect a civil authority

61. Hugh Redwall Trevor-Roper, born in 1914, is currently a Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford. He obtained his higher education from Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford, from which he graduated with first class honors. In 1934 he became a Craven Scholar, and from 1937 to 1939 he was a Research Fellow at Merton College. Seven years later he was appointed a Student of Christ Church, Oxford. He has written several books, including, Archbishop Laud and The Gentry; 1540-1640. Who's Who, 1959, 3065.

¹Trevor-Roper, op. cit., 61.

²Ibid.

of terrifying completeness;

a state based upon naked, and wielding power; whose effectiveness alone is his legitimacy, whose opinions are truth; whose orders are justice, resistance to which is a logical absurdity.¹

This particular author summarizes very adroitly when he maintains the Leviathan was written with its axiom: fear; its method: logic; and its conclusion: despotism.² As the reader will easily perceive, the position of Trevor-Roper is quite similar to Bowle's interpretation of Hobbes. It is unusual to find the interpretation of two men so alike.

The next interpretation is that of John Plamenatz.³ Plamenatz devotes a short section of his book, The English Utilitarians, to Hobbes, and although his interpretation does not coincide precisely with the others in this tradition, it has sufficient similarity to be classified in this same category.⁴ This expositor contends that Hobbes had very little respect for the past and its traditions, for he discarded both of the prevalent European moral theories of his time. One of these theories asserted that the supreme object of human endeavor was the full and harmonious

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³At present Mr. Plamenatz is an instructor at Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴John Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians (2nd Ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

development of all powers of the individual; while the other contended that virtue consists of behavior in accord with rules that man can discern by the use of his reason. According to Hobbes's system no man can be better or worse than he was before; he can only be more or less successful in acquiring felicity.¹ The laws of morality, according to Hobbes, are merely rules which men would do well to obey if they wish to be happy.² These rules are only dictates for attaining felicity, and as such they are not morally binding upon anyone. Plamenatz asserts that

the state is no more than a contrivance to insure that all men do obey these rules, so that it may be in the interest of each of them to do so. For a man who obeys them, while others do not, is no better than a fool.³

Hobbes denies that virtue, which is obedience to moral laws, has a value for men independent of its power to promote their happiness. The state, then, is a means of reconciling the selfish interests of men. It exists in order that the individual may have greater felicity, and not to protect his natural rights. At this point Plamenatz defines natural rights in the Hobbesian sense, by asserting that a right in the state of nature is an unlimited power to acquire whatever a person desires, providing that he

¹Ibid., 11.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

has sufficient strength. For Hobbes, rights are merely power, but he treats them as if they were what others mean by natural rights. Here Plamenatz veers from the other scholars of the traditional approach when he contends that Hobbes's transfer of right from the subject to the sovereign is alien to the main body of his doctrine. He feels this is not compatible with Hobbes's premises in which the sovereign can do no wrong, for

if a subject finds it in his interest to obey the laws, while the sovereign can often afford, when it suits his purpose, to ignore them, this is only because the subject has little power and the sovereign a great deal.¹

No covenant can create obligations in the parties to it, for all a covenant can do is alter the circumstances in which men act. The Hobbesian state is a system in which it is the selfish interest of every man to oblige every other man to behave in a way that suits his neighbors. Hobbes's social contract does not impose real obligations on the partners to it, for

his purpose is not to explain why and to what extent subjects are obliged to obey their rulers, but only to prove that it is, in all but the most rare occasions, in their interest to do so.²

On examining the above interpretation, one can see that Mr. Plamenatz agrees essentially with the other inter-

¹Ibid., 13.

²Ibid., 14.

pretations on the question of morality in the Hobbesian state. He differs somewhat on the question of obligation, but nevertheless he is still close to the traditional interpretation, because he bases obligations on self-interest, which is implicit in the orthodox interpretation.

The most recent work, chronologically, in the vein of the traditional interpretation is a short survey of the political philosophy of Hobbes written by T. E. Jessop for the British Council and Book League.¹ Jessop, a student of Hume, is a Ferens Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hull.² Regardless of his specialty, however, he has surveyed Hobbes rather well. Jessop asserts that Hobbes drew the conclusion from the miseries of the civil wars that the dominating function of the state is to secure peace, and the only possible way to carry out this function is to have a government possessed of plenary powers over all spheres, religious and civil alike.³ The theoretical problem is set when Hobbes describes man

¹T. E. Jessop, Thomas Hobbes, No. 130 ("Writers and their Work"; London: Longmans, Green, 1960).

²Thomas Edmund Jessop, a distinguished scholar, was born in 1896. He was educated at Heckmondwike School, Leeds University, and Oriel College, Oxford. Since 1928 he has been the Ferens Professor of Philosophy in the University of Hull. He has worked on the editorial board of the World Methodist Council, and has also been the Chairman of the Adult Religious Education sub-committee of the British Council of Churches. Jessop is a prolific writer, having composed many books. Several of these books are on Hume. Who's Who, 1959, 1603-1604.

³Jessop, op. cit., 18.

in the state of nature, i.e., being outside of a politically organized society. Here Jessop contends,

every one acts solely for himself, dominated by the passion for self-preservation, ...and each, finding everybody in these respects like himself, goes beyond a merely passive to an active safeguarding of what he has and gets - defense by antifipatory aggression.¹

Jessop maintains Hobbes's view of human nature is only a hypothesis, the main support of which is his general psychology. An egotistic view of human nature, then, is the initial postualte of this psychology and not the argued conclusion. In any event Hobbes's premises oblige him to seek the cause and justification of the civil state in man's very selfishness.² Intelligence and raw passion lead men to seek peace and follow it. Man is convinced by his reason that peace is more conducive to individual felicity; fear of violent death forces man to believe that life will be longer in ordered society. The result of this reasoning is a social contract which will be self-enforcing. Men transfer their rights to a sovereign and, in doing so, they become completely subject to him. Jessop feels that the Hobbesian social contract was not intended to be an explanation of the historical origins of government, but rather it was used for logical purposes, i.e., Hobbes was examining the notion of sovereignty as the one essential

¹Ibid., 19.

²Ibid.

facet of political philosophy. One must remember that Hobbes was a logician, par excellence. The art of defining and deducing was Hobbes's profession. Despotism, however, is a very old phenomenon, and so Hobbes's major contribution to political theory was his juridically applicable conception of the nature of civil laws, i.e., Hobbes asserts that...

a law is nothing more or less than the command of the sovereign, and is binding in virtue of its origin, not its content.¹

The practical implications of this theory, contends Jessop, are frightful, for all external actions and institutions are in every respect under the jurisdiction of the sovereign.² Hobbes reasons that if the sovereign does not have absolute power there will be anarchy. A price must be paid for order.

When discussing the question of morality in the Hobbesian state, Jessop departs somewhat from the standard interpretation. He feels that Hobbes's sovereign is bound by both God and his conscience to be responsible for his subjects. The author contends, however, that this reference to ethics and morality is not inconsistent with Hobbes's earlier views, for the Hobbesian man in a state of nature had discovered by reason the various rules of conduct that one should follow. Jessop believes that Hobbes's man is

¹Ibid., 22.

²Ibid.

moral in the sense that, "quite independently of political discipline, he is aware of moral distinctions and imperatives."¹ Apparently Jessop feels that the Hobbesian laws of nature are in some way moral axioms. He further expands this argument by saying that the laws of nature come from the author of nature, who is undoubtedly God. Consequently these are laws for all eternity, binding on man as such, and therefore on rulers and subjects alike. Jessop ends his survey by asserting that Hobbes's ethic includes objective moral laws which are perpetually valid and divine in origin but which only become operative in a civil state.² As for Hobbes's religious beliefs, Jessop maintains that if Hobbes was an atheist, he was hypocritical; but on the other hand, he was a deist only if his reference to revelation was also hypocritical. This philosophy professor summarizes his survey with the following statement:

...Hobbes is adamant in proclaiming peace as the paramount external condition of a really human life, and strong government as the only means of securing it; and believes that morality and religion are demands of man's original nature, one of his problems being how to reconcile their inner autonomy with the necessity of comprehensive political control.³

No discussion of the traditional interpretation would be complete without reference to the various text-

¹Ibid., 25.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 27.

book writers, for they, above everyone else, are responsible for the propagation of this interpretation today. Perhaps the most satisfactory manner of discussing these writers would be to choose an author representative of their thoughts. For this purpose William Ebenstein is perhaps the best choice, for he is illustrative of the text-book writers.¹ Ebenstein's interpretation of the Hobbesian state of nature epitomizes the accepted view of what is correct. He contends that the Hobbesian men "are naturally equal in mind and body."² Furthermore, this basic equality of men is the principal source of trouble and misery, i.e., if two men seek an object, they naturally become antagonistic and seek to destroy each other.³ This professor also believes that the Hobbesian social contract is for philosophical rather than historical purposes. The fear of death is the passion that moves men toward peace, for once man realizes that his fear of violent death is due primarily to brutal competition, he will seek a system where this competition will be elim-

¹William Ebenstein, Introduction to Political Philosophy (New York: Rhinehart and Co., 1952). Austrian-born, William Ebenstein is currently a professor of political science at Princeton University. He is well educated, having received a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Vienna, and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Wisconsin. He has written several books including Fascist Italy, Great Political Thinkers, and Modern Political Thought. Who's Who in America, Vol. XXXII (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1962-1963), 887.

²Ebenstein, op. cit., 124.

³Ibid.

inated to a degree. Ebenstein concludes his discussion of Hobbes's social contract by asserting that it is unlike any other social contract theory that preceded it, for it is between the subjects themselves, the sovereign having no part in it. Endorsing the official interpretation, he concludes that since the sovereign power is "incommunicable and inseparable," every corporation, including the churches, must be subordinated to the state.¹ The state must determine the doctrine of the church if the church is not to interfere with the basic function of the state, which is the preservation of order. In regard to the question of Hobbes's religious beliefs, Ebenstein believes that he had none. Apparently he considers Hobbes to have been an atheist.

Considering the above views in the aggregate, one can discern the traditional interpretation of Hobbes's political philosophy. The majority of the writers feel that the Hobbesian man is an egotistical creature who, outside of political society, will be in a constant and ruthless state of competition with his fellows. Secondly, they believe that the Hobbesian laws of nature are theorems that are conducive to self-preservation, i.e., they are not natural laws in the traditional sense. These theorems prescribe peace as a condition essential to individual self-preservation and felicity. Men, then, are

¹Ibid., 126

obliged to obey the social contract that they make because it is conducive to their self-preservation to do so. And once the sovereign has been established he will require his subjects to obey the covenant. Also, a majority of the subjects will feel that it is to their advantage to carry out the contract and allow their sovereign to punish any violators. In nearly all of the circumstances the violators would be in the minority. Once in power the sovereign authority is complete; he can suppress any opinion and subordinate any corporation which he feels is subversive to the state. The church will be fused with the state for a dual reason: firstly, the sovereign will be the authoritative interpreter of the scriptures; and secondly, by being head of the church, the sovereign will be in a better position to promote order and security. In regard to the question of Hobbes's religious beliefs, most of the writers believe that if Hobbes was not an atheist, he was skirting the fringes of this position.

There is some disagreement among the writers concerning morality in the civil state, but the majority would ultimately conclude that in the Hobbesian state morality is merely the sovereign fiat. Instead of having a set of moral standards determined by the interrelationships of the various members of the community, there would be a situation where the sovereign would force his will upon his subjects, and in doing so would term his will moral.

If the primary goal of the state is security, a situation of this type could presumably exist, for the subjects would feel that even a bad law is better than no law at all.

The traditional interpretation, as the reader has undoubtedly noted, has at times ignored or generalized certain facets of Hobbes's political theory for the purpose of maintaining consistency. It is for perhaps this reason that contemporary scholars have begun to re-examine Hobbes's political philosophy. The results of these re-examinations, however, have often been drastic changes in the basic structure of the "official" interpretation.¹

¹"Official" is a term employed by Howard Warrender to describe the traditional interpretation. Howard Warrender, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

CHAPTER II

THE NEW INTERPRETATIONS

The new interpretations of Hobbes's political philosophy are, for the most part, the results of meticulous examinations of Hobbes's basic works. This particular method of research perhaps manifests the desire on the part of the authors to illuminate certain tenets of Hobbes's theory that the traditional interpretation has tended to ignore. Thus these scholars endeavor to resolve the inherent difficulties in Hobbes's writings that consistently puzzle students of Hobbes's political philosophy. The attempts to clarify the traditional interpretation have, however, changed the very basis of that interpretation. The traditionalists have no objections to having their interpretation clarified, but they cannot allow their very position to be subverted. This chapter, however, will be devoted only to an examination of the new interpretations. The disputations among the various schools of interpretation will be considered in the next chapter.

The first major departure from the standard interpretation occurred in 1936 when Leo Strauss published The Political Philosophy of Hobbes.¹ Strauss, a noted German

¹Leo Strauss, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

scholar of the Hegelian school, was drawn to Hobbes after a study of Spinoza because the latter had virtually adopted the moral and political philosophy of Hobbes.¹ Strauss employs the genetic method, i.e., a thorough examination and point-by-point comparison of all Hobbes's writings, from the earliest to the last. The results of this particular method of research are some unusual conclusions concerning the origin and growth of Hobbes's political philosophy. According to Strauss, the Leviathan must be interpreted in the light of these conclusions.

The basis of Hobbes's political philosophy, contends Strauss, lies somewhere between the naturalistic and idealistic philosophical traditions. By starting with "right," and denying the primacy of law, Hobbes deviates from the idealistic tradition; and on the other hand, by employing "right," and not natural inclinations and appetites as the basis of morals and politics, Hobbes does not conform to the naturalistic tradition. Hobbes finally perceives the incompatibility between natural right and natural appetite. Consequently, it is Hobbes's view of funda-

¹Strauss uses Hegel's philosophy to arrive at different conclusions. Leo Strauss, currently a professor of political philosophy at the University of Chicago, was born in Germany in 1890. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1921 from Hamburg University. A few years later he emigrated and in 1944 became a naturalized American citizen. Strauss is perhaps best-known to his contemporaries for his radical innovations in the field of political theory and his vigorous opposition to the behavioral sciences. Strauss has published several books including On Tyranny, Natural Right and History, and Thoughts on Machiavelli. Who's Who in America, Vol. XXXI, 1960-1961, 3036.

mental human behavior, and not seventeenth-century science, that is the basis of Hobbes 's political philosophy. Science, when utilized at all, is only a method. His political philosophy demands an applicable morality, based upon an analysis of human passion, and compatible with human will. For Hobbes, this morality emanates from the action of human wills upon each other, and not from a superhuman authority imposing obligations from above.

Morality is established on that passion, the fear of violent death, that compels men to adopt and maintain a rational system of conduct in order to escape the blind irrational desires of their own nature. Men are naturally divided by mutual fear, and their relations are determined by those claims which they can compel their fellow men to acknowledge. The indispensable element of Hobbes's system, asserts Strauss, is a moral and humanistic antithesis between fundamentally unjust vanity and fundamentally just fear of violent death.

According to Strauss, there are two central postulates of human nature in Hobbes's theory. The first of these is vanity, i.e., the pleasure which a man derives from the consideration of his own real or imaginary power. Vanity is the basis of the natural appetite of the Hobbesian man. Consequently, man's natural appetite is nothing but a striving for precedence over others, and for a recognition of this precedence. The passions are the

particular ways of striving after this recognition. Strauss offers several proofs for this assertion. One of these is the war of everyone against everyone cast in terms of vanity. Thus the causes of this war lie in the desire of each man to surpass every other. Another proof offered consists of a paragraph taken from the Leviathan, where Hobbes makes reference to the great Leviathan as being "King of the Proud."¹ The second main postulate, according to Strauss, is that of natural reason, which Hobbes reduces to the principle of self-preservation; that is, "since the preservation of life is the condition sine qua non for the satisfaction of any appetite, it is 'the primary good'."² On the other hand, death is the primary evil, having its affirmation in passion -- the passion of fear of death. Since the fear of death forces man to believe that life is the primary good, it is the absolute standard of reference by which a man can order his life. Only through the knowledge of death can man have an aim in life -- avoiding death. Strauss states:

This fear of a violent death, pre-rational in origin, but rational in effect, and the rational principle of self-preservation, is, according to Hobbes, the root of all right and therewith of all morality.³

The result is, then, that Hobbes denies moral value to all

¹ Strauss, op. cit., 13.

² Ibid., 15.

³ Ibid., 17.

virtues which do not proceed from the fear of violent death.

This basic antithesis of Hobbes's theory is between vanity as the root of natural appetite, and the fear of violent death as the passion which brings men to reason.¹ By virtue of his nature, the Hobbesian man lives in a dream of the happiness of approaching triumph. So deep is his dream that only a forcible and imposing power will awaken him -- this power is death. The ideal condition for self-knowledge by the Hobbesian man is mortal danger. Here, then, lies the connecting link between the two postulates of human nature.² Vanity, taken by itself, leads to mortal conflict, by virtue of the fact that although man first lives in a world of imagination, he must enter the real world to discern if others feel about him the way he feels about himself. His claim to superiority is either recognized by others or it is not; in either case there arises a feeling of contempt on one side. The man who is slighted will seek revenge, with the result that physical combat will ensue. Somewhere in the course of this mortal conflict the will to triumph of the person seeking revenge is moderated by a fear for his personal safety. It is here in this life and death struggle that the futility of vanity is exposed. Also at this point the concept of the artificial state arises,

¹Ibid., 18.

²Ibid., 22.

for when both combatants become seized with fear for their lives, they overcome their vanity and the shame of confessing their timorousness and,

recognize as their real enemy not the rival, but that terrible enemy of nature, death, who, as their common enemy, forces them to mutual understanding, trust and union, and fear procures them the possibility of completing the founding of the State for the purpose of providing safeguards for the longest possible term, against the common enemy.¹

The origin of the state in mutual fear also has moral significance in Hobbes's political philosophy.

Strauss contends that Hobbes is cognizant of the distinction between legality and morality, because the Hobbesian man is just according to the morality of the purpose and not the legality of the action.² This German scholar asserts that Hobbes, "in believing that the moral attitude, conscience, intention, is of more importance than the action, -- is at one with Kant as with the Christian tradition."³ Hobbes deviates from this tradition only by his denial of the possibility that just and unjust actions may be established apart from human legislation. Strauss goes so far as to assert that just and unjust intentions are possible in the state of nature, for not every in-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 23.

³Ibid.

tention is permitted, except that of self-preservation. Unjust attitudes, therefore, stem from pride, while the just intentions arise from the fear of violent death. For Strauss maintains:

What man does from fear of death, in his consciousness of his weakness at the hands of other men, when he honestly confesses to himself and to others his weakness and his fear of death, unconcerned about his honor, this alone is fundamentally just...¹

Conscience is thus identified with the fear of death, and it is this identification which permits a differentiation between justice and injustice. It is the unjust man who obeys the laws of the state for fear of punishment, without inner conviction, and the just man who obeys them because of inner conviction -- the fear of death.² In retrospect, one may conclude that according to Strauss, Hobbes established his morality on that passion, the fear of violent death, which forces men to institute a rational system of conduct in order to escape the emulatory and illusory tenets of their own nature. Strauss's conception of Hobbesian morality is thus as radical as his de-emphasis on science in the Hobbesian philosophical system.

It would seem that the question of moral and political obligation in the philosophy of Hobbes holds a particular fascination for certain of his students because,

¹Ibid., 25.

²Ibid.

commencing in 1938, there have been three major interpretations concerning this facet of his theory. These interpretations are partial rebuttals of the orthodox approach which denies the existence of morality in the Hobbesian state of nature and asserts that, in his civil state, morality is only the fiat of the sovereign authority.

The first of these interpretations is that of A. E. Taylor, a graduate of New College, Oxford.¹ Taylor advances the thesis that Hobbes's ethical doctrine has no logical connection with his egotistical philosophy, and is a strict deontology which is curiously suggestive of some of the characteristic theses of Kant. In an explication of his analogy between certain facets of Hobbes and Kant, he points to Hobbes's distinction between the justice of an act and

¹A. E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," Philosophy, Vol. XIII (1938), 406-424. Alfred Edward Taylor, a scholar and philosopher, was born in 1869 and died in 1945. He received his higher education from Kingswood School, Bath, and New College, Oxford, where he was elected a scholar and later an Honorary Fellow. Except for a short period in the military service his career was entirely academic. He began as a Fellow at Morton College, Oxford and finished as a professor of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. Taylor divided his study of philosophy into essentially three parts. Firstly, he had a conception of the task of metaphysical philosophy formed from reading Ernst Mach, partly from his associates at Manchester and St. Andrews, and partly as a result of a sustained study of Galileo, Leibniz, and Descartes. Secondly, Taylor's deep interest in the problem of religion drove him to study the medieval Schoolmen. Thus he contributed to the development of neo-scholasticism. And lastly, he was a profound student of Plato and Aristotle. He also mastered Kant's ethics, however. During his academic career Taylor received many honorary degrees, including a Doctor of Literature and a Doctor of Laws from St. Andrews. Dictionary of National Biography, 6th Suppl., ed. L. G. Legg and E. T. Williams (Oxford University Press, 1959), 864-865.

the justice of a person. Taylor employs a passage from De Cive where Hobbes states,

to be just signifies to be delighted in just dealing, to study how to do righteousness, or to endeavor in all things to do that which is just; and to be unjust is to neglect righteous dealings, or to think it is to be measured not according to my contract but some present benefit.¹

This Oxford scholar then contends that this is precisely Kant's distinction between action done merely in accord with the law and action done from the law,

with the characteristic difference that Hobbes is trying to reduce the law from which the virtuous man acts, to the single law that a promise once duly made must be kept.²

In the opinion of this author Hobbes also goes so far as to anticipate Kant's attempt to reduce all really wrong willing to the irrational attempt to will both sides of the contradiction at once. Taylor continues by asserting that Hobbes's thought is at bottom the same as Kant's, but Hobbes reduces all injury to the violation of an express or implied promise and he has not, like Kant, "thought of the universalizing of a maxim as a criterion of its freedom from contradiction."³ The important point, according to Taylor, is that Hobbes agrees with Kant on the "im-

¹Taylor, op. cit., 408.

²Ibid., 409.

³Ibid.

perative" character of the moral law, just as he agrees with him in the assertion that it is the law of "right reason."¹

Taylor, in support of his characterization of Hobbes as a deontologist, asserts that the moral obligation to obey the natural law exists prior to the sovereign and the civil society, for "even in the 'state of nature' the law obliges in foro interno, though Hobbes is careful not to add, always in foro externo."² However, the reference to in foro externo is only a playing of words, contends Taylor, to remind us that the laws require reciprocal obligations, and that when there is no common power to act as protector, a man must judge for himself whether his desire for peace is reciprocated on the part of other men. Another implication present here is that moral law may be violated by an improper thought or purpose. One must remember, asserts Taylor, that even in the civil state, there is a large area where the sovereign has not legislated, and here natural law obliges man to exhibit equity, which is Hobbes's "Golden Rule," i.e., do not unto another what you are unwilling to have done to yourself.³ All obligations, then, including the one to honor your covenant by strict obedience to the sovereign, are derived from a natural law. The sovereign

¹Ibid., 410.

²Ibid., 411.

³Ibid., 412.

does nothing to create the obligation to keep a covenant,

all he really does is decree that the performance of certain covenants is illegal and to prescribe the precise forms of declarations of our intentions which his courts will regard as constituting a contract.¹

The duty to obey the civil law arises from the fact that the subject has covenanted to be loyal and obey the sovereign, and therefore if he voids the covenant he would be violating natural law. Taylor continues by declaring that the duty of obeying the civil laws follows as a part of a consistent deontology, for natural law is not superseded by positive law in the civilized society. Rather there is the duty in Hobbes's society to recognize the sovereign's commands as the rule of life. Even if one disapproves of a particular command, he is bound by a "prior obligation" to comply with it, for its violation would constitute bad faith.²

According to Taylor, the deontological character of Hobbes's thought is also brought out in the doctrine that the civil sovereign is just as much under a rigid law of moral obligation as are his subjects, for he is obligated to equity, the strict observance of natural law. The sovereign has the duty of promoting the public good, and a duty entails following what is prescribed by law;

¹Ibid., 413.

²Ibid., 415.

and for Hobbes all law is a command of the person whose precept contains within it the reason of obedience. Natural law, then, limits the sovereign because it is the command of God. Taylor further states:

To recognize them as laws, we must also know that they are the commands of God; and since Hobbes teaches us that a law which binds in foro interno is not really complied with unless there is a formal intention to obey it as law, we do not really fulfill the demands of equity unless we obey the divine command as such, because it is a divine command.¹

How does Hobbes know that natural laws are the commands of God? Taylor contends that Hobbes is led to this conviction not so much by the Scriptural testimonies which he produces in such profession, "as by the unusual depth of his own sense of moral obligation."² In conclusion, Taylor asserts that in Hobbes's political philosophy there is a moral obligation originating in natural law, which is binding on both sovereign and subjects. The obligatory force of civil law is derived entirely from our obligation to observe natural law. Hobbes's political philosophy, then, is a deontology characterized by a consistent moral obligation present throughout his whole account of man in both the state of nature and civil society.

¹Ibid., 419.

²Ibid., 422.

Professor Michael Oakeshott has also interpreted Hobbes's theory of moral and political obligation in a radical manner.¹ Furthermore, he avowedly challenges all previous critics of Hobbes. If one is to believe Oakeshott, he is the first man in history to understand Hobbes. He divides the opponents of Hobbes into two classes, the emotional and the intellectual. The first class he dismisses lightly, saying their opinions of Hobbes are derived from emotional irrationalism. He considers the critics of the second class more important, however, for it is through them that Hobbes has influenced the history of ideas. According to Oakeshott, these men have shown a regrettable tendency to fix their attention on Hobbes's obvious errors, and to lose sight of his philosophy as a whole. Moreover, they have failed to detect the tradition to which his civil philosophy belongs, which has led to

¹Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946). Michael Joseph Oakeshott, born in 1901, is currently a professor of political science at the London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London. He received his higher education from St. George's School, Harpendon; Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge; and Nuffield College, Oxford. In his view of politics he is a conservative who looks with disfavor upon ideological politics. Furthermore, he accepts tradition, and in doing so places an emphasis upon the limitation of reason and the importance of practical as against technical knowledge in the world of affairs. Oakeshott has written several books including, Experience and Its Modes, and Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe. Who's Who, 1960, 2251. Neal Wood, "A Guide to the Classics: Skepticism of Professor Oakeshott," Journal of Politics, XXI(1959), 647-662.

the misconception that it belongs to none. For Oakeshott, then, no writer has suffered more at the hands of little men than Hobbes.

Although Oakeshott's thoughts on the question of Hobbes's moral and political obligation are perhaps the most important in his entire interpretation, it is also necessary to discuss other parts of his exegesis. Oakeshott, like Strauss, advances the contention that the greatest of all hindrances to the acquiring of felicity by the Hobbesian man is pride. Pride, the desire for superiority, is an illusion, and will hinder a man from choosing the best route to felicity, even when he is alone. The purging emotion for pride is the fear of death, which necessitates prudence and thus makes man a civilized creature. What is gained by sagacity will be augmented by reason, for it is reason that discovers certain truths for the guidance of men in their common and collective pursuit of felicity. Oakeshott asserts that the Hobbesian man can design his own deliverance when "inspired by passion (fear of death) and instructed by reason..."¹ These truths are none other than the laws of nature. Furthermore,

there is one conclusion which comprehends the whole method of reasoning in this matter: when there are a number of men, felicity is impossible of attainment unless each man acts so as not to do to another what he would have not

¹Oakeshott, ed., op. cit., xxxvii.

done to himself.¹

This is Hobbes's "Golden Rule" paraphrased. Peace and security are the common negative conditions without which felicity is impossible, i.e.,

it is negative because it follows from our conception of the character of the individual and his felicity that one man can promote the felicity of another only negatively by forbearance, not positively by activity.²

The second and third laws of nature are additional conclusions of man's reasoning contingent on the primary principle, and there is a supplementary proviso that no man can agree to act in any way as to preclude his further pursuit of felicity.³ The men will covenant, then, in order to pursue their individual felicity. But one must remember, avers Oakeshott, that a covenant in this situation can never be anything but a state of will, for there cannot be an executed contract. What each man undertakes is to maintain a certain state of will, i.e., "what each man undertakes is always doing and never done."⁴ The required state of will would only be possible from a perpetual maintenance of a covenant -- the daily keeping of a promise -- which can never obtain the fixed and conclusive character

¹Ibid., xxxvi.

²Ibid., xxxvii.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., xxxviii.

of a contract performed once and for eternity.¹ The covenant institutes an office, which is a representative will, and not a common will, of the subjects. It is impossible to transfer a common will, asserts Oakeshott. This office is distinct from the natural person or persons who hold it. The sovereign authority so instituted has both rights and duties. The rights are liberties, i.e., what it may do; while the duties are what it must do.² The duties are contingent upon the end for which the sovereign is instituted -- success, whereas its rights are gained from transference as a consequence of the covenant. At this point Oakeshott contends,

but, since what was transferred was the natural right of each man to do whatever he wills, the rights in the sovereign must be those of a natural man. The paradox of the civil society is that in it the extent of the rights of the artificial man, called Sovereign, are determined by nature. And, just as the natural right of each man was to do what was needful to procure good for himself, the artificial right of the sovereign is to do what is needful to procure the only good that can be said to be universally desired -- the benefit of peace.³

The relation of the sovereign authority to the subject, where one commands and the other obeys, contends Oakeshott, is not one that excludes liberty, but actually im-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., xl.

³Ibid.

plies it; for liberties are rights which arise from the silence of law. The silence of law will brood over large areas of the subject's actions, and where there is silence there is liberty. Also law as a command implies liberty in the person commanded. In the first place, there is a liberty of mental activity; and furthermore, since all commands are generally abstract, the lawmaker assumes that the subject has the ability to "fill in the detail and translate the generality into an act in which this generality is fulfilled."¹ Therefore, even though a large proportion of the acts of a subject are under the control of a command, "there remains inside every act of obedience an area of unassailable liberty."²

Oakeshott again deviates from the orthodox interpretation when he contends that Hobbes's civil state is a Christian commonwealth, i.e., composed of Christian subjects under a Christian sovereign. In this Christian commonwealth the privilege of each man to interpret scripture and determine the laws of God by his own reason will be transferred to the sovereign with the rest of his natural right, for the liberty to interpret is not a distinct part of each man's general natural right.³ The recipient, the sovereign,

¹Ibid., xlv.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., xlviii.

will settle and interpret scripture and thus determine authoritatively the rules that belong to the laws of God and nature. There exist laws, however, in a Christian commonwealth which even the sovereign must obey. These laws are from God, creating an obligation for the sovereign. Also, the subject, by virtue of the fact that he is a Christian, has a corresponding extension of both his obligation and his right.¹ The rule of his religion provides a new sanction for the observance of his obligation. Furthermore,

the articles of peace are for him no longer merely the conclusions of reasoning legitimately enforced by the sovereign power; they are also laws of God. To observe the covenant he has made with his fellow becomes a religious obligation as well as a piece of prudential wisdom and civil duty.²

The last tenet and perhaps the most controversial part of Oakeshott's interpretation is his elucidation of Hobbes's theory of obligation. Oakeshott, when interpreting Hobbes, distinguishes among four types of obligation: physical, rational, moral, and political. Physical obligation arises when a man is prevented, forbidden, or bound, by the power of another from performing an action that he has willed. This form of obligation involves an external impediment to a man's power, and as such is unrelated to his natural right. In addition to this, a man may be pre-

¹Ibid., xlix.

²Ibid.

vented from willing a particular action because he perceives that its probable consequences are damaging to himself. In this type of situation the "impediment is internal, a combination of rational preception and fear, which is aversion from something believed to be hurtful."¹ Here again, in rational obligation, although the power to will an action is impeded, no facet of a man's natural right is limited.

But there is yet another and entirely different type of obligation that curtails natural right per se, instead of only the power to exercise it. This new type of obligation is moral, and arises from the effect of authority.² Authority, according to Oakeshott, is a right which emanates from a will:

An authority is a will that has been given a Right by a process called authorization, which (in turn) is the voluntary act of those who are to be morally obliged or bound by the commands of the authorized will. This voluntary act of authorization is a surrender (by mutual covenant) of the natural Right of each man, which, in a single act, creates and endows with authority an artificial Representative man or body of men who, in respect of this endowment, is called Sovereign. The exercise of the will of the Sovereign is called legislation, and moral obligation is the offspring of laws so made. The sole cause of the moral obligation is the will of this Sovereign authority; the only sort of action to which the term moral obligation is applicable is obedience to

¹Ibid., lix.

²Ibid.

the commands of an authority authorized by the voluntary act of him who is bound. The answer to the question, Why am I morally bound to obey the will of the Sovereign? Because I have authorized the Sovereign, 'avouched' his actions, and am 'bound' by my own act.'¹

Oakeshott qualifies the above statement by saying that the covenant does not itself create moral obligations, "it is not itself morally obligatory and not being a law (the will of the Sovereign), it does not itself make any conduct morally obligatory."² There was a rational obligation involved in the making of the covenant, but this in no way creates moral obligation. However, the contract may become morally obligatory if the sovereign commands its obedience. Oakeshott further asserts that moral obligations are not based on self-interest, for self-interest is a rational obligation which cannot become moral until commanded by the sovereign. Also, moral obligation is not contingent upon the superior power of the sovereign authority, for right is never identified with power and "a Sovereign that had no Right (that is, no authorization) could only bind physically, and not morally."³ Ultimately, there is no other law independent of the sovereign's will. Consequently there are no moral obligations independent of this sovereign fiat. Therefore, natural law is not legally binding

¹Ibid., lx.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., lx.

upon the subjects until the sovereign has willed its dictates. Nor is the word of God as given in the scriptures binding, except in the authoritative version; therefore, "laws springing from that interpretation are morally obligatory, not because they are God's, but because they are the Sovereign's."¹

Political obligation, according to Oakeshott, is a mixture of physical, rational, and moral obligation designed to serve one end, but which are never assimilated to each other, i.e., "civil society is a complex of authority and power in which each element creates its own appropriate obligation."² Oakeshott concludes by saying that each of these obligations provides a separate motive for creating the civil state, and each is necessary for the preservation of that commonwealth.

The above paragraph concludes the analysis of Oakeshott's interpretation. As the reader has now discerned, various tenets of this elucidation are rather arbitrary. Nevertheless, to the sorrow of other Hobbesian scholars, Oakeshott's interpretation is very influential, for it is contained in the introduction to Blackwell's edition of the Leviathan which is widely used in the teaching of political theory.

The latest major interpretation of Hobbes's theory

¹Ibid., lxi.

²Ibid.

of obligation is set forth in a book by Howard Warrender, entitled The Political Philosophy of Hobbes.¹ For the most part this book is a detailed exegesis of A. E. Taylor's earlier article, with the addition of certain new points. The main thesis of Warrender is set forth in the following paragraph:

Hobbes says so much about self-preservation that it is easily regarded as being central in his theory of obligation. This is so far from being the case that it is not a part of the theory as such, but an empirical postulate employed in its application. A denial of Hobbes's psychology, therefore, merely poses a new problem of application, but leaves his theory of obligation, in the proper sense, unaffected.²

Warrender contends that in Hobbes's political philosophy there is a consistent theory of obligation that is present throughout his whole account of man, in both the state of nature and civil society. Political obligation is not a new type of obligation created by the covenant, but rather it springs from a moral obligation to obey the laws of nature. Hence the difference between the state of nature and civil society is that some of the duties which are suspended in one become operative in the other.

According to Warrender, there are in the state of nature general obligations to seek peace and to preserve a

¹Howard Warrender, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957). Currently Warrender instructs political theory in the Queen's University at Belfast.

²Warrender, op. cit., 93.

readiness of mind to obey the laws of nature. In this situation, intentions are judged as well as actions. The obligatoriness of the laws of nature emanates from the fact that they are the commands of God. In this case, then, as law is the command of one whose precept contains it in the reason for obedience, the laws are to be obeyed simply because they are the laws of God. The laws of nature, however, will not oblige those who do not accept God as all-powerful, i.e., insane persons, children, and atheists. Therefore, the state of nature is not by any means one in which there are no obligations, and "still less it is a state where there are no moral principles."¹

Warrender continues by saying that obligation in the civil state does not depend in any way upon the social contract or upon the command of the civil sovereign. Rather the ground of obligations is always present, for it originates in the commands of God in His natural Kingdom. The function of the sovereign is to provide the validating condition for the employment of this obligation, "in a system of rights and duties that he himself does not create or control."² The validating condition is "sufficient security," and so the difference between the state of nature and civil society is one of circumstance and not of moral principles. The sovereign does not provide an obligation to

¹Ibid., 102.

²Ibid., 28.

keep valid covenants, rather he makes possible circumstances in which there are valid covenants to keep. As Warrender contends, the obligation to obey covenants is the third law of nature. Laws and covenants are only the instruments of obligation and not the source. Perhaps a good summary of the above is a paragraph from Warrender's book:

Providing that certain validating conditions are satisfied, men are always bound by law, and they may further extend such obligation by covenant. The account of civil society is essentially an account of how these validating conditions may become satisfied. The civil sovereign prescribes neither the ground of obligations nor the terms under which they are valid in any particular case, but is concerned entirely with the satisfaction of conditions which he himself does not specify. The resultant pattern of obligations in civil society is, therefore, the product under special circumstances, of moral principles which bind as men, and not simply as citizens.¹

As previously stated, Warrender's thesis is basically that of Taylor's, with some minor exceptions. In the first instance, Warrender does not agree with Taylor's analysis of obligation in the state of nature in terms of reciprocity. Warrender contends that this position cannot be justified in terms of Hobbes's text. In the second place, he asserts that because Taylor is concerned only with sovereignty by institution, he ignores Hobbes's illustration of sovereignty by conquest or acquisition. In the last place, Warrender will not subscribe to the analogies between the doctrines of

¹Ibid., 102.

Hobbes and Kant, for Warrender contends that such drawing of analogies is misleading. Any similarities generally turn out to be superficial.

Warrender is undoubtedly an astute scholar, but his work suffers because it is written in an atrocious style, which inhibits lucidity. Furthermore, he attempts to attribute a higher degree of consistency to Hobbes's philosophy than it actually possesses.

Two other interpretations merit consideration before this chapter is brought to a close. The first of these is set forth in an article "Hobbes and Hobbism" by S. P. Lamprecht, a professor at Amherst College.¹ In his article Lamprecht distinguishes between the traditional interpretation and what he terms the correct one.

Lamprecht commences his article by stating that the picture of the Hobbesian man in a state of nature is not intended by Hobbes to be a complete view of human nature. His portrait is of only one aspect of human nature, "an aspect which may at times be competently controlled, but can

¹S. P. Lamprecht, "Hobbes and Hobbism," American Political Science Review, XXXIV(1940), 31-53. Sterling Power Lamprecht, born in 1890, received his higher education from four schools: Williams College; Harvard University; Union Theological Seminary; and Columbia University. He commenced his academic career as an instructor of philosophy at Columbia, and continued there until 1928, when he moved to Amherst College, where he has remained ever since. Lamprecht has published several books, including Our Religious Tradition, Nature and History, and Our Philosophical Traditions. Directory of American Scholars, 3rd. ed., ed. Jaques Cattell (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1957), 427.

never possibly be eradicated."¹ The concept of man in a state of nature, Hobbes regards as a permanent factor within society, a factor with which all sound social authority must be constantly occupied. This is an ever-present menace against which man must always be on his guard. According to this Amherst scholar, then, the concept of man in a state of nature is useful in enabling one to estimate the importance of the social bonds that determine the conduct of any man he might wish to study. At this point Lamprecht makes a radical assertion when he states that "Hobbes was not so poor a psychologist as to overlook man's genuinely social interest."² Hobbes saw that a lucid concept of a man in the state of nature is a prerequisite for any formation of an effective technique of social control, since the difficulties of social life are not the results of man's better aspects, but rather of his basic lusts.

Secondly, Lamprecht disagrees with those who maintain that, for Hobbes, morality is the product of the arbitrary fiat of the sovereign, and consequently lacks all validity apart from the sovereign's control. Hobbes, asserts Lamprecht, is speaking here in legalistic and not moral terms where "justice and right are being defined in terms of enforcement of a conformity to law."³ This is an analytical

¹Lamprecht, op. cit., 41.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 43.

position on Hobbes's part, for where there is no law, there is no question of right or justice. Lamprecht summarizes when he states:

Justice then begins only where laws exist. And in the absence of law, might makes right, not in the sense that might proves wisdom or virtue to be resident in him who exercises the might, but in the sense that might, when irresistible, is a beginning of a regime in which the distinction between the ruler and the subjects is emerging, in which, hence, the existence of the law is beginning to manifest itself and conformity to the law is incipiently required.¹

A corollary to this remark, avers Lamprecht, is that Hobbes is also insisting that any significant morality is social in character and presupposes the occurrence of regularized procedures. Morality is not considered when men are separate, but only when they are in an integrated condition where the question of social adjustment arises. This Amherst professor feels that Hobbes will admit the existence of a minor type of morality apart from social institutions, but all the significant moral problems stem from the complex adjustments of men in a civil society. The subject of law is also involved here, for it is because justice and right have important meanings as legal terms that morality can be viewed as a social affair. According to Lamprecht, law creates "significant moral situations, and Hobbes saw this more clearly than any prior political philosopher of

¹Ibid.

modern times."¹ Any absence of law would result in chaos, where the possibility of moral achievement would be annulled by universal strife;

Hobbes dramatically was stressing the point that morality (aside from a few trivial exceptions) arises in social life as manifest in the existence of social instrumentalities, or institutions to regularize human relations, of laws to define and modify these relations, and of authorities to enforce their observance.²

In the third place, contends Lamprecht, when Hobbes states that the law-maker is always morally justified in all his acts, he means that the source of the law cannot logically be contrary to the law. Hobbes repudiates the belief that the king can do no wrong when he asserts that the sovereign is subject to the laws of nature as well as the dictates of reason. Above all else the sovereign has a duty to provide good government, and

not simply may a sovereign violate his responsibilities to his people through indulgence in vice or through neglect, but even a conscientious sovereign may commit such vital mistakes of judgment that his rule involves serious moral disaster.³

Lastly, Lamprecht compromises with the traditionalists by stating that in the Hobbesian civil state there can be no appeal to the law as a protection of popular rights, since there are no popular rights other than the

¹Ibid., 45.

²Ibid., 46.

³Ibid., 47.

passing whim of the sovereign. Lamprecht even goes so far as to endorse Hobbes in this position. Firstly, he contends, since social problems often admit of no settlement by compromise, it is necessary to have a sovereign who can act with impunity. One of the conditions of civil life is the requirement of obeying governmental decisions, even if they seem to have been made unwisely. Secondly, it is desirable to have the will of the sovereign behind the law, for although law is very important, it cannot be the background of all civil order. Law is essentially static, and thus ties a society to the level of past achievement. Hobbes's appeal to sovereignty, then, is a release from outworn precedent.

Lamprecht, then, has advanced four propositions that he believes comprise the correct interpretation of Hobbes's political philosophy. It would appear, however, that he is alone in his belief that his interpretation is correct.

The last interpretation which will be considered in this chapter is that of Nathaniel H. Henry, who advances the thesis that Hobbes is not an atheist.¹ Henry has marshalled the courage to enter Hobbes's labyrinth of biblical verse, a maze which most scholars of Hobbes are quite content to pass over. This author arrives at his conclusion

¹Nathaniel H. Henry, "Milton and Hobbes: Mortalism and the Intermediate State," Studies in Philology, (1951), 234-239.

from an examination of Hobbes's view of the intermediate state, i.e., that dimension of space or time where the soul is resident before it goes to either heaven or hell.

According to Henry, Hobbes presents the problem of the intermediate state when he quotes from John iii, 13: "no man has ascended into heaven but he that come down from heaven."¹ Hobbes then quotes from Acts ii, 34, where St. Peter, "to prove the ascension of Christ," quoted Psalm xvi:

'thou will not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thine holy one to see corruption,' saith, they were spoken, not of David, but of Christ; and to prove it added this reason, 'For David is not ascended into heaven.'²

At this point, asserts Henry, Hobbes sets forth the crux of his position on soul sleeping, for which he gives the Calvinist answer:³

'But to this a man may easily answer, and say that though their bodies were not to ascend till the general day of judgment, yet these souls were in heaven as soon as they departed from their bodies...'⁴

What Hobbes says in the next sentence appears to buttress his Calvinist position:

¹Henry, op. cit., 242.

²Ibid.

³When a man dies, what happens to his soul? In Christian theology there is the problem of an intermediate state between death and the final day of judgment. Some say the soul sleeps during this time, while others maintain that it wanders about, waiting for resurrection.

⁴Henry, op. cit., 242.

'...which also seemth to be confused by the words of our savior (Luke 20:37,38), who proving the resurrection out of the words of Moses, saith thus, 'that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for they live by him.'¹

What follows in the next paragraph, according to Henry, is an extension and expansion of the Calvinist position as regards election and predestination;

'But if these words to be understood (sic) only on the morality of the soul, they prove not at all that which our savior intended to prove, which was the resurrection of the body, that is, to say, the immortality of man. Therefore our savior meaneth that those patriarchs were immortal; not by a property consequent to the essence and nature of mankind; but by the will of God, that was pleased of his mere grace, to bestow eternal life upon the faithful.'²

Out of the above paragraphs taken from Hobbes's Leviathan, Henry concludes that Hobbes's religious position is that of an orthodox Calvinist. The above interpretation perhaps furnishes excellent proof of the contention that virtually any meaning can be read into Hobbes's philosophy by utilizing certain paragraphs and excluding others.

As the reader has easily discerned, the attempts to resolve the inherent difficulties in Hobbes's text have only compounded those difficulties. It is with this view in mind, perhaps, that the traditionalists have taken such violent issue with the innovaters.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

CHAPTER III

REBUTTALS AND COUNTER-REBUTTALS

Generally speaking, any innovation or departure from the norm is greeted by skepticism. This skepticism often manifests itself in written or verbal defenses of the traditional, which in turn occasions a series of counter-arguments from the innovators. The contemporary study of Hobbes's political philosophy is characterized by precisely this kind of situation, for at the present time competent students of political theory are quarreling over what Hobbes actually meant. Certainly these scholars must realize that since they are battling in the realm of interpretation, no one view is entirely correct. Nevertheless, the controversies become quite pungent at times.

The first set of debates centers around Oakeshott's interpretation of the Leviathan, with the participants being two English scholars, J. M. Brown of Kings College, New Castle upon Tyne, and Dorothea Krook of Newham College, Cambridge. The precipitant of this altercation was an article by Brown in which he takes issue with certain parts of Oakeshott's interpretation. Altogether, Brown differs on some eight points with Oakeshott. However, for the purpose of this discussion, several of these points will

be combined.¹

Firstly, Brown asserts that Oakeshott has introduced the political covenant prematurely, i.e., he believes Oakeshott has misread Hobbes's second law of nature as requiring men to enter into a single agreement.² This agreement then solidifies into a covenant, which in turn becomes a political covenant. Brown asserts, however, that Hobbes did not introduce the political covenant until later.³ Continuing, Brown maintains that Oakeshott has altered the third law of nature so to direct men to keep their promises under the agreement they make with each other. In addition to this, Oakeshott misquotes the very passage where Hobbes introduces the political covenant, for Brown asserts: "In the words Professor Oakeshott selects from this passage 'covenant' refers to covenants other than and unsupplemented by the political covenant."⁴ Oakeshott inserts a definite article before "covenant" and makes the words refer to the political covenant itself. Such perversions, according to Brown, obscure the difference between Hobbes's first and second parts, thus causing the true nature of chapters fourteen and fifteen to be lost. After Oakeshott

¹J. M. Brown, "A Note on Professor Oakeshott's Introduction to the Leviathan," Political Studies, I(1953), 53-64.

²Ibid., 54.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

has tortured Hobbes into saying that something besides the political covenant is needed, he also forces Hobbes to say what that is. This new factor is a supreme authority with enough power to enforce the political covenant perpetually.¹ The real purpose of page 112, however, suggests Brown, is to show that the political covenant is necessary to create a power strong enough to secure peace, and not that there must be a supreme power to enforce the political covenant.² If there was such a power to enforce covenants, the political covenant would not be necessary.

Secondly, Brown strongly disagrees with Oakeshott's version of Hobbes's theory of obligation. He believes that Hobbes's doctrine does contain moral obligations, but not the kinds that Oakeshott describes, and furthermore that Oakeshott's explanation of Hobbes's different uses of the word "oblige" is "nothing more than an attempt to get us to read Hobbes in a way that will suit Professor Oakeshott's preconceptions."³ Brown avers that the only passage where Hobbes compares different uses of the term "obligation" is not in the Leviathan at all, but in De Cive. Here Hobbes distinguishes between two types of natural obligation which, as one would guess, correspond to the "physical" and "rational" obligations of Oakeshott. The

¹Ibid., 55.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 57.

actual passage where Hobbes speaks of the law of nature as binding, contends Brown, is not one where the context requires obligation to be understood in Oakeshott's rational sense. There is the possibility that these laws are morally obligatory because they are the commands of God. However, this is only a possibility. In any event, Brown is more concerned about what Oakeshott does in the political regions of Hobbes's doctrine. This leads Brown into a criticism of what he terms the "paradox of the covenant."¹ Oakeshott, asserts Brown, entertains the view that the moral obligation does not originate in the social contract, but rather is contingent upon the sovereign's command; i. e., the covenant does not make anything morally obligatory. The covenant itself becomes binding in a moral sense only when the sovereign commands its observance. For Brown this view is ridiculous, for he asserts that the law would have no effect except for subjects who were previously obliged to obey it. This prior obligation is created only by the political covenant. Oakeshott's inclusion of physical obligation in political obligation is also rejected at this time, for Brown contends that the conception of a sovereign not delegated to act for his subjects would be a self-contradiction for Hobbes.

Thirdly, Brown criticizes Oakeshott's interpretation of the sovereign-to-subject relationship. On this

¹Ibid., 58.

vital point, asserts Brown, all Oakeshott does is to tell us that the institution of the sovereign rights is illustrative of their general scope, i.e., the nature of the sovereign's rights is determined by the social contract. The rights of the sovereign authority are those which have been transferred to it by covenant, and "since what was transferred was the natural right of every man to do what he wills, the rights in the sovereign must be those of a natural man."¹ For Brown this view is not plausible, as it does not explain how the sovereign gets his authority. Nor does he accept Oakeshott's explanation that the right to all things is surrendered to the sovereign. The notion of a transferrance of a "right to all things" is for Brown both highly obscure and unverifiable in Hobbes's doctrine. In any event, none of Oakeshott's assertions even remotely resemble the points made in the seventeenth chapter, from whence he draws his references. What this chapter does contain, asserts Brown, is an argument to show that the sovereign cannot do injustice, in the strict sense of injury, to his subjects, "because he can make no covenant to them upon his observance of which their authorization of his acts should depend."²

Fourthly, Brown disagrees with Oakeshott's as-

¹Ibid., 60.

²Ibid.

sertion that the sovereign has duties but no obligations. "The meaning of this," contends Brown, "is never cleared up."¹ In view of pages forty-five and forty-nine of Oakeshott's introduction, "duties" in the case of a heathen sovereign could apparently only mean "functions," while in the case of a Christian sovereign they would mean "moral obligation." In accord with Oakeshott's supplementary account of obligation neither the heathen nor any other sovereign could have duties in the sense of functions. However, for Oakeshott, the sovereign's prime duty is the making of laws, i.e., he lays down a general rule which creates the artificial distinction peculiar to civil society, the distinction between right and wrong. These categories replace the surrendered natural right as the consequence of sovereignty, and from whence it follows that "no law can be unjust."² For Brown this is a puzzling passage. Oakeshott refers to the twenty-sixth chapter in connection with it; at which time Brown asserts that it is a misreading of the beginning of this chapter. But, for Brown, this chapter means something else, for it is at this point that Hobbes defines civil laws as those rules under which the commonwealth commands the subject to make use of the distinction between right and wrong. And he does not, as Oakeshott maintains, say that civil laws create the distinction be-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 61.

tween right and wrong. Hobbes points out that the civil laws are the rules of "just and unjust," nothing being reputed unjust that is not contrary to some law. Brown concludes by saying that Oakeshott misreads all this to make it support his general views about Hobbes, "whereas the passage is neither for nor against these views, but is simply irrelevant to them."¹

Fifthly, asserts Brown, Oakeshott's preconceptions prevent him from giving even an intelligible account of the liberties of the subject. Brown feels that Hobbes distinguishes between liberties that arise from the silence of law, and the "'true liberties of the subject...the things which though commanded by the sovereign, he may nevertheless, without injustice, refuse to do.'"² Oakeshott begins by speaking of the former as if it were the whole matter, then switches to the latter, and then back to the former. In the end Brown feels that Oakeshott's

vague notion of 'transfer,' from subjects to sovereign, of a right to all things consisting in an absence of moral obligation, and his failure to explore the notion of 'injury,' leave him unable to report, or even investigate, Hobbes's discussion of this whole subject.³

In conclusion, Brown takes issue with Oakeshott's interpretation of the role of the last two books of the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 62.

Leviathan. Oakeshott feels that in these books the Hobbesian man emerges as a Christian, and consequently the Hobbesian man must acknowledge obligation under the law of God. Therefore, all that Hobbes says about natural law in the earlier chapters is an irrelevant anticipation of the argument of the last two chapters of the book. Hence, concludes Oakeshott, the Leviathan and De Cive are best read backwards. Brown, on the other hand, asserts that for Hobbes "the 'laws of nature' are not rules of moral obligation except to him as takes them as commands of God."¹ However, the taking of these commands as the laws of God does not necessarily involve the acceptance of the Christian or any other scriptures. For Brown, then, the last two books of the Leviathan are a masterly special application, and in no way a correction of what preceeds them.

In the final analysis, Brown believes that Oakeshott has misrepresented Hobbes throughout. He also feels that, in spite of Oakeshott's criticisms of the myths about Hobbes, his whole tendency is to support in his own way an old myth -- that Hobbes's political thought consists in the application to political matter of a dogmatic and unintelligible moral philosophy.

Mrs. Dorothea Krook, in her article, starts with the intention of defending Oakeshott's views, but ends up

¹Ibid., 63.

by setting forth her own interpretation.¹ Krook sets the temper of her argument at the very beginning with the assertion that Brown's reading of the Leviathan is marred by such a lamentable lack of comprehension that even when it appears he has something interesting to say, it turns out to be interesting only as a misconception.²

In the first place, she criticizes Brown for interpreting the Leviathan as an account of a general hypothetical sequence of events, "followed by a 'masterly special application' to a particular historical situation," and for failing to understand Hobbes's modus operandi.³ The virtue of Oakeshott, contends Krook, is that he recognizes the Leviathan as a logical structure, while at the same time he perceives Hobbes's method clearly. Furthermore, it is characteristic of a logical work that it can be read backwards, and in fact it must be if it is to yield its full meaning. The Leviathan is a case in point, for we cannot understand part one (human nature) unless we have part two (commonwealth) in our minds when we are reading it. In a sense, then, we do read from part two back to part one. That is, we read from the theory of the commonwealth back to the theory of man, which

¹Dorothea Krook, "Mr. Brown's Note: Annotated," Political Studies(1953), 216-227.

²Ibid., 216.

³Ibid.

is its logical ground in the structure of the Leviathan.¹
 Similarly, part three must be read back into parts one
 and two,

for it is Christian men and a generation
 of the Christian commonwealth that Hobbes has
 in mind all the time: it is only the final
 proof of this that is postponed to parts two
 and four, the 'proof' consisting in the
 Hobbesian reinterpretation of the Scriptures.²

Furthermore, Brown's view of Hobbes modus operandi
 is not valid, i.e., for Brown believes that Hobbes devel-
 oped his doctrine in a series of discrete steps, neither
 knowing nor caring what was ahead of each. According to
 Krook, Hobbes knew what he wanted to prove before he be-
 gan -- his consequences were implicit in his premises.

In the second place, Krook proceeds to criticize
 certain of Brown's assertions. As for the political cov-
 enant, this critic is not so certain that it was not in-
 troduced before page 112 of the Leviathan, for before
 part two there are explicit statements about commonwealth,
 and its characteristics and consequences. Furthermore,
 asserts Krook,

it follows by necessary consequence from
 Hobbes's account of the nature of man, and is
 stated explicitly on more than one occasion
 before page 112, that all human covenants
 must be 'political covenants' -- if by 'po-
 litical' covenant Mr. Brown means the only
 thing he can mean, a covenant rendered ef-

¹Ibid., 217.

²Ibid.

ficacious by the power to enforce the promise made.¹

In Hobbes's definition, the power to enforce the keeping of promises among men is an essential part of the word "covenant." So the validity of Brown's distinction between pre-political and political covenants is a moot point, because the passage on page 112 where Hobbes introduces the political covenant is a logical statement and not a historical or hypo-historical one.

There is neither a sequence of events in time nor even a hypothetical sequence in hypothetical time, but only premises and deductions, antecedents and consequents, definitions and the meaning of definitions.²

According to Krook, Brown's characterization of the last two books of the Leviathan is highly misleading, if not positively false. She feels that these books form a vital and integral part of the Leviathan. It is clear to Hobbes that parts three and four are vitally necessary to the theory of the commonwealth in part two, and furthermore it is false to suggest, as Brown does, that the problem of scriptures is not approached until the thirty-second chapter. Rather, Hobbes as early as chapter fourteen is interpreting certain text of the Holy Scriptures when he speaks of the natural laws.³ For example, the

¹Ibid., 218.

²Ibid., 219.

³Ibid., 220.

second law of nature is the "Golden Rule" paraphrased. Krook asserts that the integral position of parts three and four in the argument of the Leviathan can best be understood in the light of two aspects of Hobbes's Christian thought, namely, his nominalistic philosophy and his skeptical view of scriptural interpretations.¹

Hobbes's attitude towards the church in parts three and four must be distinguished from his views towards religion in part one. In part one, contends Krook, Hobbes's attitude was determined by his materialistic metaphysic, whereas his attitude towards the church in parts three and four is that of a civil philosopher. This accounts for his scornful treatment of religion, and yet his conspicuously sober and serious treatment of the church. Hobbes recognizes that the church is a powerful political institution in a civil society, and thus deserving of respectful treatment.² For Hobbes's peculiar kind of Erastianism the problems of conflicting loyalties between the church and state do not exist -- he does not acknowledge the crucial difference in kind. The word of God is nothing but black marks upon paper, which have meaning only by arbitrary imposition. Consequently, contends Krook, the problem of the relation of Church and State is reduced to the problem of who shall

¹Ibid., 221.

²Ibid.

interpret the Scriptures, and since Hobbes has already answered this question,

he must attempt a reinterpretation of the Scriptures that will establish and support the supreme sovereignty of the civil magistrate against the usurping claims of the ecclesiastical authority...¹

Brown, then, has failed to understand this, i.e., Brown does not understand that Hobbes must accept a Christian Commonwealth; and thus Hobbes is forced to undertake the difficult and delicate task of reinterpreting the Scriptures.²

The next point with which Krook deals is Brown's treatment of the Hobbesian theory of obligation. She feels that Brown's remarks "are marred by a false disjunction, which springs from the more general misunderstanding already noticed."³ According to Brown, moral obligation is ultimately derivative from God's commands or some other source. If it seems to be contingent upon both, then Hobbes is inconsistent about its derivation. Krook feels, however, that the two sources are not mutually exclusive. Hobbes's doctrine of obligation consists in a moral obligation to do whatever one takes to be God's commands. But one does not know God's commands until the sovereign lays them down, therefore moral obligation has

¹Ibid., 222.

²Ibid., 223.

³Ibid., 224.

another ground, i.e., the absolute power of the sovereign to declare and enforce the only interpretation of God's commands that shall prevail in the commonwealth.¹

Lastly, Krook criticizes Brown's interpretation of the Hobbesian doctrine of right and wrong in relation to civil law. She contends that Brown's argument only gives one measure of his misunderstanding of Hobbes's fundamental philosophical doctrine, namely, nominalism. All definition is for Hobbes, "strictly and exclusively nominal," and all knowledge is a matter of setting down definitions and drawing out the logical consequences of those definitions.²

But Krook was not to have the last word, for Brown retorted with acrid invective. Perhaps the counter-rebuttal by Brown epitomizes the bellicose temper of this controversy.³ He commences his article with the assertion that Krook's charge against him of a lack of understanding of Hobbes's method is beyond credibility. He further contends that he does recognize the Leviathan as a logical structure, and that the assertion of Krook to the contrary is a mystification to him. Krook's problem is to trace the logical structure of the Leviathan, and Brown feels that she attempts to solve this enigma without reading the

¹Ibid., 225.

²Ibid., 226.

³J. M. Brown, "Hobbes: A Rejoinder," Political Studies, II(1954), 168-172.

book. Brown then proceeds to reiterate his interpretation of Hobbes's concept of obligation and of the institution of the political covenant.

Moreover, Brown contends that Krook has misrepresented his view of the last two books of the Leviathan. Rather, Brown contends, he still maintains as before that it is in the twenty-second chapter where Hobbes deals with the problem of the Scriptures. This contention, however, does not say that the Christian Scriptures are not involved in Hobbes's construction of the natural laws.

Lastly, Brown views with amazement Krook's assumption that he agrees with Oakeshott's interpretation of the definitions of justice and injustice in the civil state. On top of this, asserts Brown, Krook then proceeds to lecture him on nominalism.

The last paragraph of Brown's article is perhaps representative of his attitude towards Krook.

The falsification, as compared with the truthful representation, of the classical political theorists, admittedly requires less time, makes quite as good literature, sets off equally well one's own ideas, and facilitates the writing of histories of thought: but it remains falsification.¹

The next controversy that will be discussed is neither so broad nor so acrid. For in this controversy it would appear that the opponents hold great respect for

¹Ibid., 172.

each other as scholars, however, not enough so that they will accept other's views instead of their own. This particular intellectual polemic centers around the interpretations of Hobbes's theory of obligation by Taylor and Warrender. The first article, chronologically, in this debate is by John Plamenatz, a gentleman of the traditional school.¹ It is Plamenatz's principal contention that Warrender renders his own thesis untenable by his two admissions, namely, that the Hobbesian man always acts from hope of some benefit, or from fear of some hurt to himself, and that the laws of nature are not obligatory when considered only by their content, but are binding only as the commands of a God whose power is irresistible.

Plamenatz asserts it is possible that Hobbes believed man must first be obligated by the laws of nature as commands of God before he is required to obey the civil sovereign. It is possible, also, that unless men feared God, they could never have a sufficient motive for obeying the sovereign and thus making his power effective. What Plamenatz does deny is that Hobbes needed to hold these views to explain how men can be obligated to obey their worldly rules, "or how they can have a sufficient motive for such obedience."² It is difficult to discern at this

¹John Plamenatz, "Mr. Warrender's Hobbes," Political Studies, V(1957), 295-308.

²Ibid., 298.

point whether Plamenatz is criticizing Warrender, or trying to refute Hobbes within his own system. Nevertheless, in Plamenatz's opinion, men are said to be constrained when they stand in such a relation to someone who commands them, that "if they see that relation clearly, they cannot choose but do what is commanded of them."¹ Therefore, where men are unequal, either physically or mentally, there may be obligations among them that would not necessarily be contingent upon a prior obligation to obey God. Furthermore, asserts Plamenatz, Hobbes does not say that power must be irresistible to justify any action -- he only says that irresistible power alone can justify all actions. This Hobbesian contention thus nullifies Warrender's thesis that only irresistible power alone can justify obligation. According to Plamenatz, we are obligated at all times to obey God, because his punishments are inescapable, "in the sense that, whenever we see clearly how we stand in relation to him, we cannot help but chose to do what he requires of us."² The fact that some of the punishments of the sovereign can be avoided, however, does not effect the nature of our obligation to him, only the extent. This situation in no way requires that we should be previously bound to obey God before we can be obliged to obey the sovereign. All that is needed, asserts Plamenatz, if there is to be obligation as

¹Ibid., 297.

²Ibid., 299.

Hobbes understood it,

is that there should be commands issued by someone so powerful that those who are called upon to obey stand to gain more than they lose by doing what he requires of them.¹

There is a sufficient motive, then, to set up political obligation, even in a godless world, for as soon as the agreement is made and the ruler chosen, it becomes the interest of most men to support him most of the time in what he does. A majority of the subjects will endorse the sovereign's sanctions upon the few subjects who disobey.

Another fault which Plamenatz finds in the argument of Warrender is that if we must do what God commands because his power is irresistible, why is his third law of nature conditional? That is, God commands us to keep our covenants only if other parties have already kept them, or we have adequate grounds for believing that they will do so.² This qualification, asserts Plamenatz, means that we must already have an adequate motive for keeping the covenant which establishes the sovereign, and that the command of God for us to obey it is only secondary. The need for security is the motive which explains obedience, even in a godless world of selfish men without hope of a life after death. According to Plamenatz, then, the fear of God can only add a further motive to one which is already sufficient

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 300.

without that fear. "Once again, God is superfluous."¹

Another confusing point for Plamenatz is Hobbes's emphasis on God, that is, if the only thing we can know of him is his existence, for his nature is incomprehensible to us. Furthermore, it is only through revelation that we know there is a life after death, and the sovereign must tell us what revelation to believe. This presents a very perplexing problem to Plamenatz, as is easily illustrated in this paragraph:

Thus it is on the sovereign's authority that we receive the belief without which we have no motive for fearing God... It is on the sovereign authority that we receive the doctrine without which it could not be our duty to keep the covenant to obey the sovereign.²

In the next place, Plamenatz does not see why Warrender, in the light of his main thesis, includes the covenant in Hobbes's political philosophy. For, as Plamenatz asserts,

if all Hobbes wanted to do was to show that no ruler can have power unless at least some of his subjects obey him from other motives than from being punished by him, he had no need to resort to a covenant to make his point. On the other hand (and this is more likely) if what he wanted was to show that all rightful obedience of man to man rests on covenant, he attempted the impossible.³

Here again it would seem that Plamenatz is attempting to

¹Ibid., 301.

²Ibid., 303.

³Ibid.

prove Hobbes wrong, while using Warrender as an opponent.

In conclusion, Plamenatz disagrees with Warrender's definition of natural right, i.e., a freedom from obligation to renounce a right. For Plamenatz, natural right is merely the absence of obligation. This leads to his disagreement with Warrender's contention that a subject is not responsible for the action of the sovereign, even though he authorizes his action. According to Plamenatz, Hobbes says again and again that the sovereign cannot injure his subjects because they are the author of all his sovereign acts. Hobbes means that they are, in some sense or other, responsible for what the sovereign does.

Warrender wrote a rebuttal to Plamenatz's article, but it will not be examined until two other arguments concerning the same subject have been discussed.

The second scholar who takes issue with Warrender is Thomas Nagel, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Although Nagel is doubtlessly an astute scholar, his article suffers from obscurities and complexities. In his article Nagel attempts to show that genuine moral obligation plays no part in the Leviathan at all, "but that what Hobbes calls moral obligation is based exclusively on considerations of rational self-interest."¹ Nagel feels that an egotistic theory of motivation permeates the whole book. This theory

¹Thomas Nagel, "Hobbes Concept of Obligation," Philosophical Review, LXVII(1959), 68-83.

is brought out with particular clarity in Hobbes's laws of nature, his explanation of why certain rights are inalienable, and his stipulation about what sort of covenants the Hobbesian man can or cannot be conceived to have made.¹

According to Nagel, there are in Warrender's account two separate systems: a theory of motivation, and a theory of obligation. The first has self-preservation as its supreme principle, based upon the fact that all men will regard death as the greatest evil; whereas the second is based upon the duty to obey natural law as the will of God.²

Nagel, however, takes a disapproving view of the above thesis and accordingly attempts to refute them. For Warrender, asserts Nagel, the reason a person can do his duty is because he is able to see it as a means to his self-preservation, but the reason he ought to do it is because God commands it. Self-preservation is the requisite condition and not the ground of legal and moral obligation. Any law to bind must satisfy certain demands of the one upon whom it is binding. Nagel goes so far as to endorse a concept of validating conditions, but he differs from Warrender in regard to the source of these obligations. According to Nagel, Warrender maintains that

¹Nagel, op. cit., 69-70.

²Ibid., 70.

a person must be capable of having an adequate motive to obey the law (which he claims is involved in the notion that ought implies can), plus the empirical fact that since men perform only those actions which they believe to be in their own self-interest, only in rare circumstances can anyone have an adequate motive to contribute to his own destruction or not to resist others in attempts on his life. All obligatory actions must be at least capable of being regarded by the individual concerned as in his best personal interest; therefore self-destruction and the like are never obligatory.¹

This, according to Nagel, is Warrender's method of denying that self-interest is the ground of Hobbes's theory of obligation. Frankly, this is a rather confusing assertion.

On the other hand, Nagel believes that the Hobbesian man can never perform any action unless he believes it to be in his own self-interest, i.e., all actions must be immediately perceived as conducive to self-interest. The Hobbesian man is susceptible only to selfish motivation, and therefore can not perform any action that could be labeled moral.² Warrender's own admission, contends Nagel, that the Hobbesian man can never act voluntarily without having as an object his own personal good, is the downfall of any attempt to put a moral construction on Hobbes's concept of obligation. Nothing may be called a moral obligation which in principle never conflicts with self-interest. A person so motivated could never have a

¹Ibid., 73.

²Ibid., 74.

feeling of genuine moral duty.

Nagel also takes issue with Warrender's proposition that the laws of nature are obligatory only as the commands of God. Nowhere, asserts Nagel, does Hobbes say that only the commands of an authority can be obligatory -- all he says is that the commands of an authority are laws. Accordingly, Nagel denies that natural laws derive their binding status because they proceed from God. For him Hobbes's primary ground of obligation is prudential, with even the obligation to obey God being grounded on sagacity. This critic bases his conclusions on Hobbes's afterthought to his laws of nature where he "says that his calling of these precepts 'laws' is not strictly correct, since only the commands of an authority are properly called laws."¹ According to Nagel, the role of God in the Hobbesian system is manifold. Firstly, He is the omnipotent ruler of his natural kingdom, His subjects being those who believe He exists and governs. Secondly, He functions as the cause of all things, all men's passions, desires, and appetites being caused by God's will.² Lastly, and negatively, He is not the basis of moral obligation, for the laws of nature are obligatory in themselves. They may derive some moral obligation as being the commands of God, but these are not their general grounds. Furthermore, contends

¹Ibid., 76.

²Ibid., 79.

Nagel, a system of obligation which has at its apex the authority of a person, and not a principle, could never properly be called a moral system. For morality in a true sense is not a product of sovereign fiat. In the last analysis Nagel endorses the following position:

It is a mistake to say that God is the ultimate appeal for Hobbes, for, if that were so, then all things which He ordered would be of equal obligatoriness, and whenever He changed his orders, our obligations would change. The essentials of Hobbes's system are a set of principles concerned mainly with the preservation of human society, and if those principles were changed, it would not be the same system.¹

The third major attempt to refute the Taylor thesis is made by S. M. Brown, Jr., of Cornell University.² This critic is rather dismayed at the acceptance of the Taylor thesis by contemporary scholars. He states that the controversies about the interpretation of Hobbes's theory have been for the most part between scholars who completely endorse the Taylor thesis and those who disagree only as to what in detail Hobbes's non-prudential theory of obligation is.³

¹Ibid., 80.

²S. M. Brown, Jr., "Hobbes: The Taylor Thesis," Philosophical Review, LXVIII(1959), 303-323. Stuart M. Brown, Jr., a professor of philosophy at Cornell University, was born in 1914. He received his Bachelor of Science and his Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Cornell University. Brown currently instructs in the fields of ethics and political theory. Also during his career he has written several articles. Directory of American Scholars, 3rd ed., 1957, 96.

³S. M. Brown, Jr., op. cit., 304.

Strangely enough, Brown places Oakeshott in the second category, saying that because Oakeshott construes self-interest as rational obligation he disengages Hobbes's ethical theory proper from his egotistical psychology. That is, Oakeshott's rational obligation is an internal and psychological phenomenon which supplies no principle for the authorization of the sovereign.

Brown's major contention is that the Taylor thesis is false, for he holds that

Hobbes does not in fact hold and cannot in principle admit, that the statements comprising his psychology have no logical bearing on the statements compromising his ethical theory.¹

Brown, in attempting to prove the Taylor thesis false, employs two principal considerations. In the first place, he contends, there is Hobbes's own testimony about what he is doing in his political treatises. As a political theory often has practical implications adverse to the interests of men, the political philosopher must establish his major doctrines by vigorous arguments from premises that cannot be denied.² Hobbes follows this procedure, for he grounds the sovereign's right and both the duty and liberty of the subjects on the known natural inclinations of mankind. Hobbes explicitly denies that his ethical theory is independent of his psychology. Consequently, contends

¹Ibid., 307.

²Ibid., 308.

Brown, the Taylor thesis, as an account of Hobbes in terms of what Hobbes thinks and is trying to accomplish, is false.¹ The proponents of the Taylor thesis in fact disregard Hobbes's logical standards, and interpret his doctrine as if such standards were irrelevant. According to Brown, the attempt to piece together a logically independent doctrine out of Hobbes's theory is to emasculate him.² What Hobbes demands for a political theory is logical support for moral and political doctrines which would otherwise remain unestablished and controversial; "and what the Taylor thesis has presented as his theory is a set of doctrines which, lacking the required support, cannot constitute the theory."³ Both Oakeshott and Warrender appear to suppose that Hobbes's thought is too lacking in clarity, precision, and vigor to be a systematic theory of the kind Hobbes himself thinks he is presenting. But any interpretation based upon such a supposition is absurd, asserts Brown,

for if Hobbes thought is so loose to justify ignoring what he presents as his theory, it is absurd for a commentator to expound as Hobbes's real theory a set of doctrines which satisfy strict taste of clarity and consistency.⁴

Brown concludes this first argument with the contention that

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 304.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 309.

the Taylor thesis would be valuable as a side of Hobbes's theory which the traditional interpretation tends to ignore, i.e., it could be employed to portray Hobbes as a man whose own moral and political convictions were not at every point compatible with the logical implications of his argument.

Brown's second consideration is that the moral doctrine (Taylor thesis), pieced together out of Hobbes and expounded sympathetically as a self-consistent theory, is in fact inconsistent and philosophically untenable. The proponents of the Taylor thesis must present a theory in which the concept of obligation is moral, as distinct from prudential, or legal, and in which psychological factors are not considered. Brown contends that this is impossible, for in Hobbes's doctrine the notion of the covenant is employed as the indispensable logical connection between political obligation and psychological considerations. It is used to link the obligation to obey the law with those human desires and aversions which give every citizen a stake in the institution of government. The duties of citizenship presuppose an obligation conceived in terms of the covenant, and covenanting presupposes interests at stake. Brown asserts:

In the Taylor thesis, the chain of presuppositions must be broken at the point where the moral considerations will be together completely isolated from considerations of interest explicated in psychological terms.¹

¹Ibid., 311.

This inconsistency, contends Brown, manifests itself in Oakeshott's interpretation as a flat contradiction. At first the latter's explanation of why the subjects should obey the sovereign is stated in terms of covenanting and is moral, i.e., the subjects authorize the sovereign by their own acts. In the next sentence, however, the moral explanation is contradicted and restated in terms of positive law, i.e., the covenant itself is not morally obligatory because it is not a law. The covenant is not the will of the sovereign and so it does not itself make any conduct morally obligatory. According to Brown, then, Oakeshott's account is in the end legal, although he tries to make it moral.

Taylor's difficulty is somewhat similar, as he begins by asserting that a man is obligated to be a good citizen because he has pledged himself in the covenant to be one, but then proceeds to argue that all obligation, including that of honoring covenants, is derived from the laws of nature as being the commands of God. Here again, says Brown, is a contradiction:

I am obliged because I have covenanted;
but as there would be no obligation to keep
covenants unless some authority, God or
civil sovereign, commands it, covenants of
themselves do not oblige.¹

Warrender, asserts Brown, avoids this contradic-

¹Ibid., 312.

tion by never giving Hobbes's account of obligation solely in terms of a covenant or pledge. This position, however, attributes an absurdity to Hobbes; for natural law, as the command of God, does not guarantee performance, it only guarantees the obligation to perform. Furthermore, contends Brown, Warrender's distinction between atheists and theists, with respect to obligation, attributes no intrinsic moral content to natural law. Law in itself imposes no obligation, for if it did the atheist would be constrained, and it would not be necessary to provide a guarantee of the obligatory character of covenants. According to Brown, it follows from this that no one is obliged.

For to say that natural law is the command of God is simply to say that a set of rules, lacking in moral content, is law in the strict sense. If an atheist cannot incur an obligation to obey civil law, simply by acknowledging the status of the civil sovereign, then neither I nor anybody can incur an obligation to obey natural law simply by acknowledging the status of God as sovereign in a kingdom of nature. What Warrender attributes to Hobbes as a theory of obligation is a position in which no one can be obliged at all.¹

For Brown, then, the Taylor thesis is false. It creates new difficulties for Hobbes based on mistakes he did not make. Moreover, Hobbes did not ask the two distinct questions: why ought I to do my duty, and how is

¹Ibid., 314.

it psychologically possible for me to do it? This separation, contends Brown, implies that Hobbes wanted to make a distinction between moral and prudential questions, whereas, in fact, he combines the two. The question before Hobbes is one in moral and civil prudence, i.e., how to establish unconditional submission to the civil state.

Brown concludes by saying that there is no justification for the view, advanced by Taylor and others, that natural laws are to be interpreted in either of two logically distinct ways: either as prudential maxims which imply no obligations, or as commands of God which are obligatory. Hobbes's psychology does not consist primarily of empirical statements, but rather of logical statements, which justify the presumption of logically necessary connections. Hence, statements like "Men necessarily desire their own good" are logical. The laws of nature, then, cannot be related to Hobbes's egotism as prudential maxims. The following paragraph characterizes Brown's position:

Hobbes psychology is indispensable because in it he establishes the sense of good in terms of which he argues that the stake of each man in the institution of government is of supreme magnitude. What is completely dispensable in Hobbes are prudential maxims and the commands of God. The Taylor thesis grossly misrepresents Hobbes's because it dispenses with the indispensable and makes what is¹ dispensable the very heart of his theory.

So concludes what is perhaps the most refined crit-

¹Ibid., 323.

icism of the Taylor thesis. But the controversy was not yet over, for Warrender has written a counter-rebuttal to Plamenatz, and he also has expressed his intention to answer his other critics.¹

In the first place, Warrender feels that it is not always clear just how far Plamenatz disagrees with him, and just how far with Hobbes. Secondly, Warrender contends that Plamenatz puts too much emphasis on the place of God in Warrender's interpretation. In support of this second contention, Warrender asserts that as far as parts one and two of his book are concerned, the place of God is not involved, and any such references are only incidental to the argument. Parts one and two are concerned with piecing together the pattern of obligation, the conclusion being that everything is dependent upon the obligation to obey natural law. Provided this pattern has some prescriptive meaning, it holds good for Hobbes's definition of obligation. Furthermore, he says in part one, which is concerned with the question of what kind of obligation is evoked, that God is not an integral factor. In this section Warrender sets forth three alternative solutions about what the remainder of Hobbes's theory of obligation is based upon;

- (i) divine rewards and punishments,
- (ii) simply upon the will of God,

¹Howard Warrender, "The Place of God in Hobbes Philosophy; a Reply to Mr. Plamenatz," Political Studies, VIII (1960), 48-57.

(iii) a body of natural law having self-evident or intrinsic authority.¹

According to Warrender, the first alternative seems to be the most likely for Hobbes, even though he himself would have preferred that Hobbes use the third one. In any event, all these solutions vary only within a narrow range -- they all result in some special status being given to natural law. Immediate status is given if natural law has intrinsic authority; and indirect status, if it is God's unchangeable command. Consequently the whole system hangs upon natural law. Thus, if God were to be removed from Hobbes's political doctrine, the thesis of Warrender's book would not really be affected.

Thirdly, Warrender asserts that, according to Plamenatz, God is superfluous in Hobbes's system, on the grounds that Hobbes could have solved both the problem of political obligation and that of the motive for obedience by having civil government based on ordinary self-interest alone. Ordinary self-interest would eliminate not only God, but also the laws of nature as Warrender conceives them.²

Apparently Plamenatz and Warrender start from different definitions of Hobbes's theory of obligation. Obligation, for Plamenatz, is derived from a sanction that is

¹Ibid., 44.

²Ibid.; 50.

sufficient if clearly apprehended. This sanction would operate on men permanently, provided they have due knowledge and reflection. Warrender holds that because only God exercises such a sanction, his is the only power that can produce obligation.¹ Moreover, the case where a person exercises a sanction over another person is not obligation per se, but simply "power." The power of the master is the instrument of subjection. In any event, contends Warrender, the situation where one has power over any other is impermanent in time, and does not necessarily bind other parties. Brute force requires something extra to produce genuine permanent obligation. Warrender admits that there is an analogy in Hobbes's doctrine between God's power and man's power, which leads us to believe that there is nothing special about God's power except for its efficiency and amount. It is this same analogy, asserts Warrender, that underlies Plamenatz's attempts to refute Hobbes within his own system. Warrender maintains, however, that the analogy is misleading, and furthermore Hobbes does not follow it. The power of God differs from that of men in kind, not degree. God's power is unknown and directed to support a rational body of principles -- the laws of nature; whereas the power of man is associated with visible signs and directed to serve the ends that the wielder of the power has set for himself. The

¹Ibid.

analogy is conceivably valid in the prophetic kingdom, where God has a personal relationship to His subjects, but certainly not in the natural kingdom -- the world. In His natural kingdom the power of God is introduced as a formal answer -- government in this kingdom being based on rational knowledge, with the limitations of reason to set its boundaries. The laws of nature are discerned through reason, and reason tells us very little more than this except the necessity of some hypothesis to account for their formal statues. This hypothesis can be filled in according to the individual's belief and religion. A related point, asserts Warrender, is that for Hobbes, no obligation arises between the conqueror and the vanquished unless a covenant is made in which the defeated have promised obedience in return for their lives. Without such a covenant the conquered may act as they wish, subject only to physical restraint. Regardless, Hobbes thought that temporary leaders were inherently unstable, and thus could not form any firm basis for the establishment of the state.

Warrender also takes issue with Plamenatz's contention that ordinary self-interest is enough to maintain the state, for he feels that at times there may be a discrepancy between selfish interest and public interest. If such a discrepancy arises, an ample amount of state coercive power would be difficult to achieve. Warrender points out that insurrections are often profitable.

According to this critic, then, Hobbes's theory needs a source of obligation strong enough to bind the subject to the degree of suicidal risk. This cannot derive from the ordinary principle of self-interest; it can only come from the obligation to obey natural law. Personal self-interest is not what makes certain acts obligatory, but rather is what suspends the obligation to do certain actions that would otherwise be obligatory. Moreover, the laws of nature are not strictly for personal preservation, rather they are rules for the preservation of men in general. To "preserve yourself" is not the formula required for the institution of the state, but rather "that all men can be preserved," except where it is inconsistent with one's own preservation. A formula of this kind could never have its origin in ordinary self-interest.

Warrender agrees with Plamenatz that the third law of nature is conditional. However, he feels that this is still compatible with his interpretation of Hobbes's theory of obligation. The individual is not obligated to do anything he honestly believes to be suicidal, but short of this he remains obligated to do his best. Warrender feels that if God is to be regarded as the author of moral laws, it is no more absurd for him to command a conditional precept, than it is to have a human system of conditional moral principles.¹

¹Ibid., 56.

Finally, Warrender does not agree with Plamenatz's contention that we have to accept the sovereign's interpretation of the Scriptures in order to know God and his punishments. He feels that this conclusion is unfair to Hobbes, for in Hobbes's doctrine political obligation depends ultimately on the laws of nature, which are known to all men by the use of reason, regardless of their political beliefs or religion. Furthermore, the sovereign's interpretation does not affect man's inner beliefs, which depend on God's grace. Warrender summarizes his ideas in the following paragraph:

As Hobbes makes clear, the basic obligation to keep the political covenant is prior to anything that the sovereign decrees; otherwise there would be no need to take notice of what the sovereign had ordered, including, of course, his views on works of prophecy. Nothing essential, therefore, depends upon the sovereign's interpretations.¹

One other article, written by a man who has not actually been involved in the controversy himself, deserves to be discussed before this chapter is brought to a close. This article, written by Willis B. Glover of Mercer University, is concerned with Hobbes's concept of God and the role He plays in Hobbes's moral and political philosophy.²

¹Ibid.

²W. B. Glover, "God and Thomas Hobbes," Church History, XXIX(1960), 275-297. Willis Border Glover, a professor of history at Mercer University, was born in 1915. He received his higher education from Mississippi College, the University of Virginia, and Harvard University. Currently he

It is Glover's contention that Hobbes is not an atheist. According to this author, if one takes at face value what Hobbes says about religion, "the set of opinions which emerge is a combination of reformation theology with the discursive rationalism that was to characterize the eighteenth century..."¹ Hobbes conceives of a God who acts directly in nature and history, who is the source of righteousness, but is not in himself bound by any law of morality.² Furthermore, Hobbes's insists on the corporeality of God, but he does not deny that God is a spirit:

...he simply insisted that such spirits that exist are corporeal. Because he conceived God to be a body, Hobbes had no particular difficulty with the idea of His providential activity. Bodies can move other bodies, and God, the cause of all causes, still operates directly on other bodies in accordance with his eternal purpose and foreknowledge of all things. Since the substance of God was not like any other substance, Hobbes was able to avoid contradicting at the point the inherited Christian conception of God as radically discontinuous with the created world.³

The attack on Hobbes by his contemporaries, contends Glover, was not concerned with specific items in his theology, but rather with the question of atheism. In clas-

he teaches modern intellectual history. During his career he has published one book on religion, entitled The Evangelical Non-conformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century. Directory of American Scholars, 3rd ed., 1957, 275.

¹Glover, op. cit., 276.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 277.

sical philosophy materialism was associated with atheism, and consequently Hobbes, regardless of what he said to the contrary, was thought to be an atheist. Hobbes terms this practice "atheism by consequence."¹ At this point Glover criticizes the contemporary interpreters who assume that the seventeenth-century attitudes associated with some of Hobbes's ideas must be the real attitude of Hobbes. The author points out that those who consider Hobbes an atheist "are forced to assume that he did not mean what he said on religion, and he said a great deal."² Nearly anyone can be accused of being an atheist on the assumption that whatever he may have said to the contrary was not seriously meant.³ This method, contends Glover, has often caused serious misunderstandings of Hobbes's political philosophy. Three explanations have been given as to why Hobbes, although an atheist, should have written as he did:

- (i) He aimed to destroy Christianity and the Bible by an elaborate reducto ad absurdum.
- (ii) He cluttered his works with theistic suggestions and pronouncements in order to protect himself from persecution for the atheistic basis of his politics and mechanics.
- (iii) He sought to support his political views by the appeal to the beliefs of his readers.⁴

¹Ibid., 278.

²Ibid., 279.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

On examining the above motives, contends Glover, one finds that they are either mutually inconsistent or implausible. The first motive is not consistent with the other two, and while it is conceivable that the second and third motives do not contradict each other, they are both implausible. Glover criticizes the contemporary savants, who,

realizing that religious pretense cannot be proved against Hobbes, and yet unable to free themselves from the traditional conception of Hobbes the atheist, have found his political writings so confusing that they conclude Hobbes must have been himself confused to have introduced God into his political philosophy at all.¹

Glover singles out Plamenatz in particular. According to Glover, it is more plausible to assume that Hobbes believed in God, and that he wrote his political philosophy accordingly.

Furthermore, Glover argues that the problem of church and state is more crucial to Hobbes than most of his interpreters have recognized. It has been assumed that his state is entirely secular, and religion is a mere instrument of the sovereign. This is not the case, contends Glover, for far from making religion a tool of the state, "Hobbes defines the Christian state as a church and ascribes to it a religious mission which takes precedence over its legitimate worldly concerns."² Religion furnishes the limiting context within

¹Ibid., 280.

²Ibid., 281.

which the sovereign can fulfill the ends of government and secure the maximum development of his power.¹ The continuous obedience to natural laws. He is also subject to the law, however, and can succeed as sovereign only by obedience to those natural laws which are the conditions for the existence of the society he rules. Also, Glover believes, one of the sovereign's prime duties is to insure the salvation of his subjects. He points to the fact that the subject is not constrained when his eternal salvation is in jeopardy. Hobbes's concern with the relationship of the state to Christianity and the difficulties involved make untenable any thesis that his religious expressions are insincere or irrelevant.

In the end, Glover agrees with Taylor that Hobbes's ethical system is basically deontological -- God's command being the source of obligation.

The article by Glover thus concludes this analysis of the contemporary polemics concerning the political philosophy of Hobbes. The variety of interpretations perhaps staggers the imagination of the student of Hobbes and in the end serve only to confuse him, for each of the interpretations has some basis. Moreover, it is highly doubtful that a clear synthesis could ever be had from the above views; and even at best, a synthesis would only be an approximation of what Hobbes really meant.

¹Ibid., 282.

CONCLUSION

Hobbes apparently anticipated a certain amount of confusion concerning the meaning of his theories, and to provide for this he wrote meticulously, even to the point of setting forth a list of definitions. It would appear, however, that Hobbes judged his prospective readers rather poorly for, if he were resurrected, he might view with amazement the disagreement among contemporary scholars regarding the actual meaning of his political philosophy. He would perhaps endorse the contention that he was the author of a profoundly skeptical doctrine which finds the only solution to man's predicament in force and coercion, but he might be astonished to discover himself being classified as a Kantian deontologist. In fact, it is highly probable that, if he attempted to explain his real intent, a few scholars would still disagree with him.

Resurrection, however, in this temporal world, is not possible, and so the real meaning of Hobbes's political philosophy is forever obscured by the passage of time. Therefore, we can only be content with an approximation of it, by hoping that Hobbes wrote what he actually believed. There is an impediment here, however, for Hobbes's works are for the most part written in a seventeenth-century frame of mind. Also, even if we understand the seventeenth-

century context, Hobbes has often given new and unusual meanings to the words he employs. Furthermore, we cannot rely too much on the views of Hobbes's contemporary critics, for it is possible that their opinions were controlled more by indignation than by analysis. Any plausible interpretation, then, must take into account manifold factors.

We have been concerned with the areas of disagreement among the contemporary students of Hobbes. Their multiplicity only shows that virtually any meaning can be read into a theorist by utilizing certain parts of his works and disregarding others. Before these disagreements are commented on, however, a few prefatory remarks are in order.

It must be remembered that Hobbes wrote in a time of crisis, a crisis in which both the civil and religious orders were being subjected to violent upheavals. His major work, the Leviathan, was composed while he was a voluntary exile in Paris. In fact, this very book appeared in London at a critical juncture in Cromwell's career, when, after his victory over the royalists at Worcester, he was strong enough to defy the Rump Parliament and usher in the Protectorate.

So out of a life intertwined with crisis after crisis came Hobbes's major religious and political conceptions. In Hobbes's mind the dread of war was the one irrefutable objection to civil reform. Among all of man's

demoniacal practices war was the worst; it was the supreme evil that levelled to the ground all of men's accomplishments and aspirations. For Hobbes conflict as such was not limited to the civil sphere, since no force was more dynamically destructive to the peace of the kingdom than religious controversy -- the endless sectarian disputes arising from the different interpretations of the Scriptures.

To Hobbes, the summum bonum in a civil state was peace and tranquility. Here, then, was Hobbes's fundamental problem: how to have a state that would provide order and security in both the civil and religious spheres.

The present disputations divide themselves into several major areas. The first centers around the Hobbesian theory of moral and political obligation. The traditional interpretation appears to be the most plausible of those advanced, i.e., obligation derives from prudential self-interest. According to this explication, if there is a theory of moral obligation in Hobbes's doctrine, it must be explained in terms of self-interest. The argument that Hobbes's ethical theory is a deontology, a moral obligation arising from a source other than society, is permeated with inconsistencies and untenable assumptions, as has already been pointed out.¹ The existence of a transcendent moral code has always been seriously questioned, and when one

¹Plamenatz, Nagel, and S. M. Brown, Jr., advance this very contention.

considers the characteristics of the Hobbesian man in a state of nature, it is difficult to concede any type of moral obligation to him at all. Warrender's own admission that the Hobbesian man always acts from the hope of some benefit or fear of some hurt to himself, makes the Taylor-Warrender thesis unsound. The Hobbesian man can never perform any action unless he believes it to be in his own self-interest, i.e., he is susceptible only to selfish motivation. It is difficult to see how an egotistical theory of motivation could be construed as a deontology. Furthermore, if Hobbes contends that the only thing which we can know about God is that He is the first cause of things, how can we know that He is the author of a set of moral laws. For example, there is Hobbes's paragraph concerning what man knows about God.

So that it is impossible to make any profound inquiry into natural causes, without being inclined thereby to believe there is one God eternal; though they cannot have any idea of him in their mind, answerable to their nature. For as a man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the fire, and being brought to warm himself, by the same, may easily conceive, and assure himself, there is somewhat there, which men call fire, and is the cause of the heat he feels; but cannot imagine what it is like; nor have any idea of it in his mind, such as they have that see it; so also by the visible things in the world, and their admirable order, a man may conceive there is a cause of them, which men call God; and yet not have an idea, or image of him in his mind.¹

¹Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), 69.

Moral laws to be obligatory must be the command of some one whose precept contains in it the reason of obedience. Therefore, if man cannot have an image or idea of God in his mind, how can he be constrained to obey His moral laws? In the state of nature where man is concerned with his immediate struggle for existence, the most he will do is to pay lip-service to an entity that he can neither conceive nor understand.

Even in the civil state there is no obligation to obey God unless the sovereign wills it. It seems rather ridiculous that the sovereign would have to command obedience to God if there is already a prior obligation to obey Him. One ultimately realizes that without the sovereign's command there would be no obligation to obey God, and hence the sovereign must constitute the source of authority.

It is far more plausible to assume that in Hobbes's state of nature there is no obligation, except that of pursuing one's own self-interest. Furthermore, prudential self-interest furnishes a sufficient motive for continued obedience to the commands of the sovereign.

A second major area of disagreement revolves around the question of whether Hobbes was or was not an atheist. This is a rather difficult question to answer, but it is quite clear that Hobbes's system, like any other materialistic system, is incompatible with theism. As stated

above, Hobbes, when he did admit of a God, considered him only as the first cause, and as such incomprehensible. However, it is certain that if he meant what he said about religion, he cannot be called a Calvinist or a member of any other denomination. Any man who condemns religion as a parasite on fear does not endorse any seventeenth-century creed. For Hobbes, the natural seed of religion consists of four things: opinions of ghosts; ignorance of second causes; devotion to that which men fear; and the taking of things causal for prognostics.¹ Moreover, he contends that these things by reason of different fancies, judgments, and passions of men have grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another. Whether Hobbes is talking about theology with tongue in cheek is hard to discern, but one does not usually write this way and still retain a sincere belief in religion.

A third area of controversy is concerned with the status of the Hobbesian laws of nature. One school of interpretation contends that they are the commands of God, and therefore morally binding; whereas another school believes them to be general rules of reason for man's self-preservation, and as such not morally obligatory. The latter view appears to be the more specious when one considers Hobbes's own definition of a law of nature:

¹Ibid., 72.

A law of nature, lex naturalis, is a precept or general rule, found out by reason, which man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to admit that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.¹

Furthermore, it is difficult to construe the whole of Hobbes's first law of nature as being the command of God. Conceivably, the first part could be a divine command; i.e., every man ought to endeavor peace and maintain it. However, certainly the second part is not a sacred law, which states that when men cannot obtain peace they may seek and use all the helps and advantages of war for their self-preservation.²

At the present time there seems to be little hope that the intellectual disputations over the political philosophy of Hobbes will be resolved. In fact, it is highly doubtful that they could ever be resolved, scholarly polemics being what they are. In any event, the undergraduate will still go on being instructed by the textbook writers, and Thomas Hobbes will continue to live in infamy.

¹Ibid., 84.

²Ibid., 85.

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