

NOTES ON CB MACPHERSON, *THE POLITICAL THEORY OF POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM*

BASIC CONCEPTS of the whole book (p. 3)

1. 20th century problems in liberal-democratic theory rooted in 17th C individualism.
2. Individual
 - a. owns his person and his capacities
 - b. owes nothing to society
 - c. not seen as part of a whole
 - d. free, insofar as owner of person and capacities and independent of will of another
3. Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors
4. Political society = device for protection of property and for orderly relation of exchange

HOBBS (read pages 15-42; 46-49; 61-70)

1. Intro (15-17)
 - a. Move from physiology to hostile behavior only consistent w/ a certain model of society (15)
 - b. Hobbes first develops theory of social man, before SN hypothesis
 - c. H's model of society is 17th C England: "competitive relations between naturally dissociated and independently self-moving individuals, with no natural order of subordination" (17)
 - d. From this model he can derive "moral obligation from supposed facts w/o importing hierarchical moral values or teleological principles" (17)
2. You cannot move from materialist concept of man as self-guided matter in motion to need for sovereign state w/o further assumptions (18-19)
 - a. Human nature in SN = socialized / civilized desires
 - b. That society is one of possessive individualism
3. SN = humans w/o a state enforcer of contracts = incessant struggle for power over others (19)
 - a. This incessant struggle is H's model of society
 - b. Human behavior in H's society is so anti-social that when put in SN it looks non-social (22)
 - i. Locking doors, going about armed,
 - ii. behavior in civil war (L, ch 13)
 - c. Negation of civilized society ("no industry, no culture of the earth ...") (23-24)
 - d. Causes of quarrel are civilized:
 - i. competition and fear require desire to "live well"
 - ii. That is, landed property provokes invaders
 - iii. Also, desire for "glory" requires a hierarchical society
 - e. Equation of SN and SW (state of war) (27)
 - i. Take men as they are and remove fear of reprisal and you get SW
 - ii. If you bring back fear of other men, then SN / SW is contrary to human nature
4. Deduction from physio-psycho motion to social conflict (29-)
 - a. Method of introspection gives clue that civilized man is the basis of analysis (30)
 - b. H doesn't show the first step; he starts with man as self-moving machine
 - i. From social man
 - ii. To man as self-moving machine
 - iii. And then to social conflict

- c. From physiology to war (31-42)
 - i. Key moves occur in Chs 10-11; they set up Ch 13 where SN = SW
 - 1. Chs 10-11 are relations of civilized men
 - 2. Ch 10: neutral definition of power as “present means to obtain future good”
 - 3. Ch 11: social power as power over other men
 - ii. Ch 10: Natural power is pre-eminence of capacities over others who oppose me (35-36)
 - 1. Wealth and reputation provide offensive / defensive strength against others
 - 2. Value = price for use of one’s power –market for power (37-38)
 - iii. Oppositional structure of power (40-41)
 - 1. Some men desire more power and delight than they have, while others are satisfied at their present level
 - 2. Fragmentation of society requires entry into power struggle of everyone to combat the super-power-desiring ones who will be provoked to “invade” (42)
- 5. Models of society (46-61)
 - a. Status society: preset allocation of productive position; no property in land
 - b. Simple market society: market relations of production but labor is not a commodity
 - c. Modern or possessive market society (PMS):
 - i. Postulates:
 - 1. No preset allocation of work
 - 2. No preset reward for work
 - 3. Coercive contract enforcement
 - 4. Rational utility maximizers
 - 5. Alienable land
 - 6. Alienable labor
 - 7. Differences in desire
 - 8. Differences in productive resources
 - ii. Results: class differences between owners and workers
- 6. Hobbes’s social assumptions are those of possessive market society (61-70)
 - a. H see English Civil War as attempt to destroy old order in order to impose PMS (65)
- 7. Inadequacy of SN hypothesis
 - a. Only after he showed social men want power over others does he turn to SN = SW (68)
 - b. He need social man as he could not have moved directly
 - i. from physiology to SN as power struggle
 - ii. and then from SN to SW
 - iii. and then from SW to need for sovereign
 - c. The hidden step: it’s only in PMS that man’s physiology produces power struggle

LOCKE (read pages 194-221; 238-247; 263-265; 269-271)

- 8. Overview:
 - a. Contradictions in Locke (196-97)
 - i. Men are on the whole rational, but most are not
 - ii. SN is peaceful, and it is not
 - b. Resolved later by assumption of different levels of rationality by classes (243; 246)
- 9. Theory of property right
 - a. Chapter 4 of 2nd Treatise removes law of nature limitations on individual property
 - b. Initial limited right to fruits of earth mixed with personal labor:
 - i. Presuppositions

1. God gave nature to all men
2. All men have right to preserve their own life
3. Men own their labor
4. So you gain property by mixing labor
 - a. with fruits of earth (foraging), w/o need for explicit permission
 - b. with land itself (agriculture)

ii. Limits

1. Sufficiency of remainder (“enough and as good”)
2. No spoilage

iii. Transcending limits: money is the key

1. Spoilage:

- a. money does not spoil
- b. money is capital and allows land to be capital
- c. this all supposedly happens in SN (prior to or outside government)
- d. levels of consent
 - i. consent to use money (and hence have economy)
 - ii. consent to join CS (not necessary but practically useful for enforcing contracts in economy)

2. Sufficiency:

- a. There’s always “America” as untouched land
- b. But the key is the increased productivity of agriculture
 - i. So there may not be any more land
 - ii. But even a day-laborer will live better than savage king (212)
- c. So, either you can get land, or you can earn a living by selling labor
- d. And the product of sold labor goes to the labor purchaser (215)

10. So L has read back his social relations into SN (217)

- a. Also, SC doesn’t create rights; it preserves them
- b. So super-appropriation is naturally justified
- c. “A market society generates class differences in effective rights and rationality, yet requires for its justification a postulate of equal natural rights and rationality. Locke recognized the differentiation in his own society and read it back into natural society” (269).

i. Differential effective rights

1. In 17C England, poor people lived hand-to-mouth and hence were excluded from politics because they were dependent on others and so couldn’t exercise independent judgment (2300)
2. This is naturalized by Locke: the more industrious will acquire the land and leave others as workers (231); this unequal distribution is protected by CS

ii. Differential rationality

1. Rationality = industrious unlimited appropriation
2. Without capital, workers cannot be fully rational
 - a. They live hand to mouth
 - b. They don’t save for investment and return