*"Putting the responsible majority back in charge": New Labour's punitive politics of respect*

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**Introduction**

The concept of anti-social behaviour is among New Labour's key legislative innovations. Unknown to English law prior to 1997, anti-social behaviour was addressed by provisions in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Police Reform Act 2002 and the Criminal Justice Act 2003, as well as receiving an Act of its own (the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003). As these dates suggest, the concept became particularly prominent during Tony Blair's second and third terms as Prime Minister (2001-7). Anti-social behaviour - together with the associated remedy of the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) - was a prominent feature of the 'Respect agenda', a framework for social policy associated with Blair personally and with David Blunkett (Home Secretary between 2001 and 2004).

In this paper, I examine the ideological roots of the 'Resepct agenda' by reviewing statements made by Tony Blair, who set out his views on anti-social behaviour on many occasions between 1988 and 2006. I argue that Blair has developed a complex and coherent model of how individuals should relate to one another within a contemporary community, and of how they may legitimately be coerced into doing so. The roots of this authoritarian variant on communitarianism are then traced back to two authors whom Blair has explicitly cited as intellectual influences: Thomas Hobbes and John Macmurray. I argue that Blair's fusion of Hobbesian liberal absolutism with Macmurray's moral communitarianism results in a model of society permeated by an intrusive moralism, underpinned by state coercion.

**Tony Blair: "How do we live together?"**

In 1993, the Shadow Home Secretary - Tony Blair - set out his thoughts on crime in the left-wing magazine *New Statesman and Society*.

> We should be tough on crime and tough on the underlying causes of crime. We should be prepared and eager to give people opportunities. But we are then entitled to ask that they take advantage of it, to grant rights and demand responsibilities.
> ...
> crime, ultimately, is a problem that arises from our disintegration as a community, with standards of conduct necessary to sustain a community. It can only be resolved by acting as a community, based on a new bargain between individual and society. Rights and responsibilities must be set out for each in a way relevant for a modern world.
> (Blair 1993: 27-28)

Still earlier, in 1988, Blair (then a back-bencher) had warned in the *Times* of "the new lawlessness" represented by rising levels of gang violence. He related this development to "the decline in the notion of 'community', of the idea that we owe obligations to our neighbours and our society as well as ourselves": "When a sense of community is strong, that adds its own special pressure against anti-social behaviour. Instead, we have learnt to tolerate what should not be tolerated. ... We are living in a society where increasingly the term is itself becoming meaningless, where social responsibility and the duties that come with it are seen simply as a drag anchor on our private pleasure." (Blair 1988).

These brief excerpts foreground three ideas which would recur throughout Blair's career. Firstly, the concept of 'community' is prized: 'community' is an ideal which present-day societies should strive to realise. The fundamental characteristic of a community is the combination of rights and obligations, or of opportunity and responsibility: the state may "grant rights" but it should also "demand responsibilities". Crucially, these obligations and responsibilities are horizontal rather than vertical, connecting members of the community one to another: a community is a society uniting its members through ties of reciprocal obligation.

Thus in 1999, addressing the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, Blair argued: "individuals realise their potential best through a strong community based on rights and responsibilities. I have always believed that the bonds that individuals make with each other and their communities are every bit as important as the things provided for them by the state" (Blair 1999). In 2000, addressing the Global Ethics Foundation in Tübingen, he developed the argument further: "you can't build a community on opportunity or rights alone. They need to be matched by responsibility and duty. That is the bargain or covenant at the heart of modern civil society" (Blair 2000b).

This line of thinking culminated in the 2006 Respect Action Plan, launched by Blair in these terms:

> Respect is a way of describing the very possibility of life in a community. It is about the consideration that others are due. It is about the duty I have to respect the rights that you hold dear. And vice-versa. It is about our reciprocal belonging to a society, the covenant that we have with one another.
>
> More grandly, it is the answer to the most fundamental question of all in politics which is: how do we live together? From the theorists of the Roman state to its fullest expression in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the central question of political theory was just this: how do we ensure order?
> ...
> the change has to come from within the community, from individuals exercising a sense of responsibility. Rights have to be paired with responsibilities.
> (Blair 2006)

In turn, this horizontal network of mutual obligations, of paired rights and responsibilities, is based on an assertion of equality among the community's members - or rather 'equal worth'. In his Tübingen speech Blair described 'the equal worth of all' as 'the central belief that drives my politics', and clarified the concept thus: "Note: it is equal worth, not equality of income or outcome; or, simply, equality of opportunity. Rather it affirms our equal right to dignity, liberty, freedom from discrimination as well as economic opportunity." (Blair 2000b). The following year, addressing the Christian Socialist Movement, he argued:

> Our values are clear. The equal worth of all citizens, and their right to be treated with equal respect and consideration despite their differences, are fundamental. So too is individual responsibility, a value which in the past the Left sometimes underplayed. But a large part of individual responsibility concerns the obligations we owe one to another. The self is best realised in community with others. Society is the way we realise our mutual obligations - a society in which we all belong, no one left out.
> (Blair 2001)

The community - founded on a network of reciprocal obligations, owed by every member to every other on the basis of their equality of worth - is a well-developed and consistent theme in Blair's speeches and writings on the theme of anti-social behaviour.

Secondly, this notion of community is counterposed to crime and disorder, which are conceptualised in terms of heedless, self-seeking individualism ("our private pleasure"). There is a significant ambivalence here. Blair argues that individuals are able to act anti-socially as a **result** of the decline of community ("crime ... arises from our disintegration as a community"). At the same time, he suggested that anti-social behaviour is spreading and growing independently, and that this growth is a **cause** of further community decline ("we have learnt to tolerate what should not be tolerated".)

The first of these oppositions - anti-social behaviour as a morbid symptom of community decline - recurred when Blair was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman in 2002: "I think the anti-social behaviour, the vandalism, the graffiti, the lack of respect for people, I think that's all part of a society that has lost its way and I want to create a society where we have opportunity for people, while we demand responsibility from them." (Blair 2002a). However, the more active formulation - anti-social behaviour as a malignant growth tending to destroy the community from within - was much more prominent in Blair's later statements. A typical formulation is the assertion that anti-social behaviour is "as corrosive to community life as more serious crime." (Blair 2003). Similarly, in a 2005 speech on parenting, Blair argued, "It is not criminal acts that are bad in themselves ... it is what they cumulatively indicate, which is a disrespect for other people, for their rights, for the community" (Blair 2005b).

The third distinguishing feature of Blair's communitarian rhetoric is that 'community' is not articulated as a utopian concept - an ideal to which any existing society could aspire, but which none could hope to achieve - but as a reality. It is counterposed to existing society by being displaced in time - into the future, as a goal being worked towards; and into a more or less mythical past, as a lost state of civic virtue. Blair's 2000 speech to the Women's Institute expresses this second notion succinctly:

> The idea of community is as old as time. What makes it tick are the values of responsibility to, and respect for, others. These are traditional values, good old British values. But here's the challenge. The spirit of this age is democratic. We won't rebuild community on the basis of doffing your cap or hierarchy. The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate: it won't wash any more.
> (Blair 2000a)

Community is associated with a past condition of stable hierarchy and deference: by implication, progress towards equality had encouraged self-seeking individualism, which tended to dissolve community. At the beginning of this third term of office, Blair returned to the theme:

> I've been struck again and again in the course of this campaign by people worrying that in our country today, though they like the fact we have got over the deference of the past, there is a disrespect that people don't like ... I want to make this a particular priority for this government, how we bring back a proper sense of respect in our schools, in our communities, in our towns and our villages.
> (Blair 2005a).

Launching the 'Respect Agenda' in 2006, Blair explicitly linked modernity with lack of respect for authority, and proposed that its place should be taken by mutual respect among individual citizens. "A modern market economy needs the attributes of innovation, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit. These qualities thrive best when we can be critical of authority ... But to help communities in the modern world restore respect, these changes in lifestyle need to be accompanied by a new settlement between people, a new *modus vivendi*." (Blair 2006). He concluded: "We are not looking to go back to anything. We have left behind an era in which we refused to respect people because of who they *were*. The only reason to withhold respect is because of what people *do*." (Blair 2006; emphasis in original)

**The Respect Agenda: "rules, order and proper behaviour"**

Community is based on mutual respect among equal individuals. Anti-social behaviour both benefits from the decay of community and damages it further. Community has been lost but can be rebuilt. Considered as a political philosophy, this combination of ideas has some curious features. It is essentially **moralistic**: both the problems it diagnoses and their solution are rooted in individual behaviour rather than broader social factors. Growing social equality and the decline of deference are blamed for the dissolution of community, but also celebrated for their contribution to "a modern market economy"; large-scale changes in society are accepted as being benign, or at worst irreversible. "The bonds of cohesion have been loosened. They cannot be tied again the same way." (Blair 2005c).

The fault thus lies not with changes in society, but with the way a minority has exploited them. "The 1960s saw a huge breakthrough in terms of freedom of expression, of lifestyle, of the individual's right to live their own personal life in the way they choose. ... It was John Stuart Mill who articulated the modern concept that with freedom comes responsibility. But in the 1960s revolution, that didn't always happen ... some took the freedom without the responsibility" (Blair 2004a). Equally, the solution is for people, as individuals, to behave better - to play by the rules. "People do not want a return to old prejudices and ugly discrimination. But they do want rules, order and proper behaviour." (Blair 2004a).

It follows that the anti-social behaviour agenda is deeply **divisive**. If community is a realisable state, but one which is imperilled by the actions of a minority of selfish individuals, then those individuals need to be dealt with - both for the sake of their own reform and to prevent them from causing any more damage. In this context, Blair's 2006 formulation on respect and equality - "We have left behind an era in which we refused to respect people because of who they *were*. The only reason to withhold respect is because of what people *do*." - is double-edged. It implies that mutual respect, among individuals of equal worth, may be withdrawn - and perhaps that some people's equal worth is more equal than others'. Continuing membership of the "society in which we all belong, no one left out" (Blair 2001) is implicitly conditional on each person contributing to the community by acting respectfully. Withdrawal of respect would set the individual outside the community - and, in the process, cancel the community's obligations to the person excluded: henceforth their well-being would be a secondary consideration to that of the community they had offended against.

Blair has consistently emphasised the damage done by anti-social behaviour to the community and its values. As early as 1997, he argued that the CSO "would give the power to local authorities and the police to put people under an obligation to behave themselves," adding: "Some people say that it is a very draconian thing to do but I think you are entitled to certain minimum standards of behaviour from people if you are living next door to them." (Blair 1997). In 2002 Blair explicitly associated crime and punishment with a wide range of non-criminal rule-breaking and deviance, under the general heading of disrespect: "Tough on crime - and on those who break the rules: those who don't turn up for school, who won't take a job when it is offered, those who commit crimes and threaten our basic values of decency and mutual respect." (Blair 2002b). Failing to participate in employment and education in approved ways is now a threat - on a par with crime - to "decency and mutual respect".

For the sake of the responsible majority, action must be taken against the minority posing this threat. "It is about respect for other people. ... It's about hard-working families who play by the rules not suffering from those that don't. ... For too long, the selfish minority have had it all their own way. That's changing." (Blair 2004b). Speaking to Paxman, Blair went so far as to advocate withdrawing state benefits from claimants who refused to "give anything back" by behaving responsibly: "if your child is engaged in persistent truanting, refusing to co-operate, and the police and the education welfare officers and the school and everyone is at their wits' end, well, I'm sorry, but we shouldn't carry on paying out benefit to you in circumstances where you are not prepared to give anything back to society." The question of how the - presumably impoverished - claimant would cope without benefits was brushed aside ("you might as well say that a family that is of low income should never be fined"). Later in the same interview, Blair explicitly dismissed any concern for the welfare of anti-social offenders: "As you know some families have been evicted with the anti-social behaviour orders. But in the end what happens is in those areas the other families can live in a bit of peace and quiet." (Blair 2002a)

Finally, this project of moral renewal for the many and punishment for the disrespectful few is also a populist appeal for **authoritarian mobilisation**. Many of Blair's statements on anti-social behaviour are characterised by an almost revolutionary urgency: "I am pleased that 50 per cent of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have dedicated anti-social behaviour teams - but I am worried about those communities who don't. ... Until action is taken in every community where it is needed, we can't rest." (Blair 2004b). Sometimes the government is seen as driving through urgently-needed change, in the teeth of an entrenched establishment: "For eight years I have battered the criminal justice system to get it to change. And it was only when we started to introduce special anti-social behaviour laws, we really made a difference. And I now understand why. The system itself is the problem." (Blair 2005c). Sometimes the government is portrayed not as initiating change from above but as responding to the moral awakening of the decent majority. "[People] want a society of respect. They want a society of responsibility. They want a community where the decent law-abiding majority are in charge; where those that play by the rules do well; and those that don't, get punished." (Blair 2004a) "Anti-social behaviour is not evidence of a flawed moral sensibility in the British people. On the contrary, the need to act comes from the pressing moral urgency of the people." (Blair 2006). In all cases the need is for more action by government agencies: more intervention, more control, more punishment.

In short, the anti-social behaviour agenda - as described by Tony Blair - is a coherent project for the progressive regulation, stigmatisation and punishment of groups within society which are seen to be responsible for disorderly, chaotic and disrespectful behaviour. This is justified on the grounds that disorderly behaviour is intrinsically damaging to the social order, irrespective of its actual effects. It is underpinned by the mobilisation of those groups in society who regard themselves as responsible and law-abiding, in support of the government and the police and against disfavoured minorities. Having reached this point, it comes as something of a surprise to remind ourselves that Blair has always described himself as a Christian, and claimed that his religious faith underpins his political philosophy. It's not immediately obvious, not to put too fine a point on it, how you get here from there.

To approach the two sources of Blair's thought - one of them unimpeachably Christian - it's worth looking in more detail at two crucial speeches: Blair's 2000 address to the Global Ethics Foundation in Tübingen and his 2006 speech launching the 'Respect Action Plan'. In Tübingen, Blair said:

> The traditionalist mourns the passing of the old familiarities, points to the greater stability of family life in the past; points to the ugliness and disorder of much of the new world. The moderniser sees its opportunities; rejects the prejudices of the past, the old hierarchies, is impatient to grasp the material benefits modernity brings.
> ...
> The resolution of this conflict lies in applying traditional values to the modern world; to leave outdated attitudes behind; but re-discover the essence of traditional values and then let them guide us in managing change. The theologians among you will say it is reuniting faith and reason.
>
> What are the values? For me, they are best expressed in a modern idea of community. At the heart of it is the belief in the equal worth of all the central belief that drives my politics - and in our mutual responsibility in creating a society that advances such equal worth. Note: it is equal worth, not equality of income or outcome; or, simply, equality of opportunity. Rather it affirms our equal right to dignity, liberty, freedom from discrimination as well as economic opportunity.
> ...
> you can't build a community on opportunity or rights alone. They need to be matched by responsibility and duty. That is the bargain or covenant at the heart of modern civil society. Frankly, I don't think you can make the case for government, for spending taxpayers' money on public services or social exclusion, in other words for acting as a community - without this covenant of opportunities and responsibilities together. If we invest so as to give the unemployed person the chance of a job, they have a responsibility to take it or lose benefit. And on crime, I have no hesitation about being very hard on it. It's not just that the vulnerable suffer most from crime. It is that it breaks the covenant between citizens.
> (Blair 2000b)

In 2006, he argued:

> Respect is a way of describing the very possibility of life in a community. It is about the consideration that others are due. It is about the duty I have to respect the rights that you hold dear. And vice-versa. It is about our reciprocal belonging to a society, the covenant that we have with one another. More grandly, it is the answer to the most fundamental question of all in politics which is: how do we live together? From the theorists of the Roman state to its fullest expression in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the central question of political theory was just this: how do we ensure order? And what are the respective roles of individuals, communities and the state?
>
> Legal stricture will never be enough. Respect cannot, in the end, be conjured through legislation. Government can provide resources and powers. It can do its best to ensure that wrong-doing is detected, that its powers against offenders are suitable, that its systems are expeditious and its enforcement strong. And the British system, like others, in the modern world, has not been good enough against these standards. But, ultimately, the change has to come from within the community, from individuals exercising a sense of responsibility. Rights have to be paired with responsibilities.
> ...
> a modern market economy needs the attributes of innovation, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit. These qualities thrive best when we can be critical of authority, when people can make the most of themselves without feeling constrained by their background. This is precisely the ideal of the open society that we value. All of this is true. But to help communities in the modern world restore respect, these changes in lifestyle need to be accompanied by a new settlement between people, a new *modus vivendi*.
> (Blair 2006)

Two phrases stand out here: "the equal worth of all" and "the covenant that we have with one another". Tracing these concepts to their intellectual roots will help to clarify how a sincerely-held Christian faith can be said to inform Blair's political views, and in particular how it underpins the divisive authoritarian moralism of the anti-social behaviour agenda.

**Hobbes: "a common Power to keep them all in awe"**

'Covenant' is an unusual word for a twentieth-century politician to use. The theologians among you will have seen this term before, but generally in the context of a covenant between God and humanity. The concept of a community held together by a covenant among its members has very different roots.

According to Blair, Hobbes' *Leviathan* is the "fullest expression" of "the central question of political theory ... how do we ensure order? And what are the respective roles of individuals, communities and the state?" If we follow this lead, we find that Hobbes is also concerned with articulating a relationship between horizontal covenants and the creation and maintenance of a law-abiding community:

> A Common-wealth is said to be Instituted, when a Multitude of men do Agree, and Covenant, Every One With Every One, that to whatsoever Man, or Assembly Of Men, shall be given by the major part, the Right to Present the Person of them all, (that is to say, to be their Representative;) every one, as well he that Voted For It, as he that Voted Against It, shall Authorise all the Actions and Judgements, of that Man, or Assembly of men, in the same manner, as if they were his own, to the end, to live peaceably amongst themselves, and be protected against other men.
> ...
> First, because they Covenant, it is to be understood, they are not obliged by former Covenant to any thing repugnant hereunto. And Consequently they that have already Instituted a Common-wealth, being thereby bound by Covenant, to own the Actions, and Judgements of one, cannot lawfully make a new Covenant, amongst themselves, to be obedient to any other, in any thing whatsoever, without his permission.
> ...

Secondly, Because the Right of bearing the Person of them all, is given to him they make Soveraigne, by Covenant onely of one to another, and not of him to any of them; there can happen no breach of Covenant on the part of the Soveraigne; and consequently none of his Subjects, by any pretence of forfeiture, can be freed from his Subjection.
...
Thirdly, because the major part hath by consenting voices declared a Soveraigne; he that dissented must now consent with the rest; that is, be contented to avow all the actions he shall do, or else justly be destroyed by the rest. ... whether his consent be asked, or not, he must either submit to their decrees, or be left in the condition of warre he was in before; wherein he might without injustice be destroyed by any man whatsoever.
(Hobbes 1651: chapter 18)

The reference to a 'condition of warre' in the third point can be clarified by referring to an earlier passage:

during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.
...
To this warre of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be Unjust. The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have there no place. Where there is no common Power, there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice.
(Hobbes 1651: chapter 13)

The necessary corollary of a society united "by Covenant ... of one to another" is that anyone who breaks the covenant risks exclusion from the society. On this point, Hobbes is terse but explicit: "he that dissented must now consent with the rest ... whether his consent be asked, or not, he must either submit to their decrees, or be left in the condition of warre he was in before; wherein he might without injustice be destroyed by any man whatsoever." Peace, the rule of law and the possibility of justice can obtain only within a commonwealth, established on the basis of common submission to a sovereign power. Once such a commonwealth has been established, its decrees are binding on all its members: anyone who dissents from them must submit. Crucially, this submission is motivated not by the punitive power of the sovereign, but by the second-order imperative that the power of the sovereign should remain unchallenged. The rapacity of other individuals is the greatest threat to an individual's ability to live in peace, Hobbes argues; this is kept in check only by the power of the sovereign, which in turn is only binding within the commonwealth whose members are united in submission to it.

If dissenters from the decrees of the commonwealth will not submit to them, they must be excluded from the commonwealth - which will return them, as individuals, to a state of war. The argument is brutally symmetrical. In the state of nature, people will tend to compete for what they desire, by foul means as well as fair. The possibility of peace and the rule of law can only exist within a commonwealth, guaranteed by the unchallenged power of the sovereign ("Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." (Hobbes 1651: chapter 17)) However, a commonwealth is sustained by its members' consent or submission to its decrees; anyone who refuses to submit thereby ceases to be a member of the commonwealth. By so doing, they will forfeit the protection of the sovereign, and by the same token remove themselves from the scope of the rule of law. While members of the commonwealth behave lawfully among themselves, this is only guaranteed by their fear of the sovereign set over them all; the outlawed ex-member of the commonwealth may be treated as brutally as they please. Nor could their actions be criticised as unjust: since justice is only conceivable within the commonwealth, anyone excluded from the commonwealth "might without injustice be destroyed by any man whatsoever".

Blair's debt to Hobbes seems to include the idea of society being sustained "by Covenant ... of one to another, and not by [the government] to any of them", as well as the idea that it is only such a horizontal covenant which keeps lawlessness and chaos at bay. Blair's insistence on the reality of crime, and his association of crime with self-seeking individual desire, also seems authentically Hobbesian. Hobbes' admonition to readers who might accuse him of a pessimistic view of human nature is a clear precursor of the rhetoric used by politicians who see themselves as 'tough on crime':

It may seem strange to some man, that has not well weighed these things; that Nature should thus dissociate, and render men apt to invade, and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this 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 armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his dores; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there bee Lawes, and publike Officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall bee done him ... Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse mans nature in it. The Desires, and other Passions of man, are in themselves no Sin. No more are the Actions, that proceed from those Passions, till they know a Law that forbids them

(Hobbes 1651: chapter 13)

For Hobbes - as for Blair - crime is to be expected when individuals are not restrained by the law. The exclusionary logic of Hobbes' definition of the commonwealth is also echoed in several of Blair's comments on anti-social behaviour: his suggestion that respect should be withheld "because of what people *do*"; his invocation of "a community where the decent law-abiding majority are in charge; where those that play by the rules do well; and those that don't, get punished"; and, less overt but perhaps most telling, his breezy indifference to poverty and homelessness when inflicted on the 'anti-social' ("in the end what happens is in those areas the other families can live in a bit of peace and quiet"). The divisiveness as well as the authoritarianism of Blair's thinking has a clear Hobbesian pedigree.

However, any account of Blair's thinking as Hobbesian runs up against the problem of the content of the imagined 'covenant'. Hobbes's covenant was not a moral undertaking: as we have seen, the members of the commonwealth are bound to a higher standard of behaviour only by the power of the sovereign which is set over them. The commonwealth is not a community defined in positive terms, constituted by the mutual respect of its members for one another's rights; there is no sense that such a community is possible or that it would be desirable. As the lines quoted above on security from crime suggests, Hobbes began from the assumption that people will get away with as much as they can; the function of a commonwealth is to ratify an agreement to limit how much this is. The reason why the rule of the sovereign restricts individual freedom is that an individual whose freedom is unrestricted will tend to use it against other individuals. For Hobbes, all behaviour is anti-social.

It follows from this that only a minimal 'covenant' can or should be administered. If members of the commonwealth infringe on one another's rights to life, liberty and property, they can justly be punished by the sovereign; if they dissent from the commonwealth's decrees, for instance by elevating their own conscience above its laws, they can justly be excluded from it. Beyond this (admittedly fairly advanced) point, the members of the commonwealth are not under any positive obligations.

For seeing there is no Common-wealth in the world, for the regulating of all the actions, and words of men, (as being a thing impossible:) it followeth necessarily, that in all kinds of actions, by the laws praetermitted [i.e. omitted], men have the Liberty, of doing what their own reasons shall suggest, for the most profitable to themselves. ... In cases where the Soveraign has prescribed no rule, there the Subject hath the liberty to do, or forbeare, according to his own discretion.

(Hobbes 1651: chapter 21)

This is the sense in which Hobbes can reasonably be seen as a liberal: the absolutism of *Leviathan* might preclude political dissent or appeals against sentencing decisions, but it stops short of proposing that citizens must act in certain ways if they are to form part of the commonwealth. Nor are any duties imposed on citizens in their relations with one another. The notion that there might be "standards of conduct necessary to sustain a community", or that individuals might be bounden to respect one another's equal worth, would be foreign to Hobbes.

**Macmurray: "the sharing of our lives in fellowship"**

As we have seen, Blair's social thinking combines echoes of Hobbesian absolutism with a very different vision of society: one in which mutual respect and equality of individual worth play a large part. Interviewed in 1994, Blair was quoted as saying: "If you really want to understand what I'm all about, you have to take a look at a guy called John Macmurray." (quoted in Hale 2002: 192). Macmurray (1891-1976) was a philosopher whose work, both as a populariser and promoting is 'personalist' model of society, had a vogue in the mid-twentieth century. Brought up as an evangelical Christian, Macmurray left the church during the First World War; he joined the Society of Friends late in life, but had no institutional religious affiliation during his working life (Stern 2001: 25). Despite this lack of practical religious engagement, Macmurray saw himself (and was seen) as a Christian writer.

Among Macmurray's central ideas was the distinction between 'community' or 'fellowship' on one hand and 'society' on the other, and the related distinction between 'personal' and 'impersonal' or 'functional' relationships. He argued that "we should use the term 'society' to refer to those forms of human association in which the bond of unity is negative or impersonal; and reserve for the contrasted forms of association which have a positive personal relation as their bond, the term 'community'" (Macmurray 1961; quoted in Stern 2001: 31). The 'personal' life is "the life that we live as persons, and we can live it only by entering into relationships with other people on a fully personal basis, in which we give ourselves to one another; or, to put the same thing the other way round, in which we accept one another freely for what we are, and in which therefore there is and can be no purpose other than the sharing of our lives in fellowship" (Macmurray 1961; quoted in Doddington 2007: 135). A community, in these terms, should not be confused with a society:

> Like a society, a community is a group which acts together; but unlike a mere society its members are in communion with one another; they constitute a fellowship. A society whose members act together without forming a fellowship can only be constituted by a common purpose. They co-operate to achieve a purpose which each of them, in his own interest, desires to achieve, and which can only be achieved by co-operation. The relations of its members are functional; each plays his[sic] allotted part in the achievement of the common end. A community, however, is a unity of persons as persons.
> (Macmurray 1996; quoted in Stern 2001: 31)

Viewed pragmatically, the distinction between personal and impersonal relationships simply corresponds to two modes of interacting, both of which are necessary for anyone living in a differentiated society. Within society, we "associate with each other in order to achieve some purpose that we all share. Out of this there springs a life of social co-operation through which we can provide for our common needs and achieve common ends." (Macmurray 1935; quoted in Hale 2002: 193). However, this form of interaction is not without a cost: "The satisfactory working of social life depends upon entering into relationships, not with the whole of ourselves, but only with part of ourselves." (Macmurray 1935; quoted in Hale 2002: 193). "[T]here is a central core of our life which is personal" (Macmurry 1935: quoted in Doddington 2007: 135); there is a fundamental need for people to be able to relate on a personal basis, in "a relationship ... which has no purpose beyond itself; in which we associate because it is natural to human beings to share their experience, to understand one another, to find joy and satisfaction in living together" (Macmurray 1935; quoted in Hale 2002: 193-4). Social co-operation is necessary for practical reasons, but personal relationships are an end in themselves: a free expression of the desire to share the experience of living.

It follows that personal relationships are built on a basis of equality. In the personal relationships which go to make up a community, "[individuals are] related as equals. This does not mean that they have, as a matter of fact, equal abilities, equal rights, equal functions or any other kind of *de facto* equality. The equality is intentional; it is an aspect of the mutuality of the relation. If it were not an equal relation, the motivation would be negative; a relation in which one was using the other as a means to his own end." (Macmurray 1961; quoted in Stern 2001: 33) A community is neither a biological family nor an artificially-imposed society, and avoids the inequalities built into both; it is "based neither on the blood-relationships of natural affinity, nor on the organised relationships of political or ecclesiastical groupings, but simply the practical sharing of life on a basis of their common humanity" (Macmurray 1936; quoted in Prideaux 2005: 544).

Macmurray's argument is cogent and coherent. We can readily appreciate the difference between a 'functional' relationship, in which "one was using the other as a means to his own end", and a 'personal' relationship in which "there is and can be no purpose other than the sharing of our lives". The idea of extending this model of relationship to form a community - a network of voluntary obligations sustained by mutual respect and intentional equality - is a powerful ideal. What it cannot be, and does not claim to be, is a model of society. A church may be a community; a school may be a community - Macmurray in fact argued that education depended on personal relationships, and hence that a properly functioning school **must** be a community (Stern 2001: 32). An entire society can never be a community, as it is necessarily organised along 'functional' and impersonal lines. It follows that to treat obligations to society as if they were obligations to community is both mystifying and exploitative, as it leads to individuals being exhorted to invest in a functional social bond as if it were a fulfilling personal relationship. Macmurray sharpened this point in a 1932 talk which contrasted "social morality" with the "human morality" of personal relationships. According to "social morality", Macmurray argued, "the purpose which ought to control our lives is not our own selfish purpose, but the social purpose ... the goodness of our own individual lives depends upon our devoting them to the common good". Macmurray dismissed this as "a false morality": "a denial of human reality" which "treats everybody as a means to an end" (Macmurray 1932; quoted in Hale 2002: 196). Blair's belief in the ideal of Macmurray's 'community' appears to be sincerely held: his statements on respect, mutual responsibility and equality of worth bear the authentic Macmurrayan stamp. However, as Hale points out, what Blair has made of it is closer to Macmurray's "social morality".

Macmurray's influence alone might have given Blair a project for moral mobilisation; as we have seen, Blair's actual thinking is equally marked by a divisive authoritarianism which can be traced back to Hobbes. The resultant hybrid is a particular kind of vision of 'community'. In the context of the 'Respect Agenda', responsibility and respect are invoked in authentically Macmurrayan terms, but the invocation is always accompanied by a drive to identify and punish those who don't belong in the community. In the Respect Action Plan (which has no authorial credit but carries Tony Blair's image and signature), we read:

> we have changed the culture of our public services and our communities so that the most visible signal of disrespect - serious anti-social behaviour and disorder - is tackled not tolerated, putting the responsible majority back in charge of their communities.
> ...
> If we are to achieve the vision of the Britain that we all want, then there is no room for cynicism. We need to take responsibility for ourselves, our children and our families, support those who want to do the same - and challenge those who will not.
> ...
> **every citizen has a responsibility** to behave in a respectful way and to support the community around them in doing the same.
> ...
> Too many people still suffer from the anti-social behaviour of a minority and feel powerless to stop it.
> ...
> When people feel confident, safe and supported, they will be able to come together with others in their neighbourhood to build trust, share values **and agree what is acceptable behaviour**. (Home Office 2006: 1-2; emphasis added)

For Hobbes, it was every citizen's duty to refrain from law-breaking and to consent to the decrees of the commonwealth. For Blair, this duty extends to meeting a positive standard of behaviour and assisting local institutions in enforcing it. For Macmurray, the community was an end in itself, and the fullest expression of human life treated as an end in itself. For Blair, building a trusting community makes it possible to agree the standards of behaviour which community members must meet or be excluded. This grotesque hybrid is as authoritarian and divisive as Hobbes, but without the framing liberalism that kept Hobbes' sovereign from governing every area of behaviour; it is as moralistic as Macmurray, but without Macmurray's belief in a universal human dignity which should not be coerced.

The last word can be given to Blair's former colleague, Roy Hattersley. "I helped as best I could in [Blair's] campaign to lead the Labour Party because he called himself something, 'Christian Socialist', and Christian Socialism means something very precise and it's more or less what I believe in. And when I discovered that Tony Blair didn't believe in it, it came as something of a shock to me." (Hattersley 2005)

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