CHAPTER V

C.B. MACPHERSON: POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

This chapter discusses C.B. Macpherson’s claim that ‘Possessive Individualism’ is the foundation to the political philosophy of Hobbes. Macpherson presented an historical interpretation, which bases the philosophy of Hobbes on the possessive quality of a market society. This historical interpretation helps us to minimize the importance of scientific method in Hobbes’s philosophy, by arguing for a gap between Hobbesian presentation of physiological nature of man (which is materialism) and man’s necessary behavior towards each other (which is psychology). It is argued that the gap is filled by a certain kind of social assumptions. However, C.B. Macpherson’s main aim is not to limit the significance of scientific method in the philosophy of Hobbes. He, while pointing out the difficulty of finding a firm theoretical basis for the liberal democratic state, inquires into the roots of liberal tradition for the solution. This inquiry led him to the seventeenth century individualism, which is the root of liberalism. Individualism is an outstanding characteristic of the whole liberal tradition. He identified the difficulty of modern democratic theory in its ‘Possessive Quality’. The possessive qualities that are present in the seventeenth century political philosophies correspond to the actual conditions of a market society of that period. These possessive assumptions worked as strength to the liberal theory of seventeenth century, but became weakness to the nineteenth
century liberalism. The reason for this weakness, he identified, is the development of market society, which destroyed certain prerequisites while deriving liberal theory from possessive assumptions. He argued that, though the prerequisites of the possessive assumptions have been destroyed by the development of modern market society, yet these assumptions could not be abandoned since they are closely confirmed to the society. The persistence of these possessive assumptions is responsible for the difficulties of the liberal democratic theory in our own time. According to him, individualism as a basic theoretical position starts from Hobbes. Hobbes’s postulates were highly individualistic and he deduced political rights and obligation from the interest and will of dissociated individuals. The fact that individualism has its basic theoretical basis in Hobbes led Macpherson to start his analysis of the difficulty of the 20th century liberal democratic society from Hobbes. The perennial fascination towards Hobbes’s political philosophy has been proved by the fact that it has been re-interpreted and now a days even completely reconstructed. Hobbes has been interpreted as a constructor of a monolithic structure. This has been re-interpreted by breaking the monolith either to discredit or to rescue a substantial part of it from the fatal weakness of the other parts.

Let us begin by understanding what Macpherson means by possessive individualism and then proceed to discuss the analysis of state-of-nature to know where the social assumptions have entered into Hobbes’s philosophy and how possessive market society fits to Hobbes’s requirements.
Possessive individualism is a theory which states that every individual is both free and independent in having exclusive control over his capacities and is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, owing nothing to the society in possessing the capacities. In other words, possessive individualism talks about the possession of the possessions such as freedom and independence from the wills of others, in using which he has an exclusive control. Individuals have this exclusive control not only in owning them but also in using them. Let us look at the assumptions that are provided by Macpherson to understand possessive individualism.

1. What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.

2. Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.

3. The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.

4. Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his propriety in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labor.

5. Human society consists of a series of market relations.
6. Since the freedom from the will of others is what makes a man human, each individual's freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to secure the same freedom for other.

7. Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors of themselves. (1962:263-4)

In the first postulate, humanness is defined as freedom from dependence on the will of others. Humanness, in this definition, is equated with freedom. Freedom is said to be the natural quality of man. This freedom though makes man independent of other's will, it also gives him scope to enter into relations with others voluntarily on his own choice, and for his benefit. Further, the individual's capacities are independent of society, which implies that he owes nothing to the society. He has an exclusive control over his capacities and these capacities cannot be alienated from him. But he can alienate his capacity to labor. This capacity to labor makes human society consisting of a series of market relations. Since by nature all individuals are free equally, their freedom is limited by obligations and rules that are necessary to secure freedom for others. In order to protect the individual's property in his person, and maintain orderly relations of exchange between them political society is constituted. These possessive individualistic assumptions, according to Macpherson, are in their fullest and clearest form in Hobbes.
Two possible questions may arise regarding the prevalence of these assumptions in Hobbes's philosophy. One is, where does the social assumptions come from. Two, what kind of society is consistent with these social assumptions. Macpherson answers the first question in his re-examination of the state-of-nature. The second question is discussed by offering three kinds of model societies, one of which was claimed to be consistent with the philosophy of Hobbes.

Let us now start with the first question and understand where possessive individualistic assumptions were introduced by Hobbes, by analyzing the description of the state-of-nature.

Unlike the previously discussed interpreters such as Leo Strauss, A.E. Taylor and Warrender. Macpherson accepts the assumption of traditional interpretation that there is continuity in the philosophy of Hobbes from physiological principles to political obligation. Hobbes deduced from his description of man as a self-moving mechanism (which is materialism) the necessary behavior of men towards each other (which is psychology) from which the need for a sovereign follows. Macpherson argues that the argument from physiological principles to the necessary behavior of men, which is described as state of war, is not a simple deduction. It was considered to be a simple deduction by the traditional interpreters because it is misunderstood by them. The reason for this misunderstanding is that the argument from the physiological principles to the social motion of man is usually taken to be culminating in the state-of-nature. Hobbesian description of man as a self-moving mechanism and psychological principles of man, contact each other and take their
fullest shape in the state-of-nature. Nevertheless, he believes that Hobbes introduced possessive individualistic assumptions about the behavior of man along with his description of man in the state-of-nature. Macpherson focuses his attention on the state-of-nature in order to understand where the assumptions got introduced. His analysis of state-of-nature tries to bring out three important aspects into light: one. that the state-of-nature is about the social and not about the natural man: two. that the state-of-nature in any case is not the culminating point of the arguments from physiology to the behavior of men towards each other: and three. that Hobbes's theory of necessary relations of men in society requires the assumption of a certain kind of society.

According to Macpherson, Hobbesian conception of the state-of-nature is not about the behavior of the natural man as opposed to the civilized. It is the natural condition of mankind of the civilized form, if we withdraw the law and the contract enforcement. To quote Macpherson:

The state of nature depicts the way in which men, being what they are, would necessarily behave if there were no authority to enforce law or contract (1962: 19).

Further, the physiological propositions about the state-of-nature do not contain all that is needed for the deduction of a civil sovereign. Hobbes's statements about sense, imagination, memory, reason, appetite and aversion, which are physiological principles, do not contain the necessary requirements for the deduction of the
necessity of the sovereign. These propositions describe the human being as a system of self-moving, self-guided matter in motion. These propositions are about man as such, abstracted from society, as opposed to civilized man. They do not contain all that is needed for the deduction of the sovereign state. But if we take physiological propositions, the statements about the behavior of men in the hypothetical absence of any society, such as statements about the necessary behavior of men towards each other, then they do contain the requirements for the deductions of the sovereign. This implies that the physiological propositions are, as the argument proceeds, not about man as a mechanical system as such, but they include some social assumptions about the behavior of men in a civilized society. According to Macpherson:

You can move from the universal struggle for power in society, or from the state of nature, to the necessity of the sovereign without further assumptions, but you cannot move from man as a mechanical system to the universal struggle for power, or to the state of nature, without further assumptions. (1962: 18)

The deduction of state of war situation from man as a self-moving mechanism is not possible without few assumptions about the behavior of man. Macpherson argued that these assumptions are about the relations prevailing between men in certain kind of society.

Further, Macpherson argues that the state-of-nature is a logical and not a historical hypothesis. However, it is not a logical hypothesis reached by setting aside
completely the historically acquired characteristics of men. It is not about the historically primitive man, who is untouched by the civilized attitudes towards power. It is about the natural man as opposed to civilized man. What Hobbes deduces from the state-of-nature is the need of man to acknowledge the absolute sovereignty that is based on his understanding of the historically acquired nature of men in existing civil societies. The inference that is drawn about the passions of man-in-the-state-of-nature is from the passions of existing men (his contemporary man), "passions shaped by civilized living." Hobbes deduced the behavior of man-in-the-state-of-nature from the behavior of man in the civilized societies by setting aside the law and contract enforcement. To quote Macpherson:

His state of nature is a statement of the behavior to which men as they now are, men who live in civilized societies and have the desires of civilized men, would be led if all law and contract enforcement (i.e., even the present imperfect enforcement) were removed. To get the state of nature, Hobbes has set aside law, but not the socially acquired behaviour and desires of men. (1962: 22)

The fact that the statements about man in the state-of-nature are about the statements of the behavior of social and civilized man can be confirmed by looking at Hobbes's own descriptions of man. His exposition of the state-of-nature describes man as having a ‘tendency to invade and destroy each other and lock his doors and
This description of man is a clear evidence that he is talking about the civilized human being's behavior, where there is no common superior power. It is assumed that Hobbesian conception of the behavior of men in the state-of-nature is non-social, but actually, it is a statement about the behavior of the social and the civilized men. He reached this state-of-nature by successive degrees of abstraction from the civilized society. According to Macpherson, if we take men as they now are, remove the fear of unpleasant or fatal consequences of their actions to themselves, and their present natural proclivities would lead directly to the state of war. As the above quote suggests, the state-of-nature is 'a deduction from the appetites and other faculties, not of man as such, but of civilized man.' Hobbes primarily derives the nature of man from observation based on his contemporary society. He deduces the state-of-nature, which is of state of war, by temporarily setting aside the fear of a

\[1\] In Leviathan Hobbes says "it may seem strange to some men, that has not well weighed these things: that Nature should thus, [i.e. as in the state of nature] dissociate, and render men apt to invade, and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to his inference, made from the Passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him therefore consider with himselfe, when taking a journey, he arms himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied: when going to sleep, he locks his dores; when even in his bouse he locks his chests: and this when he knowes there bee done him: what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed: of his fellow Citizens, when he locks his dore: and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests." (1668: 97)
sovereign. However, the absence of the sovereign heightens the fear of the other individuals being omnipresent.

Further, the kind of negative description that Hobbes gives about the state-of-nature as a state where there is 'no industry, no culture, no arts, no letters and no society.' proves that the state-of-nature is deduced from the civilized society with the historically acquired social behaviour. What the man-in-the-state-of-nature lacks is 'precisely all the goods of civilized living: property, industry, commerce, the sciences, arts, and letters, as well as security for his life.' (1962: 29)

Macpherson, in this way, regards the state-of-nature both as logical, as well as historical hypothesis. It is logical in so far as it is a link between physiological principles and the civil society. It is historical in so far as it is deduced from the historically acquired nature of man in existing civil societies. According to him, Hobbes's theory of 'necessary relations of men in society, as each striving for valuing and honoring of his power by others,' requires the assumption of a possessive model society. The value of a man gets manifested by the honor that he gets from others. This value is both determined by and determines the other's opinion of his power. Individuals make their own estimates about the powers of others independently on their own by comparing themselves to others. This comparison leads to struggle for power. Hobbes developed the model of society which contains an incessant competitive struggle of man for power over others even before the exposition of the state-of-nature. The three principle causes of quarrel in the state-of-nature, such as competition, diffidence and glory, arise out of civilized man's desire to live well.
Only a civilized man can have the conception of these three principles and these three principles can be the causes of quarrel.

Moreover, the fact that Hobbes used the resolutive-compositive method is itself a surest proof for stating that his analysis of psychological principles is about the civilized man. His order of thought is from man in society back to man as a mechanical system of matter in motion, and only then forward again to man's necessary social behavior. But leaving the first part of the method, he starts from the description of man as a mechanical system of matter in motion. The resolutive part, which he did not demonstrate, must have proceeded not merely by breaking the phenomenon down into its simplest elements, but doing this with a considerable account of abstraction. The civilized nature of man might have been set aside in this process of abstraction. This may be the reason why he opens his philosophically setting aside the civilized characteristics of man.

From the above discussion it follows that the behavior of men in the state-of-nature is deduced from both the physiological principles and the social assumptions. As it is stated above, the physiological explanation seems to be of the natural man. However, as the argument moves forward and enters the sphere of psychological principles, it turns out to be the analysis of the behavior of the civilized man. Macpherson argues that civilization was always there in the arguments of Hobbes. Macpherson quotes Hobbes, who says, "whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when does think, opine, reason, hope, t'care, &c and upon what grounds: he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of
all other men. upon the like occasions." presumes that the analysis is about the civilized man of his contemporary time. (Macpherson. 1962: 30) Let us see where did these civilized elements get into the argument in the process of compositive method.

These civilized assumptions are not there in the opening presentation of man as a self-moving and self-directing automated machine. It is when he starts the discussion of man's natural power that the inclusion of the social assumptions starts. He defined the natural power of man as the `eminence of his ability.' It consists of the excess of his personal capacities over those of other men. plus what he can acquire by that excess. Macpherson argues that a new postulate is implied in this, that is, `every man's power is opposed by the power of others." This postulate, for him, is not contained in the previous postulates, which describe man as a self-moving mechanism. From this, the argument goes on to the analysis of valuing and honoring, which fills out the picture of the relations of men in society. Since it is a relation between one man, who receives it and all the others, who give to him, it justifies the

According to Macpherson "it is in chapters 10 and 11 that we find the main transition from man the machine by itself, to man the machine as a unit in a series of social relationships. And it is in these chapters that we shall expect to find such new postulates, stated or implied, as are needed for the deduction of state-of-nature...." (1962: 34) He argued that these two chapters (10 and 11), contain all but one of the essential propositions of the model society. and the last essential proposition was stated in the 13th chapter, which is the equality of men, from which the necessity of war of every man against every man is deduced.
relations of all the people in society. The definitions of power, along with his analysis of valuing and honoring explain the necessary behavior of men in society, as an endless struggle for power over others.

Hobbes deduces the opposition of power, which is an endless struggle for power over others, from the physiological principle that 'every man innately desires more power without limit.' According to Macpherson, unless there is an apparently universally competitive society, it is not possible to deduce the opposition of power from these physiological principles. Therefore, there is a need for assuming a model of society, where every man's natural powers are continually invaded by others, i.e., "a society in which each can continually seek to transfer to himself some of the powers of others." (1962: 46) This kind of violent behavior of men cannot be possible in any kind of society. However, Hobbes finds this to be the actual behavior of man in the state-of-nature. Macpherson resolves this contradiction in positing the violent behavior of men as the actual behavior, by postulating a model society, "which provides peaceful, non-violent ways by which every man can constantly seeks power over others without destroying the society." (1962: 46) He, after explaining that the arguments of Hobbes, which run from the physiological postulates to the state-of-nature, inquires into the details of the model of society that is consistent with the social assumptions.
In order to show the kind of model that fits to Hobbes's thought, Macpherson constructed three kinds of models, which he named as 'Customary society', 'Simple market society' and 'Possessive market society' respectively. He argues that the first two model societies do not fit to Hobbes's requirements. The model of customary or status society 'neither permits nor requires the constant search for power by individuals over individuals to such extent that all individuals must seek more power in order to protect what delights they have', which is necessary for a model to be consistent with Hobbesian model, in the same way individuals in the simple market society 'who are content with their existing level of satisfactions are not pulled into competition for more power in order to protect the level they have', which is the exact requirement to deduce the state of war. Therefore, both the models, Macpherson opined, do not meet the requirements of Hobbes.

The possessive model society in which each man's capacity to labour is his own property and is alienable, and also is a market commodity and in which all individuals be in continual competitive power relationship meets the requirements of

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3 However, this construction of model societies is not arbitrary or without proper determination. The principle that governed this construction is, "to construct the fewest possible models to which all known kinds of society could be assimilated and which would isolate their features in such a way as to permit comparisons with Hobbes's model." (1962: 47)
Hobbes. In this model society, there is no authoritative allocation of work or rewards. There is only market in labor as well as in products. The main criterion of the possessive model society is that man's labour is a commodity, which is saleable. In other words, though a man's energy and skill are his own, yet they are regarded, not as integral parts of his personality, but as possessions. Regarding the use and disposal of this possession, man is free to hand it over to others for a price. As a society of this kind becomes a market of possessed social relations. Macpherson names it as possessive market society.

In possessive market society, there is no authoritative allocation of work and authoritative provision of rewards for work. However, there is authoritative definition and enforcement of contracts. Each Individual's capacity to labour is his own property. Land and resources are also owned by individuals, which are alienable. All individuals seek rationally to maximize their utilities. Some individuals have more

4 The concept of possessive market society of Macpherson is neither a 'novel nor an arbitrary' construction. It is similar to the concepts of bourgeois or capitalist society used by Marx, Weber, Sombart and others.' However, Macpherson argued, the possessive market society, also at certain aspects, differs from the bourgeois and capitalist society used by Marx, Weber etc. To quote Macpherson, 'it differs from theirs chiefly in that it does not require any particular theory of the origin or development of such society. It is not concerned about the primacy or relative importance of various factors such as Marx's primary accumulation. Weber's rational capital accounting, or Sombart's spirit of enterprise.' (1962: 48)
energy, skill, or possessions, than others and desire to have a higher level of utilities or power than they have. Man is seen as an absolute natural proprietor of his own capacities, owing nothing to the society. Man's essence is freedom to use his capacities in search of satisfaction. This freedom is limited properly only by some principle of utility or utilitarian natural law, which forbids harming others. Freedom, therefore, is restricted to, and comes to be identified with, domination over things, not domination over men. The clearest form of domination over things is the relation of ownership or possession. Freedom, therefore, is possession. Everyone is free, for everyone possesses at least his own capacities. Society is seen, not as a system of relations of domination and subordination between men and classes held together by reciprocal rights and duties, but as a group of free equal individuals related to each other through their possessions. In other words, the individuals are related to one another as owners of their capacities and of what they have produced and accumulated by the use of their capacities. This relation of exchange is seen as the fundamental relation of society. All possessions, including man's energies, are commodities; and the relationship between individuals is the possession of marketable commodities. Everybody has to continually offer commodities in the market, in competition with the other. Macpherson says that "Competition in this market unlike that in the simple market in products is a means by which men who want more may convert more of the powers of others to their use than others convert of theirs." (1962: 55)

This process of transferring some of the powers of one man to another, which is an interesting aspect of the possessive market society, follows the Hobbesian
definition of power as 'man's present means to obtain future apparent good.' This implies that the powers of man includes not only his energy, skill and labor, but also his access to the means of production like land, material and capital, without which his capacity to labour cannot become active labour and so cannot produce any goods.* (1962: 56) There is a continuous transfer of power and its amount is not fixed, but fluctuates with the changes in the supply of labour and capital.

The possessive market society. Macpherson argues, requires a 'compulsive framework of law' to secure the life and property and to define and enforce contracts. Also, this model of society permits state action, but it does not require a state policy of laissez-faire. He accepts the possibility of minimum state action and states that there is authoritative definition and enforcement of contracts in this model society. This authoritative definition later inspired men-in-the-state-of-nature to get into a contract. This model permits individuals to convert the natural powers of the other individuals to their use. This converted power is their acquired power. Making the individual's labor as a commodity in the market makes this conversion possible and the society as continually competitive. In this way, Macpherson says, Hobbes's argument from the physiological nature of man to the necessary attempt of all men in society to seek ever more power over others requires the proposition that every man's power resists and hinders the powers of others. This proposition, even if supposedly deduced from a physiological postulate that all men innately desire limitless power over others, requires at least the further assumption of a model of society which permits continual peaceful invasion of each by each. And if the proposition is taken to be deduced from the physiological postulate that only some men innately want ever
more, it requires a model of society which not only permits continued invasion of each by each but also compels the moderate men to invade. The only model which satisfies these requirements is the possessive market society, which corresponds in essentials to modern competitive market societies. That Hobbes's explicit postulates, notably, that labour is a commodity, that some men want to increase their level of delight, and that some have more natural power than others, are essentially those of a possessive market society. That the model of society which Hobbes constructed in his analysis of power, valuing, and honouring and confirmed in his analysis of commutative and distributive justice, essentially corresponds to the possessive market society. Although Hobbes was not fully conscious of such correspondence, there is some evidence to suggest that he was aware of the peculiar suitability of his analysis to seventeenth-century society.

Macpherson maintains that even Hobbes's deduction of obligation is also based on this possessive individualism. As every individual in the market society seeks getting more power over others; there is a constant fear of violent death, which made their lives miserable and insecure. Yet, as Hobbes already postulated, men necessarily seek and desire commodious living. From this it follows that basing on protection of their own life and property, i.e., only for their personal interest they made a covenant with each other and transferred all their rights to a sovereign to protect themselves. It is this transfer of rights, which creates their obligation to the sovereign. Macpherson thought that it is equally necessary that their natural power also should be transferred in order to make the sovereign absolute to enforce the
restraint on the appetites. He, in this way, explains even the origin of sovereign power also as based upon the possessive market society.

The conception of obligation of Hobbes, Macpherson maintains, is moral and is deduced from the facts about human nature. This he expressed clearly in his statement that "Hobbes believes that he has deduced moral obligation from fact. ought from is." (1962: 71) Further, Hobbes "thought that his rational, albeit self-interested, obligation was as moral an obligation as could be found." (1962:73) Hobbesian postulate of equality of man, i.e., equality of ability and equality of expectation of satisfying their wants implies a moral equality. To quote Macpherson:

Hobbes takes it that an equality of fact sets up an equality of right: without bringing in any outside value judgment or moral premises. He does not prove that fact entails right, he simply assumes that it does because there is no reason why it should not. (1962: 75)

Hobbesian treatment of political obligation as moral obligation is derived from the transfer of rights, which are moral rights. According to Macpherson, morality enters Hobbes's thought in the early stages of his deduction of equality of right from the equality of ability and need. Hobbes argued that there is no need of bringing the right from outside the realm of fact but it is already there. that they were entailed in the need of each human mechanism to maintain its motion. He deduced right and obligation from the fact, by way of the postulate of equality. This postulate
of equality is a characteristic of the possessive market society and it pervades Hobbes's political philosophy. In fact Macpherson took up the postulate of equality as the main string in the possessive individualism, stated all the other features in order to substantiate it and showed Hobbesian philosophy as basing itself on the new foundation.

After explaining the possessive market model, Macpherson thought that it fits absolutely to Hobbes's requirements and in fact, Hobbes implicitly laid down this model, upon which be constructed the state-of-nature.

Hobbes, according to Macpherson, brought out the Galilean revolution in science. Galileo assumed that the object in motion does not require the continual application of outside force to stay in motion. In the same way Hobbes, instead of finding rights and obligations only in some outside force, (as it was the case before) assumed that they were entailed in the need of each human being to maintain its motion. In this way, Hobbes dispensed any moral postulate imposed from outside the individual.

Macpherson, while accepting the view that materialism is a necessary condition of the theory of political obligation, argues that materialism is

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5 Macpherson states that “Hobbes's deduction of right and obligation from fact, by way of the postulate of equality, seems to have been made possible by his acceptance of the materialist assumptions which he took over from the new science of the seventeenth century. In this view, Hobbes's materialism was neither an afterthought
not the sufficient condition. For him, besides materialism market assumptions are needed to deduce political obligation. To quote Macpherson:

For besides the materialist assumption that men are self-moving systems of matter in motion, he needed the postulate that the motion of every individual is necessarily opposed to the motion of every other. This latter postulate was not contained in his mechanical materialism but was derived, as we have seen, from his market assumption. The postulate of opposed motion was what enabled him to treat all individuals as equally insecure, and hence as equally in need of a system of political obligation. (1962: 79)

Macpherson holds the view that political obligation is enabled by both market assumptions and materialistic assumptions. However, he thinks that 'we need not conjecture which is more important, or which came first in Hobbes's thinking.' Instead, it should be noticed that market assumptions are essential and 'only a society as fragmented as a market society can credibly be treated as a mechanical system of self-moving individuals.' It is the market assumptions that made Hobbesian attempt to transfer the mechanical postulates of the new science to the analysis of society possible.

nor a window-dressing but an essential part of his political theory. His materialism was a necessary condition of his theory of political obligation.” (1962: 78-9)
Hobbesian attempt to transfer the mechanical postulates to the analysis of society, which was done by using resolutive-compositive method, leads to a logical difficulty. By following scientific analysis of man's nature, Hobbes claimed, he showed that men ought to acknowledge a steadier obligation to a sovereign. If this scientific analysis of the resolutive-compositive method is true and men by nature have to acknowledge the sovereign then the men now must oblige the sovereign without any hesitation. But the condition of man in his contemporary times was different. They did not in fact act in accordance with Hobbesian scientific analysis in obliging the sovereign without any hesitation. To quote Macpherson:

That is to say that men must act in a way they do not now act. if they are to be consistent with their own nature. This seems to be a flat contradiction. Yet it is what Hobbes gets by his application of Galileo's resolutive-compositive method. (1962: 101)

However, he resolves this contradiction by stating that possessive individualism saves Hobbes from this contradiction. His theory is to persuade men by showing their actual nature to behave in a way that is different from the way they hitherto behaved. They need to be persuaded because they did not realize what is demanded of and permitted to in possessive market society. Macpherson claims, "if his theory is taken only as a theory of and for possessive market society he is saved in some measure from the reproach of being contradictory about men's capacities. More accurately, he is saved from that reproach if his theory is taken as a theory of and for
a possessive market society.... So understood, his theory is an attempt to persuade present men, by showing them their actual nature, to behave differently from the way in which men have hitherto behaved, and in which they are now still behaving simply for lack of realizing what is demanded of and permitted to men in possessive market society” (1962: 105).

Macpherson’s main aim was to show the puzzle solving power of his Possessive Individual model. He attempts to solve long-standing dispute about Hobbes’s political obligation with reference to his model. Macpherson boldly attacks the problem by claiming that Hobbes was able to construct a deductive argument from factual premises to moral conclusions because he took for granted a market model of society in which each man is equally liable to be invaded by others.

Further, coming to the main argument of the thesis. Macpherson also argued that the method and purpose of Hobbes’s philosophy is non-scientific. While discussing the impossibility of deducing the behavior of man-in-the-state-of-nature from physiological postulates without social assumptions. Macpherson held that if we accept that the above deduction is possible without social assumptions, and then it would not be in consonance with Hobbes’s method or purpose. To quote Macpherson:

For his [Hobbes’s] purpose was to persuade men that they needed to acknowledge a sovereign, and his method of doing so was ‘only to put men in mind of what they know already, or
may know by their experience'. The whole success of his
endeavour necessarily depended on this. (1962: 69-70)

Thus, Macpherson endorses the view, which is the main argument of the
present thesis, that Hobbes's method is non-scientific. Rather it is to make people
look into their own selves and understand what they are or to realize it through
experience. In other words, Macpherson looks to be accepting the view that Hobbes's
method is self-observation, though the basis is possessive individualism.