

T. H. GREEN AND THE MORALIZATION OF THE MARKET*

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A person has as his substantive end the right of putting his will into any and everything and thereby making it his, because it has no end in itself and derives its destiny and soul from his will. This is the absolute right of appropriation which man has over all 'things' . . . All things may become a man's property. . . Since property is the means whereby I give my will an embodiment, property must also have the character of being 'this' or 'mine'. This is the important doctrine of the necessity of private property.

Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*

It has become a commonplace that the political thought of T. H. Green stands as a cornerstone of the modern liberal welfare state structure. Less commonly, however, is any attempt made either to understand and explicate the ontological assumptions underlying Green's thought, or ultimately to relate those assumptions to the social institutions that they attempt to justify.¹ From this latter perspective Green's enterprise takes on a deeper significance than is commonly understood in orthodox estimations of it. Certainly Green understood the dynamics of capitalism much better than did other liberal theorists, particularly the Utilitarians. Yet at the same time, his theoretical position necessarily restricted any critical thrust which could have arisen out of his analysis of bourgeois society. For Green's fundamental categories of analysis were Idealist in nature and owed much to the work of Hegel. If, as Marx argues, Hegelianism constitutes the highest development within the realm of bourgeois thought, then it might be expected that, given the added advantage of writing within the context of the most highly developed capitalist market society of the time, Green would

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provide the most sophisticated defence of that newly emergent institutional corollary of mature capitalism, liberal democracy. And this is exactly what he did.

Less fettered by overtly Utilitarian concepts than, for example, John Stuart Mill (whose views he subjected to extensive criticism), Green discerned more clearly than most that strictly Utilitarian-Benthamite assumptions were in some way related to the deplorable social conditions of the British working class. For him, therefore, these assumptions could not form in themselves an adequate justificatory base for the market. As a result, he was led to posit something like a developmental view of man's essence in which man possessed distinctively human capacities and potentialities the realization of which constituted the chief goal of the social order. For Green, man was rather more the active being than the merely passive consumer of utilities and calculator of pleasure that the Utilitarians held him to be, and Green sensed that social order and individual moral initiative were threatened by purely unqualified Utilitarian assumptions. Not surprisingly, we find Green classifying his own enterprise in the *Prolegomena to Ethics* as an attempt to counteract the debilitating influence of Utilitarianism upon the possibility of what he called the moral life:

We have to consider, not so much whether the principle that pleasure is the sole object of desire is itself tenable. . . . as whether the doctrine which, having rejected this view of desire, professes to find the absolutely desirable, or "Summum Bonum" for man in some perfection of human life, some realization of human capacities, is a kind, not only to save speculative men from suspicion of there being an illusion in their impulses after a higher life which Hedonism naturally yields, but also to guide those impulses in cases of honest doubt as to the right line of action to adopt.²

Green seems to be attempting here to extend such Utilitarian insights as had in his view proven essential for meaningful political and social reform, and had served to destroy the basis of aristocratic dominance.

What I wish to demonstrate in this paper is, first, that Green was more or less aware of the major implications arising out of the ontological presuppositions entailed by Utilitarian (market) assumptions and, secondly, that he sought not so much to reject those assumptions

as to fit them into a broader concept of man's essence. This concept still saw man as an infinite consumer of utilities, but viewed the striving for want satisfaction as directed toward the attainment of a moral end: self-realization arising out of the fulfillment of the common good. In this manner, Green hoped to surmount the serious problems attendant to Utilitarianism, while at the same keeping capitalism intact.

The first step in understanding Green's political position lies in explicating Green's philosophical premises, and by so doing articulating differences between Green's epistemological stance and the Utilitarian view. On that basis we can perhaps understand the character and scope of Green's critique of "naturalist" or utilitarian ethics, and how those ethics, rooted in Utilitarian epistemological premises, suggest what for him is a dangerously inadequate account of the human essence. The limitations of Green's critique of Utilitarianism may then be gleaned from the standpoint of Green's *own* view of human nature and the elements of Utilitarianism incorporated within it. From that point we can move on to see the relationship between Green's notion of man and his ultimate justification from a moral point of view of individual appropriation and the capitalist property institution — and beyond that to the question of an individual right and its basis in capitalist society's class divisions. In the light of this analysis, Green's defence of capitalist society from the standpoint of his developmental view of the human essence can, I would suggest, be more clearly explicated than is usually the case in treatments of Green's work. Finally we can relate Green's theoretical position to his most practical political statement and from that vantage point suggest something of the significance of Green's theoretical position to his most practical political statement and from that vantage point suggest something of the significance of Green's enterprise for modern liberal democratic theory.

I

Green never really gave explicit formulation to the vital prerequisite for a developmental view of man's essence: a concept of action. His substitute for it was probably his notion of individual appropriation; and it is this that ties him to the Utilitarian outlook and prevents the break from Utilitarianism that he hoped his theory would accomplish. This weakness is central to an understanding of his theory, what he wished to do with it, and the tensions and ambiguities attendant to the whole enterprise. To the extent that Green *did* accept Utilitarian assumptions, he was unable to bring forth an explicit concept of action, as

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such a concept of action is almost totally antithetical to those assumptions. His attempts to supersede Utilitarian postulates by building onto them his developmental view could not be a complete success and this accounts for the major problems to be found in his position. It could not be done because, by the mere virtue of his adoption of a developmental position, Green was cognitively committed to certain implications inconsistent with Utilitarianism. The most concrete manifestation of that inconsistency was, of course, the existence of the British working class. Although, according to Green's theory, they would not starve, British workers would in terms of their developmental prospects find their position unchanged vis-a-vis the capitalists.

Green was aware that, with reference to a large, industrial "proletariate" reduced to selling its labour for mere subsistence income, the ontological picture of man as a pleasure calculator and consumer of utilities was not very meaningful as a description of the good life. The mere trickle of utilities accruing to such unfortunates was barely sufficient to renew their saleable productive capacities. The pleasure-pain calculus and the freedom of choice the calculus involved were concepts of negligible importance in relation to the workers. This problem was made more acute for Green by virtue of the fact that he sought to demonstrate that Utilitarian theory had done much to improve human conduct and character,³ something which he took to be the chief aim of social theory. Clearly, the conditions under which a proletarian lived did nothing to promote character. Green saw, in fact, that the opposite was the case. His moral ideal was his way of dealing with this problem without destroying capitalism.

Since Green linked character with Utilitarian postulates and understood (or at least implied that he understood) the relationship between those postulates and a particular set of social institutions i.e. capitalist market institutions, he also was aware, to a degree not usually admitted in most liberal theory, of the extent to which human behaviour is determined by a particular institutional framework that is the product of men's relations to themselves and to their material environment.⁴ Because his goal was the moralization of each individual through the self-realization attained by the free development of one's powers to contribute to the common good, Green had to assume that capitalist institutions could provide the conditions wherein the active subject posited by his developmental ideal could fulfill the posited moral potential. In other words, Green attempted to moralize the market. That is, he assumed that the moral choices necessitated by a view of man as a developer of his human powers could be registered and

effected by the market mechanism. As Green saw it, this was the essence of the character-building function that the market performed.

Green was hardly unique in linking the market with the morally good life. The Utilitarians (particularly Hume) certainly held such a view but for them the "good" was more or less defined as the maximization of individual utilities. What makes Green unique, as a liberal, is that his definition of the good life harkened back to an earlier, pre-capitalist conception of man's essence (e.g. that of Aristotle) which saw man as a teleological being whose end was realizable only within a particular kind of social order (in Aristotle's case, the polity). Such a concept pictured man as a possessor of uniquely human attributes which achieved expression within the context of a fully human life. The fully human life, the goal of politics, was synonymous with virtue. It was virtue in something like this older sense, suitably buttressed by both liberal and democratic (i.e. egalitarian) assumptions, that, Green believed, the market could facilitate.

The problem with Green's attempts to moralize the market lay in the fact that the market, by its very nature, militates against the development of what Green called a "positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying". As I have argued, if a developmental view is to be at all substantively meaningful, it must include some concept of action. Action involves the exertion of human capacities (Green's view of will implies this) and the means by which that exertion is effected. In other words, men must have access to the means of life and labour. In a capitalist market society most men are denied this access and the price to be paid for it is the transfer of their ability to use their capacities for their own conscious purposes to those few who have land and capital. Committed as he was to the maintenance of capitalist institutions, Green could not see this transfer of power as a transfer of power and hence he could not recognize it as an impediment to human fulfillment. Or, more accurately, he did not see that the coerciveness which rendered the transfer inevitable was an integral and permanent aspect of the market, but believed it to be the outcome of the pre-capitalist accumulation of land on the part of the feudal aristocracy. (However, Green seemed to be in some sense aware of the problem of impediments to human development within a market framework if the ambiguity of his developmental ideal is any indication.)

To understand Green's notion of fulfillment and its relation to the moral role of the market, we must investigate what Green understood to be the moral ideal and the moral personality that actualized it. We

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may then see how his position was manifested in the concept of individual appropriation and hence how private property served for him as a vehicle for self-realization.

For Green, the moral ideal could probably best be understood as a conception by a man of "a better state of himself". This conception is given recognition and substance through the autonomous action of the individual will. The will actualizes the principle of self-development which is a "divine principle", an eternal consciousness that reproduces itself in man and accounts for the fact that man cannot be satisfied with what he is but seeks to realize what he "should be". This ideal compels the individual to seek self-realization by fulfilling those capabilities of which he is conscious. As he becomes conscious of those capabilities, man conceives of the "absolutely desirable" as the goal of his activities. Green's use of the word "desirable" is ambiguous in this context and this has something to do with his conception of the role of the market and the nature of market society.

Green's conception of the eternal consciousness realizing itself through the individual will is rooted in his basic epistemological premises. These premises posit the existence of a spiritual principle of knowledge, the self-distinguishing consciousness of the knowing subject, which unifies discrete physical experiences into a connected totality. Green's position was based on his critique of the naturalist epistemology and ethics that are essential to Utilitarian theory. To the naturalist position that knowledge derived from sense impression of the external world, Green countered with the view that:

We cannot enquire whether a being that was merely the result of natural forces could form a theory of those forces as explaining himself. We have to return once more to that analysis of the conditions of knowledge, which form the basis of all Critical Philosophy . . . and ask whether the experience of connected matters of fact, which in its methodical expression we call science, does not presuppose a principle which is not itself any one or number of such matters of fact, or their result. Can the knowledge of nature be itself a part or product of nature, in that sense of nature in which it is said to be an object of knowledge?"

In short, the "mere statement that facts are not feelings, that things are not ideas, that we can neither feel nor think except contingently

upon certain functions of matter and motion being fulfilled, does not help us to understand what facts and things, what matter and motion, are."⁶ What Green wished to dispute was the view that there existed two discrete entities, "thoughts" and "things" — subject and object — totally segregated from one another with the latter determining the former.

Green believed that what we know concretely are not purely empirical "things" but things as determined by relations. "The terms 'real' and 'objective'. . . have no meaning except for a consciousness which presents its experiences to itself as determined by relations, and at the same time conceiving a single and unalterable order of relations determining them, with which its temporary presentation, as each experience occurs, of the relations determining it may be contrasted."⁷ Green thus saw subject and object as integrally related, interacting factors of a world constituted by thought or consciousness, such a consciousness being a "mode" of the eternal consciousness which is the source of the "single and unalterable order of relations". Out of this philosophical position came Green's understanding of the relationship between an institutional framework and human self-development, such an understanding being fundamental to his moralization of the market.

II

Green's critique of naturalist ethics follows from his analysis of empiricist epistemology. Clearly, an empiricist position implies the moral view that the test of the rightness or wrongness of actions must be based solely upon whether such actions promote the presence of pleasure and absence of pain — the Utilitarian creed. The close connection between naturalist epistemology and moral theory may be seen clearly if we use Hobbesian postulates (something which Green understood quite well). If man is seen as a system of matter which seeks to remain in continuous motion, then the terms "pleasure" and "pain" refer to material conditions which, respectively, facilitate or impede that motion.⁸ Green saw that if his connection of the moral ideal were to have anything resembling a solid basis, it would be necessary for him to provide a theory of motivation which took into account man's social nature to an extent not found in Hobbesian-cum-Utilitarian postulates. Indeed, it was chiefly for this reason that he adopted Idealist categories of analysis.

The main thrust of Green's criticism of Utilitarianism is that the doctrine constitutes an incomplete picture of the human essence. To say that man seeks merely pleasure, that pleasure is the only object of his

desires, conveniently overlooks the fact that men frequently desire for the good of others and fulfill family and community duties and moral obligations which could not possibly have as their basis the desire for pleasure, as the Utilitarians understood pleasure. Indeed, such actions may entail considerable self-sacrifice and pain. Green's position here follows from the idea that man seeks the "absolute and common good", a "good common as between some group of persons interested in each other, absolute as that of which the goodness is conceived to be independent of the likes and dislikes of individuals . . . (The) true good must be good for all men, so that no one should seek to gain by another's loss. . . ."9 Man has desires and seeks to satisfy them, and for Green this is inextricably linked with the idea of the good. Man is, indeed, a creature of wants, but not of mere wants. Here, we must remind ourselves of Green's Idealist conception of man: the knowing subject who is at the same time an object to himself insofar as he recognizes that he embodies the spiritual principle upon which the existence of a complete rational world conceived as a totality is possible. Green says that the "essence of man's spiritual embodiment is the consciousness of having it"10 and this consciousness indicated to a man a potentially better state of himself which he seeks to realize through the action of the autonomous will. How wants present themselves to the willing subject is analogous to the process by which knowledge is possible. In the world of practice, where the will actualizes moral ends, the determining causes of human action are motives, which Green describes as those ideas of ends which a self-conscious subject presents to itself, and which it strives and tends to realize. Wants are the building block of motives but they can serve as motives only when they are transformed from their natural, animal state through the action of the self-conscious subject. Green remarks that "the transition from mere want to consciousness of a wanted object, implies the presence of the want to a subject which distinguishes itself from it and is constant throughout successive stages of the want."11 As Green does not specify the wants he has in mind (other than that they must be transformed into objects of desire suitable for the attainment of the moral ideal), nor dispute the sorts of "mere" wants that Utilitarianism posited, we may assume that Green's treatment of wants is an important basis for his moralization of the market.12

For Green, the transformation of a want into the consciousness of desired object permits the conception of a world of practice quite distinct from a world of experience or knowledge. As we have seen, the world of practice is the realm of the will the quality of which is dependent upon the nature of the objects willed. The highest objective of

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the will — the moral good — is the fulfillment of the individual's moral capacity, the harmonization of the will with practical reason, which presents man with the moral end to be attained. In other words, the will makes motivation possible and the good will seeks the attainment of objects consistent with self-realization.

Fettered by their conception of wants as "mere" wants, Utilitarians were wrong in that they saw the good to be generally pleasant (which it is), but assumed that the object embodying the good was desirable because of the pleasure it conveyed. In fact the opposite is true: an object's pleasantness depends upon its goodness.¹³ Thus, if the basis of desire is not pleasure, then "there are many objects of desire which are not imagined pleasures and which though pleasure may be anticipated in their attainment cannot be desired on account of that pleasure."¹⁴

In Green's view, the theoretical weaknesses of Utilitarianism have grave significance in the social and political realm. The consistent Utilitarian could not call for the performance of particular acts because they ought to be done, even if such a performance could increase the aggregate amount of pleasure. On the basis of the Utilitarian assumption "that every one acts from what is for the time his strongest desire or aversion, and that the object of a man's strongest desire is always that which for the time he imagines as his greatest pleasure, the object of his strongest aversion that which for the time he imagines as his greatest pain"¹⁵, it is not possible for any man, given what he is and given his particular circumstances, to gain any more pleasure at any specific time than he in fact does. This is so because for a man's present capacity for pleasure "we have. . . no test but his desire, and of his desire no test but his action."¹⁶ The Utilitarian, regardless of his own reformist inclinations, is confronted with an ever-increasing gap between his theory and its practical application. To say that it is not possible for a man to obtain more pleasure than he actually does at any particular time is to assert the impossibility of man conceiving a better state of himself (i. e. transforming mere wants into desired objects) and fulfilling the moral ideal as Green understood it. Of Utilitarianism, Green asks: "Is not its intrinsic unavailability for supplying motive or guidance to a man who wishes to make his life better, likely to induce a practical scepticism in reflecting persons who have adopted it, which tends to paralyze the effort after a better life?"¹⁷

III

If Green's analysis of Utilitarianism produced this conclusion then presumably, others who had undertaken similar analyses (and Green

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tells us there were many) would have reached similar judgments. Wherein, then, lies the appeal of Utilitarianism? On this question, Green reveals the extent to which his acceptance of capitalism limits his critique of Utilitarian ontological presuppositions. He tells us that the major appeal of Utilitarianism lies in the fact that it provides a substantive conception, however inadequate, of the human essence, whereas the philosopher (i.e. Green), who provides a picture of man as a being whose end consists in the perfection of human life through the realization of human capabilities, cannot do this because he does not know what any capability is until he sees its ultimate realization.¹⁸ For "if he cannot. . . tell them what his greater perfection will positively mean for themselves and others, they will be apt to think that he has told them nothing, and to contrast the emptiness of the end to which he professes to direct them, with the definite intelligibility of that which is explained to consist in a greatest possible quantity of pleasure for all sentient beings."¹⁹

What Green does not seem to realize is that in a capitalist market society, an end defined as the accumulation of the greatest quantity of pleasure is the only meaningful one. A capitalist society both produces and is produced by a vision of man as an infinite consumer of utilities, a desirer of pleasures, with his power equated with his ability to gain those utilities. Green to some extent comprehended this (which explains why, given his support of capitalism, he did not reject Utilitarianism totally), but, given his assumptions and purposes, could not possibly have conceived of pleasure as the sole end in a market society. He makes this clear by asserting that the "ordinary activity of men regulated by law and custom", activity undertaken within the context of market society, contributes to the realization of man's end as a developer of his human potential. Green saw "Hedonist" (Utilitarian) assumptions as antithetical to the realization of that end. There is irony here: capitalist institutions are based on Utilitarian postulates, yet Green saw those institutions as essential to man as a developer of his capacities. He could only have believed this if his concept of realization did not require as a necessary condition the equal access of all men to the means of life and labour. And, given Green's Idealist categories, and his acceptance of capitalism (which meant a fundamental acceptance of Utilitarianism) no such requirement was necessary. All that Green in effect required was that men recognize as their moral end which of the fulfillment of their capacities entails the common good that all men share one with another. I hope to show in my discussion of Green's notion of property that what this view required in practice was

that all men have the opportunity to become capitalists (or appropriators); this I see as the essence of his moralization of the market. What Green could not see was that the logic of capitalist development is such that the vast majority of men are prevented from ever becoming capitalists.

The extent to which Green was bound by capitalist assumptions becomes clearer if we consider his treatment of market ontological presuppositions. Was man an infinite desirer whose power was opposed to that of other men as he sought satisfaction of his desires? I have indicated that Green did not criticize Utilitarianism on the basis of that doctrine's analysis of human wants and want satisfactions; what he did criticize was the way in which those wants were expressed. Certainly, no one would argue that want satisfaction in the form of an inflow of material utilities does not form one aspect of the totality of human wants, needs, and purposes, the fulfillment of which any meaningful political theory must seek. The problem with the maximization of utilities within a market framework is that man's desires are considered infinite and he is thus seen as an infinite consumer. Man as infinite consumer entails man as infinite appropriator and inequality of strength and skill lead to greatly unequal holdings of property. Such inequality denies the right of most men to exercise fully their human capacities.²⁰ This suggests that the two views of man, as a consumer of utilities and as an exacter of his human capacities, are incompatible. But the picture of man as a maximizer of utilities is also in an important sense inconsistent on its own terms. The freedom of choice which is fundamental to a man if he is to maximize his utilities in the market place is unavailable to most men who are forced to sell their labour on terms dictated to them if they are to survive. This, of course, is another way of saying that Utilitarianism begs all significant questions of the justice of the market distribution of income.

Green's analysis of Utilitarianism was not as far-reaching as it might appear for he did not question the principles of market justice. In fact, his criticism of Utilitarianism and his conception of the moral ideal were designed to sustain market principles, Utilitarian postulates by themselves being inadequate to the task. It is within this context that the question as to what extent Green accepted the ontological view of man as an infinite desirer must be considered. For Green to have criticized purely Utilitarian postulates as antithetical to human self-realization while at the same time claiming that capitalist institutions were necessary for self-realization (a position which meant that free access to the means of life and labour for all men was not necessary), he would

have had to have accepted as fundamentally valid the picture of man as an infinite desirer. A view of man as an infinite desirer does not, of course, require access to the means of life and labour. I think that he did accept that view, although not unambiguously so. (He could not have accepted it unambiguously given his developmental position however non-substantive that position was.²¹

Green appears to claim that the knowing and self-objectifying subject, man, is involved in a continuous process of becoming, of seeking fulfillment of the moral end, and this must be an infinitely desirous man whose wants are continuously transformed into objects essential for his self-realization. As Green says "there necessarily accompanies or supervenes upon the idea of manifold good things, in which manifold satisfactions have been or may be found, the idea of a possible object which may yield satisfaction of the desiring man or self, as such, who, *as satisfaction of each particular desire is attained, still finds himself anew dissatisfied and wanting.*"²²

The link between the moral ideal and the notion of man as an infinite desirer paves the way for Green's justification of individual appropriation.

Every step in the definition of the wanted object implies a further action of the same subject, in the way of comparing various wants that arise in the process of life, along with the incidents of their satisfaction, as they only can be compared by a subject which is other than the process, not itself a stage or series of stages in the succession which it observes. At the same time as the reflecting subject traverses the series of wants, which it distinguishes from itself while it presents their filling as its object, there arises the idea of a satisfaction on the whole — *an idea never realisable, but for ever striving to realise itself in the attainment of a greater command over means to the satisfaction of particular wants.*²³

Green's view of society is in this light most interesting. Society is the medium through which his developmental ideal is wedded to those market ontological assumptions which he accepts. It is, in other words, the medium through which human motivation and the autonomous will are related one to the other. Green, it will be remembered, held something like a classical view of man's essence: that man could

develop himself, realize his moral personality, only in relation to other men who mutually recognize a common end. Green's moral ideal was an individual end, yet it was only thus insofar as it was also a social end (the common being a social good). For him, social life is to personality what language is to thought. Language presupposes thought as a capacity, but in us the capacity of thought is only actualised in language. "So human society presupposes persons in capacity — subjects capable each of conceiving himself and the bettering of his life as an end to himself — but it is only in the intercourse of men, each recognized by each as an end, not merely a means, and thus as having reciprocal claims, that the capacity is actualised and we really live as persons."²⁴

Society is the medium of self-development, but it can only be so if it accomplishes simultaneously another important function:

Society is founded on. . . neutral interest, in the sense that unless it were operative, however incapable of expressing itself in abstract formulas, there would be nothing to countervail the tendency, inherent in the self-asserting and self-seeking subject, to make every object he deals with, even an object of natural affection, a means to his own gratification.²⁵

There are shades of Hobbes here: man is naturally invasive, a man's power is his power over other, society is possible only if men temper their invasive behaviour. For Green that involves the recognition of the moral ideal, and consequently the recognition by each man of every other person as an end in himself. In a sense, Hobbes' all-powerful sovereign is replaced by the moral ideal. However, society is indispensable for individual personality development. If man is naturally invasive, then social institutions must take account of and limit invasive behaviour, but at the same time they must allow for the expression of such behaviour in as non-destructive a manner as possible. And here we have another way of understanding the moralization of the market: market institutions not only perform the negative function of limiting, while at the same time manifesting, invasive behaviour, but they also transform it into a means for attaining an ethical end.

The nature of Green's conception of the desiring subject lies, I think, at the heart of the tension in Green's thought between the ontological views of man on the one hand as an infinite consumer, and on the other hand, as an exerter of his human capacities. Green, of course, saw no

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such tension because he saw the latter as related in some fundamental way to the former.

IV

It is on the foundations of his analysis of Utilitarianism and society that Green constructed his theory of property, the resulting edifice being the right of unlimited individual appropriation. That Green held a view of man as an infinite appropriator could be deduced from the fact that he believed man to be an infinite desirer. As Professor Macpherson tells us, ²⁶ all that is required to convert man as an infinite desirer or consumer into a man as an infinite appropriator is the assumption that land and capital must be privately owned to be productive — and Green made such an assumption.²⁷ However, Green also made an explicit defence of individual appropriation on essentially the same basis as did Kant and Hegel: that it was necessary for the realization and objectification of the individual personality.

In Green's case the developmental role of property was brought out within the context of his discussion on rights. By a "right," Green meant a claim that all members of a society share with one another which is granted because it aids the fulfillment of the common good. It is acknowledged as a right by society and is immanent in the institutions and practices of the social order.

Green's concept of a "right" served an important function with respect to his practical political position. Following Hegel, Green saw the state as the harmonizer of rights. Within the context of Green's thought this meant in effect that the state provided (or, more correctly, maintained) the conditions necessary for the attainment of the common good. By virtue of its commonality, such a good theoretically admits of no competition. Translated into practical terms, this meant that the purpose of the state, indeed, of liberal democratic institutions generally, was to effect class conciliation.²⁸ Green did not conceive of class conflict as an ineradicable feature of market society (although he did recognize and gave a moral justification of the class divisions such a society entails). Thus, he could assert the necessity and justice of competition without any sense of contradiction — "that each member of the society . . . contributes to satisfy the others in seeking to satisfy himself, and that each is aware that the other does so; whence there results a common interest in the free play of the powers of all."²⁹ The corollary of this position is that Green did not see as an integral aspect of market

society the coercion arising out of dominance of the owning class. Or, more specifically, he did not see such coercion *as* coercion.

As might be expected given the nature of a right in Green's system, and the view that Green held of the necessity for private property as a means to develop individual personality, his ultimate justification for individual appropriation rested on its being essential for the fulfillment of the moral ideal. The moral justification for property is therefore totally dependent upon the existence of the divine principle which manifests itself through the action of the rational will. Appropriation is the individual's effort to realize through the act of will the potentially better state of himself of which he is conscious. Private property is therefore essential for the development of the free morality as it makes possible that self-imposed individual restraint necessary for the free submission to the moral ideal. The market not only registers human material choices but moral choices as well. Without private property, "The area within which (a man) can shape his own circumstances is not sufficient to allow of the opposite possibilities of right and wrong being presented to him, and thus of his learning to love right for its own sake . . ." ³⁰

Through property a man moralizes himself and develops a sense of responsibility. The extent to which Green conceived of private property and the market as crucial to the fulfillment of individual capacities may be seen from the fact that this most concrete statement of what the exercise of those capacities entailed was given in that context. Thus clan ownership of property and the restriction on individual appropriation therein implied was to be superseded with a view toward "the emancipation of the individual from all restrictions upon the free moral life and his provision with means for it." ³¹ However, the property gained from the free interplay of men's appropriative powers was only of value "as a permanent apparatus for carrying out a plan of life, for expressing ideas of what is beautiful, or giving effect to benevolent wishes." ³² One could hardly wish a better expression of what it means to lead a fully human life. We are once again shown that Green's chief importance as a theorist lies in his attempt to depict capitalism as the essential means to the realization of that life.

In essence, Green packed his views on the nature of appropriation and property into his famous concept of positive freedom. This concept involved "the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributing to a common good." The progress of society is thus measured "by the increasing development and exercise on the whole of those powers of contributing to social good with which we believe the mem-

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bers of society to be endowed; in short, by the greater power on the part of the citizens as a body to make the most and best of themselves.”³³ Given Green’s views on property, we will see that the condition for freedom was that all men must be allowed the opportunity to become appropriators and this could only come about if the market as the vehicle of free moral choice was to operate fully in accordance with its principles, with all obstacles removed. This is crucial with respect to the scope that Green granted to state intervention in the economic sphere.

What of those who have done little if any appropriating; “an impoverished and reckless proletariat”? Green admitted the existence of a vast number of men for whom the right to property was chimerical. Men in such a condition had no opportunity to live the moral life:

In the eyes of the law they have rights of appropriation, but in fact they have not the choice of providing means for a free moral life, of developing and giving reality or expression to a good will, an interest in social well-being. A man who possesses nothing but his powers of labour and who has to sell these to a capitalist for bare daily maintenance, might as well, in respect of the ethical purposes which the possession of property should serve, be denied rights of property altogether.³⁴

An accurate analysis and, on the surface, a fatal criticism of capitalism from Green’s perspective. Any developmental view of man requires that all men have property in order to develop themselves. What Green did not see was that the capitalist property institution — the right to exclude others from the benefit of something coupled with the tendency in capitalism for land and capital to accumulate in the hands of a few — prevents most men from every having property in the only sense that means anything: access to the means of labour. Thus Green attributed the existence of a large, propertyless class to the historical setting in which capitalist societies had grown. Through regimes of force and conquest, the landed aristocracy (a favourite liberal *bête noir* had without the expenditure of labour or the results of labour, appropriated virtually all the land in most industrial countries. The result was the creation of a large, landless class, trained in the habits of serfdom, whose members lived lives of forced labour and were unable to develop that sense of responsibility necessary for the growth of the free morality. The industrial proletariat was their progeny. Hence the solution to the

problems posed by the existence of this proletariat lay in the abolition of those landlord rights, traceable to the original conquest, which interfered with the right of each individual to make the most of himself. By and large, save for certain state-imposed restraints designed to prevent land from being made unserviceable to human wants and landlords from creating conditions deleterious to general health and freedom, the answer lay in exposing land as fully as possible to market forces. To that end, the right of entail was to be abolished. By thus making land "a much more marketable commodity," the benefits inherent in capitalism could overcome the disabilities (i.e. the existence of a large, impoverished proletariat) imposed by the antecedent system.³⁵

V

Having attributed the problems of industrial capitalism to the feudal distribution of land, Green took to defending capitalism from charges that such problems were inevitable in a market society. All we must do, Green tells us, is to investigate the social outcome of those antecedent conditions and "we shall see the unfairness of laying on capitalism or the free development of individual wealth the blame which is really due to the arbitrary and violent manner in which rights over land have been acquired and exercised. . ."³⁶ It is true that large accumulations of capital through the market process lead to the employment of large masses of hired labourers, "But there is nothing in the nature of the case to keep these labourers in the condition of living from hand to mouth, to exclude them from that education of the sense of responsibility which depends on the possibility of permanent ownership. . . Therefore in the accumulation of wealth, so far as it arises from the saving by anyone of the products of his labour . . . there is nothing which tends to lessen for anyone else the possibilities of ownership."³⁷ The remedy for propertyless workers is obvious: they must become capitalists. There is nothing in market society preventing them from doing so and in fact many of them do insofar as they own homes and furniture and participate in benefit-societies. The market process itself is essential if this state of affairs is to come about in that it provides wages to workers — and Green appears to say that wages are a form of wealth similar to profits. Thus, in a sense, Green gives us an early version of the "filter-down" theory: ". . .supposing trade and labour to be free, wealth must be constantly distributed throughout the process in

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the shape of wages to labourers and of profits to those who mediate in the business of exchange."³⁸

At bottom, Green's rebuke to those who argued that capitalism entailed the existence of a class of men who were reduced to selling their labour power for subsistence wages was that such a position followed from an inaccurate picture of the nature of wealth production. The increased wealth of one man does not mean the diminished wealth of another. He says, "We must not think of wealth as a given stock of commodities of which a larger share cannot fall to one without taking from the share that falls to another. The wealth of the world is constantly increasing in proportion as the constant production of new wealth by labour exceeds the constant consumption of what is already produced."³⁹

Green misses the point here, somewhat in the same way as did John Rawls when he attempted to calculate the advantages to the working class wrought by the class inequalities attendant to capitalist production incentives.⁴⁰ Given Green's fundamental acceptance of the Utilitarian ontology, this is understandable. In effect Green says that the productive power of capitalism will make possible an ever-increasing flow of material utilities and part of this increase may go to a worker in order to make him "a possessor of property. . . and of such property as will at least enable him to develop a sense of responsibility, as distinct from mere property in the immediate necessities of life."⁴¹ A flow of utilities beyond that necessary for the renewal of a worker's productive capacities would suffice to moralize him and enable him to formulate and execute a plan of life consistent with fulfillment of the moral ideal. The dictates of positive freedom would thus be realized. But the point is that a man so situated is not free to formulate his own life plan: he must continuously make over his ability to do things and to make things to those who own the means of labour and it is for *their* purposes that he exercises his powers. Given the Utilitarian basis of his thought, Green saw as sufficient for the moral life the fact that all men could appropriate consumables. He did not have to deal with the question of the impossibility of all men being able in a market society to appropriate the capital necessary as a medium for the exercise of their human capacities. He did not see clearly that a system of property relations was also a system of power relations; the issue of access to the means of labour did not pose itself.

Thus for Green, the existence, on the one hand, of the right of all men to make the best of themselves and, on the other, the reality of a class-divided society where those who control land and capital have

vastly greater life-possibilities presented no problem (as it likewise did not nearly a century later for John Rawls and John Chapman). Here Green's refusal to deal with the possibility of social conflict is important. The right to private property, like any other right, is universal: it must exist for everyone if it is to exist for anyone. A man has the right to appropriate (i.e. fulfill himself morally) only so far as the exercise of that right does not interfere with the like prerogative of another. Because the common good admits of no competition, Green did not really foresee any conflict here, so long as the basis in the common good of all rights was clearly understood. This is the key point. Presuming, as market theory does, that each individual is equally free, how can all men make the best of themselves within a class-divided society without there being conflict of rights? We have already seen the answer: the market generates a sufficient flow of utilities so that even the lowliest proletarian may get enough to moralize himself. But why is that sufficient given man's nature as an infinite consumer and given the fact that the market liberates all men's powers of appropriation? Why, especially, is that sufficient given man's naturally invasive behaviour and the fact that the market manifests that behaviour although in a limited form?

The answer, I suggest, lies in an understanding of what is involved in the notion of a "right." A right is essential for the fulfillment of the moral ideal which is the same for everyone. Yet Green not only recognizes but justifies a class-divided society:

Once admit as the idea of property that nature should be progressively adapted to the service of man by a process in which each, while working freely or for himself, i.e. as determined by a conception of his own good, at the same time contributes to the social good, and it will follow that property must be unequal . . . Considered as representing the conquest of nature by the effort of free and variously gifted individuals, property must be unequal; and no less must it be so if considered as a means by which individuals fulfill social functions . . . those functions are various and the means required for their fulfillment are various.⁴³

Since the exercise of rights is dependent on the performance of social functions, (those that contribute to the common good), Green's

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analysis, like Locke's,⁴⁴ would suggest that there may be different substantive content to rights in accordance with different class positions. Appropriation, remember, "is an expression of will; of the individual's effort to give reality to a conception of his own good."⁴⁵ The personal good is inseparable from the common good. Those few who have appropriated much more than all the others in a capitalist society, who control that society's land and capital, must presumably be performing social functions consistent with that extensive ownership. In short, such men must be making greater contributions to the common good than those who have less property; inequality of holdings could not otherwise be justified. In the context of Green's analysis of capitalism Green took such a position. In a manner similar to that of John Rawls, Green justified class inequalities as essential incentives to production: the existence of a capitalist class is the necessary condition for the creation of wealth for anyone, and hence the possibility of individual moralization. Capitalist production is therefore essential if anyone is to realize himself, even an individual without any capital at all. (This is why Green supported "those two great sources of inequality," freedom of trade and freedom of bequest.) If all this is recognized, conflict can be mitigated.

Let us put the issue another way. We have seen that Green explicitly postulated that unequal capacities entailed unequal property holdings. In his system this difference translates into a difference in moral capabilities: those with capital contribute more to the fulfillment of the common good than those without. This assumption is a central aspect of Green's conception of society. Society is based on differing moral capabilities take this to be implied in Green's claim that "It is in fact only so far as we are members of a society, of which we can conceive the common good as our own, that the idea has any practical hold on us at all, and this very membership implies confinement in our individual realisation of the idea. Each has primarily to fulfill the duties of his station. His capacity for action beyond the range of those duties is definitely bounded also by his sphere of personal interests, his character, his *realised* possibility."⁴⁶ Society, indeed, ought to make self-realization possible for everyone, but self-realization is within the "confinement" of one's station in life, for such "confinement" is "the condition of social life."⁴⁷ In the capitalist market society which Green is writing about and which for him is the good society, one's means of confinement is his class. Although theoretically everyone is "confined," those who own the land and capital are hardly so, as they can determine how society's productive resources will be used and thereby

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determine the conditions of self-realization for everyone else.

Since capitalism is necessary for everyone's self-realization according to Green, it follows that the capitalist, within the "confines" of his social position must be performing a "higher" moral function than the worker. The other side of the coin is that the capitalist has a greater capability for fulfilling the moral end than does the man without any capital. The argument is circular: the capitalist is entitled to his property because of his greater moral capability and he has a greater moral capability because of his capital. The argument must be circular because Green does not deal directly with the question of equal access to the means of labour.

VI

Green's most practical political statement was his essay "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract" wherein he discussed the extent to which the state might interfere with that most hallowed of liberal institutions. The essay demonstrates both the extent to which Green's theoretical analysis was manifested in his substantive political position and the size of the debt owed to Green by modern welfare-state liberals.

Green was no great exponent of state intervention in the social and economic order. In fact, the presumption of his thought was against it, especially in view of his claim that the state could not legislate morality. (This implies more than it would seem on the surface: in essence, property is objectified morality.) Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which the state, as maintainer of the conditions of self-realization, must step in to regulate contracts that would impede the fulfillment of the moral ideal. In the case of "Liberal Legislation," such intervention is on behalf of the dispossessed in the nineteenth century British society, the factory worker reduced to selling his labour for subsistence, and the Irish tenant farmer in somewhat the same position vis-a-vis his landlord. Although, as we have seen, Green took pains to absolve capitalism of any blame for this situation, his acceptance of a developmental view made him slightly uncomfortable about some of the characteristics of market society. He saw, quite rightly, that moralization was not possible for factory workers or tenant farmers, and in effect admitted that freedom of contract may have had something to do with it.⁴⁸

At the same time, Green proposed to do nothing about changing the contractual nature of the social order because freedom of contract, suitably purified, and the market mechanism that embodied it, were essential for the presentation of the moral choices necessary for self-

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development. Thus, while the conditions under which a labourer would sell his labour power would be limited to those which make it possible for him to be a contributor to the social good (i.e. minimum welfare standards would be established), he would still be a *seller*, his labour power still alienable. Inasmuch as this is the case, there would still be a transfer and diminution of powers since the labourer would have to pay for access to the land and capital which any meaningful theory of self-realization required him to have. This despite Green's contention, a product of his own developmental view, "that, though labour might be reckoned an exchangeable commodity it differed from all other commodities inasmuch as it was inseparable from the person of the labourer."⁴⁹ Once again we are made aware of the limitations of Green's critique of classical liberalism.

From this analysis we may contend that state intervention in order to remove obstacles to self-realization is for Green equivalent to removing impediments to the fullest operation of the market. Inefficient land use? Abolish entail and protect Irish tenant farmers from undue exploitation. Workers require skills in order to enhance production? Pass a compulsory education act. Healthy workers essential to increased efficient production? Pass factory laws and laws restricting the hours of work for women and children. Drunkenness deleterious to the workers' health? Enact temperance legislation. Green was among the first to glean the major insight of twentieth century capitalism: that reasonably healthy, literate, well-fed, well-clothed and well-housed workers not only increase production and therefore profits, but are less likely to engage in revolution. For most everyone else it took a massive depression, fifty years after Green's death, for them to get the point.

We may conclude that Green saw liberal legislation as a device which provided for the conditions within which workers could moralize themselves. Such legislation could help raise them to a material level sufficient to allow them to make the correct moral choices, those choices being determined through the operation of an autonomous market mechanism which expresses human material wants and provides the conditions which allow for the transformation of those wants into objects of the will. Like James Mill, Green wished the working class to be middle class in outlook if not in ownership, (although, as we have seen, Green saw workers as "owners").

VII

It is clear that any critic of capitalist democracy must come to terms with the thought of T.H. Green. Within his premises, he argues his

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position quite persuasively and his ideas find expression in some form in the writings of such men as Walter Lippmann and John Kenneth Galbraith. His theoretical analysis was a response to the social conditions which he saw as attendant to and caused by the nineteenth century industrial capitalism and which he also saw as an affront to human dignity. He recognized that the narrow Utilitarian, liberal ontological assumptions which underlay the market had something to do with the existence of those social conditions and saw the need for a much broader and morally satisfying concept of the human essence if those conditions were to be ameliorated. He saw also that if Utilitarian ontological postulates were to be superseded, Utilitarian philosophical premises had likewise to be transcended. To this end he adopted Idealist categories of analysis.

As a result, Green posited a developmental view of man's essence with society as the medium through which men continuously seek to realize their human potentialities and so fulfill the moral ideal immanent in all rational human action. This position he embodied in his view of positive freedom. But, believing as he did in the productive efficiency of capitalism and the justice of the market distribution of income, he felt that self-development could occur only in a market society. Individual appropriation thus becomes the objectification of the moral personality: the market is moralized, fulfilling a purpose broader than that granted to it by Utilitarianism. Thus the issue of equal access to the means of life and labour, which would seem to be implied by any meaningful view of man as a rational, purposive being who seeks to develop his attributes in accordance with his own conscious purposes, is not considered by Green. His belief in capitalism, which necessarily entails the belief in the alienability of labour power and the freedom of contract by means of which that power is to be used in the most gainful way possible (albeit *morally* gainful), places Green firmly in what, following Professor Macpherson, we might call the possessive individualist camp.

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Notes

1. A notable exception is the work of Professor C.B. Macpherson. See his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962). My considerable debt to Professor Macpherson's insights will be evident throughout this paper.
2. *Prolegomena to Ethics*, par. 351.
3. See, for example, *Prolegomena*, par. 331.
4. See, for example, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, par. 24. Here, Green links a social and institutional analysis with his basic philosophical position.
5. *Prolegomena*, par. 8.
6. *Ibid.*, par. 37.
7. *Ibid.*, par. 13.
8. Cf. *Prolegomena*, par. 345: "The course of man's actions. . . depends on the pleasure and pains that have happened to come in his way, through a chain of events over which he has no control. These determine his desires and versions, which in turn determine his actions and through them to some extent the pleasures and pains of his future."
9. *Ibid.*, par. 218.
10. *Ibid.*, par. 180.
11. *Ibid.*, par. 85.
12. There was one want which Green felt should be suppressed to some degree: the desire for liquor. For reasons I will later suggest, Green was a staunch advocate of temperance legislation.
13. *Prolegomena*, par. 171.
14. *Ibid.*, par. 219.
15. *Ibid.*, par. 341.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, par. 338.
18. See, for example, *ibid.*, par. 172.
19. *Ibid.*, par. 337.
20. C.B. Macpherson, "Democratic Theory: Ontology and Technology," in *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford, 1973), p. 35.
21. As non-substantive as Green's developmental ideal was, it did serve to indicate that he was aware to some extent of the alienation resulting in capitalist society where man is separated from his labour power and from that which his power produces, that power being turned

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against him through objectification into a set of social relations which assume an existence independent of human will and which force all men to play determined roles. For Green the aim of philosophy was the articulation of a conception of the world as a rational, coherent universe whose parts manifested in their different ways the same basic principle. This desire for unity was expressed in his notion of the unity of subject and object, and his view that the moral ideal was achieved through the union of will and reason, or knowledge (theory) and practice. This union of theory and practice was an expression of "the consciousness of self and a world. . . in a sense opposed to each other, and. . . the conscious effort to overcome this opposition." (*Prolegomena*, par. 130). The developmental ideal was an expression of "an inward demand for the recognition of a unity in the world answering to the unity of ourselves — a demand involved in the self-consciousness which, as we have seen, alone enables us to observe facts as such." (*Prolegomena*, par. 186). In short, Green saw man as estranged from the world (and from himself), and believed that his philosophical position would indicate the solution. The extent to which Green understood the nature of alienation may be seen from the fact that his analysis of labour, although cursory, indicates that he saw labour as something more than a mere commodity. Yet his acceptance of capitalism prevented him from carrying his analysis through to the point where he saw that alienation could be overcome only if a man exercised his labour power fully in accordance with his own rational, conscious purposes. Labour power in this context could no longer be viewed as alienable (Green still held that it was) and society would necessarily provide for equal access for all individuals to the means of labour.

22. *Prolegomena*, par. 219 (emphasis mine).
23. *Ibid.*, par. 85 (emphasis mine).
24. *Ibid.*, par. 183.
25. *Ibid.*, par. 190.
26. Macpherson, *loc. cit.*, p. 30.
27. *Political Obligation*, pars. 218, 219. Here, Green does not speak explicitly of the greater material productivity to be had by private ownership of land and capital, but of the greater possibility for the development of the "free morality" necessary for the attainment of the common good. Given Green's conceptual framework, however, both positions are virtually the same.

28. Of Green's position, Sabine wrote:

Green's philosophy attempted to state a moral platform so broad that all men of social goodwill could stand on it. . . Its purpose was to transform liberalism from the social philosophy of a single set of interests seen from the point of view of a particular class into one which could claim to take account of all important interests seen from the point of view of the general good of the national community.

G.H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York, 1961), p. 737.

Perhaps in the final analysis, however, Green was not totally certain of the inevitability of class harmony. Thus he argues that mutual recognition of a right to private property is inadequate by itself for the maintenance of the right. "This customary recognition, founded on a moral or rational will, requires indeed to be represented by some adequate force before it can result in a real maintenance of the rights of property. The wild beast in man will not otherwise yield obedience to the rational will." (*Political Obligation*, par. 217). Man being naturally invasive, the state, in the best liberal tradition, ought to maintain the rights of those who have property against the invasiveness of those who have little or none. I believe that

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Green's analysis implies this view of the state as class instrument because of (a) his belief in the rightness and justice of middle class morality, or, putting it another way, (b) his belief in what I call the differing moral capabilities of men in accordance with their class positions. It is those in the lower class who are least likely to act voluntarily in accordance with the rational will (i.e. respect for the right of property and individual appropriation) and may need coercion.

29. *Political Obligation*, par. 216. Cf. par. 219: "A necessary condition at once of the growth of a free morality. . . is that free play should be given to every man's powers of appropriation."
30. *Ibid.*, par. 219.
31. *Ibid.*, par. 220.
32. *Ibid.*
33. "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract," in J.R. Rodman (ed.), *The Political Theory of T.H. Green* (New York, 1964), p. 52.
34. *Political Obligation*, par. 220.
35. *Ibid.*, pars. 228-230; "Liberal Legislation," pp. 60ff. Interestingly enough, the closest Green comes to formulating something like a conception of the transfer of powers is in his discussion of the almost feudal relationship existing between Irish landlords and tenant farmers ("Liberal Legislation," pp. 66-68).
36. *Political Obligation*, par. 230.
37. *Ibid.*, pars. 226. 227.
38. *Ibid.*, par. 226.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Cf. Macpherson, "Revisionist Liberalism," in *Democratic Theory*, pp. 87ff.
41. *Political Obligation*, par. 221.
41. See J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, 1973); and J. Chapman, "Natural Rights and Justice in Liberalism," in D.D. Raphael (ed.) *Political Theory and the Rights of Man* (London, 1967).
43. *Ibid.*, par. 223. Cf. *Prolegomena*, par. 191: ". . . it would certainly seem as if distinctions of social position and power were necessarily incidental to the development of human personality. There cannot be this development without a recognized power of appropriating material things. This appropriation must vary in its effects according to talent and opportunity, and from that variation again must result differences in the form which personality takes in different men."
44. Cf. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, pp. 221ff.
45. *Ibid.*, par. 213.
46. *Prolegomena*, par. 183.

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47. Cf. *Political Obligation*, par. 224 and par. 17.
48. Cf. "Liberal Legislation," pp. 59-60: "No doubt there were many high-minded employers who did their best for their workpeople before the days of state-interference, but they could not prevent less scrupulous hirers of labour from hiring it on the cheapest terms. It is true that cheap labour is in the long run dear labour, but it is so only in the long run. If labour is to be had under conditions incompatible with the health or decent housing or education of the labourer, there will always be plenty of people to buy it under those conditions. . ."
49. *Ibid.*, p. 60.