

JULIA SKORUPSKA | Rhetoric And Global Justice*

ABSTRACT: Activists have long recognized the importance of rhetoric and emotional appeal in building support for the global justice movement. However, many political theorists worry that the use of rhetoric may obstruct clear presentation of the issues at stake, and may result in our policies being determined by where the sympathies of the best rhetoricians lie. In this article I examine the ways in which contemporary theorists try to accommodate the need for rhetoric and emotional appeal, and I argue that their attempts are unsatisfactory because they view rhetoric as a tool or skill that can be used to manipulate people to support any position. Yet if we question the sharp separation between rhetoric and reason, then the aims of building support for a cause, identifying the causes we ought to support, and treating others with respect need no longer conflict. Re-examining the radical liberal theories of J.S. Mill, L.T. Hobhouse and J.A. Hobson, will help us to see how this separation might be questioned and rhetoric recovered as a respectful and respectable form of argument.

KEY WORDS: Global Justice, Activism, Rhetoric, Deliberation, J.S. Mill, L.T. Hobhouse, J.A. Hobson.

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The campaign for global justice raises interesting questions about the use of rhetoric in the public sphere. Some of the most successful mobilizing campaigns, including the recent ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign have used strong images and symbols designed to appeal to the emotions and get people to see things in a different way. On the other hand, political theorists interested in the questions surrounding global justice proceed by dispassionately presenting abstract moral arguments about the scope and nature of our duties¹. This has led to a growing concern about whether this dispassionate style of argument will, or can, have any significant public impact². Yet, while acknowledging concerns about irrelevance, many political theorists, particularly liberal political theorists in the Anglo-American tradition, are wary of the use of rhetoric because they think that rhetoric is often manipulative, and that it will inhibit the emergence of better answers. These worries may seem abstract, but similar concerns are expressed in the more widespread frustration that politicians refuse to argue for a clear and radical line, and instead are overly concerned with how their speeches will play to their constituents. Both political theorists and activists worry that concern with the best way to build support threatens to compromise the integrity of their

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1. See for example Thomas Nagel, ‘The Problem of Global Justice’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 33/2 (2005), 113-147, or Simon Caney, David George and Peter Jones (eds.), *National Rights, International Obligations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

2. See, for example, David Miller, *Principles of Social Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), or Marc Stears, ‘The Vocation of Political Theory: Principles, Empirical Investigation and the Politics of Opportunity’ in *European Journal of Political Theory* 4/4 (2005), 325-350.

movement and the quality of arguments made.

Those committed to the campaign for global justice thus face a dilemma. On the one hand, the problem of global inequality is urgent and many people die each day as a result of inaction. On the other hand, the introduction of rhetoric into debates about global justice may obstruct the clear presentation of the issues at stake, and may result in our policies being determined by where the sympathies of the best rhetoricians lie, and not by who has the better arguments. One response to these worries is to argue that we should eschew the use of rhetoric, accept that our ability to generate mass support for the global justice movement may be limited, and address our arguments to key opinion formers and policy makers. However, this strategy can only ever have a limited success as the preferences and opinions of constituents are, and must be, an important concern of politicians. Another response is to suggest a division of labour: to suggest that while political theorists continue to use abstract reason to try to establish what our obligations are, they should encourage others to popularize their arguments and make them more persuasive in order to build support behind the campaign for global justice³. However this response cannot assuage our worries about the embrace of rhetoric; rhetoric remains manipulative and we must still rely on having the best rhetoricians on our side. The dilemma can be resolved only if we deny that embracing the techniques of rhetoric will debase our arguments. Re-examining the radical liberal theories of J.S. Mill, L.T. Hobhouse and J.A. Hobson, will help us to see how this can be done and how rhetoric can be recovered as a respectable and respectful form of argument.

It will be useful to begin by drawing out the contrast between the arguments used by social movements seeking to engage with mass audiences, and the arguments used by political theorists. The 'Make Poverty History' campaign organized around the 2005 meeting of The Group of Eight (G8), offers plenty of examples of interventions and arguments that might be labeled rhetorical. One of the main slogans of this campaign was 'Justice not Charity' and an aim of the campaign was to make people feel that they had an obligation to act to address the problems of the developing world. Many different techniques were used to try to get people to accept this message including techniques addressed primarily to the emotions. For example, large and popular concerts were organized in major cities around the world, where in between the performances, pictures and short films of life in the developing world were shown and the audience was asked to engage in a number of different activities. One particularly effective activity was encouraging the audiences at these concerts to click every three seconds to bring alive the statistic that every three seconds someone in the developing world dies from a preventable disease. Other elements of the 'Make Poverty History' campaign included encouraging people to wear white bands around their wrists to show their solidarity with the movement, and getting people to physically put their name to the goals and aspirations of the movement. The point of each of

3. See, for example, Stears (2005), or Michael Walzer, 'Deliberation and What Else?' in Macedo, (ed.), *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58-69.

these actions seems to have been to ‘wake’ people up to the problems of global justice, and to get people to feel solidarity with those in other parts of the world. People were not offered new reasons or facts to convince them, but a commitment to action on global justice was a consequence of principles and standards they already accepted. The aim of the ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign was to make well-known facts more vivid and to make people in the developing world seem closer to us, and thus to make people feel that their suffering could not be ignored. These sorts of arguments can be seen as rhetoric, they are directed to the emotions and the aim is to extend people’s sympathies rather than to give them new information or point out inconsistencies in their beliefs.

Rhetoric can be contrasted to a more transparent and sober style of argumentation favored by political theorists, and there is a tradition of distrust of rhetoric among political theorists stretching back to Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁴ Traditionally political theorists have been wary of rhetoric because they feared that rhetoric would distort the exercise of reason. Many of these worries are still shared today. As we have seen, rhetoric often involves playing on strong emotional responses and we may worry that this poses an obstacle to considered reflection of the issues at stake, and makes us liable to accept arguments that would not stand up to closed inspection. Hobbes, for example, argued that rhetoricians ‘do not try to make their discourse correspond to the nature of things, but to the passions of men’s hearts. The result is that votes are cast not on the basis of correct reasoning but on emotional impulse.’⁵ While playing on and drawing out sympathetic responses to suffering in the developing world may seem admirable, if the result is an unfocused enthusiasm, the result may be more damaging than inaction. Moreover, rhetorical arguments also tap into other emotional responses that we may consider to be less worthy, for example, the rhetoric around the question of immigration often taps into insecurities and fears about marginalization and change. Indeed another reason for being suspicious of rhetoric is that it can be thought of as a skill that can be turned to any purpose: Aristotle argued that a rhetorician is someone who is always able to see what is persuasive⁶ and that rhetoric is ‘the ability to see, in any given case, the available means of persuasion’.⁷ Hobbes read this as suggesting that the end of rhetoricians is victory, not truth. More recently Quentin Skinner has embraced Hobbes’ metaphor that we can see rhetoric as ‘physical force’ or ‘weapon’.⁸ Thus political theorists worry that if rhetoric is a weapon that can be used in defense of any position, in arguments laced with rhetoric it is much less likely that correct, reasonable or just arguments will emerge triumphant from the

4. See, for example, Thomas Hobbes, *On The Citizen*, Tuck and Silverthorne (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chs. X and XII; Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. XIII; and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Book 4, ch. 1, pp. 134-6.

5. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ch.10, para.11, p. 122.

6. Aristotle, *Topics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), VI 12, 149b25.

7. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (New York: Random House, 1954), I.2, 1355b26f.

8. See for example Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 269; or Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 177.

exchange. These worries were eloquently expressed by Mill who turned down the invitation to join a debating society, writing:

I would gladly give any aid in my power towards improving their opinions; but I have no fear that any opinions they have will not be sufficiently well expressed; nor in any way should I be disposed to give any assistance in sharpening weapons when I do not know in what cause they will be used.⁹

The growing concern with legitimacy, transparency and reciprocity, and the insistence that our political actions should be such that they could be reasonably justified to all, gives contemporary political theorists another reason for worrying about rhetoric's manipulative force. If the rhetorician can persuade her audience to accept whatever argument she wants them to, then the audience does not have the opportunity to freely endorse or reject these arguments¹⁰. Sometimes after hearing a rousing speech that at the time we found convincing, we reflect and realize that the argument cannot stand closer examination, and we are left feeling duped. The use of rhetoric can also be seen as a breach of reciprocity, the commitment to offering reasons to fellow citizens that they might reasonably accept. John Rawls argued that respect for the freedom and equality of fellow citizens requires that we use 'public reason' to engage with one another on fundamental political questions; 'we should propose terms of cooperation that they could accept as reasonable.'¹¹ The expert rhetorician who sees immediately what is persuasive and can build support behind any cause thereby fails to fulfill the criterion of reciprocity and fails to show adequate respect for her fellow citizens.

However, urgent injustices like the problems of global inequality pose great difficulties to this insistence that we should address each other using only public reason. Involvement in these real world social struggles brings home the fact that the dispassionate presentation of abstract moral arguments often has little effect in public debates, and the urgency of these problems is likely to make the insistence that we refrain from using the most effective techniques seem questionable.

One response to the suggestion that dispassionate argument is unlikely to have much effect in public debate, is to conclude that the broader public is not the right audience for political theorists to address, and that instead they should concentrate their efforts on trying to persuade key actors in the policy formation process. Bernard Williams argues that contemporary works of political theory seem to address themselves 'to the attention of someone who has *power*, who could enact what a writer urges on him.'¹² A common reaction of political theorists who feel that political theory has become excessively abstract is to devote some of

9. J.S. Mill, 'Mill to the Secretary of the Neophyte Writers' Society, April 23, 1854', *Collected Works* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), XIV, p.205.

10. See, for example, Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 151-152; or John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 69-70.

11. John Rawls, 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', in *Political Liberalism* expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 446.

12. Bernard Williams, 'The Liberalism of Fear', in Geoffrey Hawthorn (ed.), *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 52-61, p. 57.

their time to writing for and talking to think tanks and politicians.¹³ However, this response may not be effective. First, it is subject to many of the same worries as were expressed about the use of rhetoric. If political theorists address politicians and think tanks in the hope that they will enact their favored policies, rather than trying to win widespread support for these policies, they will struggle to live up to the ideals of transparency and reciprocity, and their ideas will be insulated from the insights that might come from engaging with a broader audience. Second, as Williams points out, while abstract arguments may be more effective in the context of a seminar or policy consultation document than in the context of a political rally or televised debate, the opinions and beliefs of the general public place real political constraints on the actions of politicians and policy makers. In particular, they need to think about how to remain empowered and so to think about how they will get votes.¹⁴ This suggests that if we cannot build broad support behind the global justice movement, attempts to pressure politicians into enacting our favoured policies will only have a limited effect.

Another response is to accept that if we are to have any real political impact we need to take seriously the task of winning support for our cause, and thus to try to find space for rhetoric within the framework of a commitment to looking for mutually acceptable policies. Recently many political theorists have observed that successful campaigns for social justice, for example the civil rights movement, tend to use tactics other than the dispassionate presentation of moral argument¹⁵, and theorists have consequently looked for ways to relax the conditions that we place on interactions in the public sphere without undermining the ideals of transparency and reciprocity. For example, in 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', Rawls suggested that it is acceptable to introduce comprehensive doctrines - doctrines that include what is of substantial value in human life, for example, religion - to public political discussion provided that 'in due course proper political reasons...are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support'.¹⁶ In *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, John Dryzek made a similar suggestion, arguing that that the use of rhetoric is acceptable so long as in the end these arguments are 'answerable to reason'.¹⁷ However, while these modifications do relax the conditions on the sorts of arguments that can be used in the public sphere, it is not clear that they will help us to resolve the problem of motivating people to support the campaign for global justice as it is not clear the sorts of arguments made by the 'Make Poverty History' campaign would fulfill this proviso. One way of interpreting the Rawlsian

13. An illustrative example is the connection between political theorists and the British think-tank the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr), a think tank that has close links with the Labour government. Many political theorists, such as Peter Singer and David Miller, have contributed to seminars organized by the ippr and have contributed to their publications.

14. Williams (2005), p. 58.

15. See, for example, Dryzek (2000), p. 53; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.135-36; Medearis (2005); or Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 251.

16. Rawls, 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', p. 462.

17. Dryzek (2000), p. 54, and see also p. 71.

proviso is to read it as stipulating that rhetorical arguments are only acceptable if they could be replaced by arguments in public reason without losing any of their force. Dryzek argues that it is important we allow people to use rhetoric because some people find it very hard to express their point in reasoned terms. Thus he argues, that to prevent exclusion we should admit the use of rhetoric so long as the same point could be expressed in reasoned argument, and reason remains sovereign. However, if the Rawlsian proviso is read in this way, then it cannot resolve the dilemma that is posed by the difficulties of motivating people to support the campaign for global justice. Movements like 'Make Poverty History' use rhetoric not because they lack the skills to make reasoned arguments, but because they think that this is the best way to reach people, that people are unlikely to be persuaded to commit to the movement if they restrict themselves to the dispassionate presentation of reasoned arguments. Thus their use of rhetoric could not be replaced by arguments phrased in public reason. As John Medearis argues with reference to tactics used by the civil rights movement, rephrasing the arguments in the language of public reason would mean that they 'would not have had the desired impact on the chosen audience'.¹⁸

Yet it is not clear that this is the correct way to interpret the Rawlsian proviso. In his earlier work on Public Reason, Rawls suggested that the use of techniques of argument other than public reason may be necessary for 'a well-ordered society to come about in which public discussion consists mainly in the appeal to political values'.¹⁹ And in 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', he argued that the Abolitionists and those in the Civil Rights Movement fulfill the proviso because their doctrines 'supported basic constitutional values'.²⁰ This suggests that the best interpretation of the proviso is that it is acceptable to use rhetoric to build support for your doctrine so long as the content of your doctrine is such that reasonable people ought to support it. Thus we might read Rawls as arguing, as Marc Stears has more recently, that as well as using reason to identify basic principles, or political values, we must also think about 'the means by which those principles can be brought about'²¹; that thought needs to be given to how we might 'reshape' citizens' intuitions and motivate them to support struggles for justice.²² The virtue of this response is that it seems more likely to provide effective solutions to the problems of motivation than the strategy of trying to influence politicians. The problem is that while the proviso ensures that there are good reasons to support the doctrine that is being argued for, it does not ensure that citizens are persuaded to support it on the basis of free and informed reason, and thus it fails to avoid the charge that the use of rhetoric is manipulative. Rawls insisted that the exercise of power is proper only when 'we sincerely believe that the reasons we offer for our political actions may reasonably be accepted by others as a justification for this action'.²³ Yet if the distinction between rhetoric and

18. Medearis (2005), p. 63.

19. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 251.

20. Rawls, 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', p. 464.

21. Stears (2005), p. 347.

22. Marc Stears, 'Beyond the Logic of Liberalism' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6/2 (2001), 215-230, p. 222.

23. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. xlv.

reason is maintained, and people can be convinced only when we use rhetorical rather than reasoned arguments, then the basis on which people are brought to support our actions is not one that they could reasonably accept. Thus the criterion of reciprocity is not fulfilled, and people do not have the opportunity to freely endorse or reject the doctrine in question. The proviso ensures that rhetoric is used only in support of a cause that is right, but it does nothing to undermine the view that rhetoric is a tool that can be used to effectively persuade people to support any cause. Furthermore, the assumption that our reasons for endorsing a doctrine are sufficient and that we are warranted in gaining the support through rhetoric, narrows the space for a broad and reasoned public discussion about what justice requires. This will weaken the ideal of collective self-government and may result in the loss of interesting insights that would have emerged had we engaged in a broader and more substantive debate.

Therefore the dilemma with which we began remains unanswered. If we restrict ourselves to arguments that we think could be reasonably accepted by our interlocutor and deny ourselves the tools of rhetoric, then it is unlikely that we will have much success in motivating support for change. On the other hand, if we do start to think about how to motivate people to enact or campaign for our policy preferences, we risk compromising many of the liberal values that inspired our commitment to social reform in the first place. At the heart of this dilemma lies the claim that the sorts of arguments that are necessary to motivate us are arguments that can be used in support of any cause: that ‘the function of political arguments is more that of advertising, or “weapons” that circumvent the use of physical force, than that of assertions one could interpret as providing support for “true” theories’.²⁴ If we accept this claim, then we must accept that motivating people to act will always come at the cost of reasoning with them.

However, I think that this claim that rhetoric is a skill rather than a mode of reasoning can be rejected. While sometimes reflection on an emotionally charged speech leaves us with a sense that we have been manipulated, sometimes, even after reflection, we feel that we have learnt something, and have a more sensible appreciation of what is significant. Indeed, many would insist that getting people to enact statistics about poverty in the developing world gives them a better and truer understanding. This conviction that sometimes rhetorical arguments are good arguments can be elaborated by drawing on the work of Mill, Hobhouse, and Hobson: liberals much more actively involved in campaigns for social reform than contemporary political theorists, and liberals who did not share the contemporary suspicion of rhetoric. Because of their involvement in practical politics all of these writers were concerned with what makes arguments successful, and all were skeptical of the power of the dispassionate presentation of abstract moral argument to generate support. For example, Hobhouse insisted:

Great changes are not caused by ideas alone; but they are not effected without ideas. The passions of men must be aroused if the frost of

24. W. Becker, *Die Freiheit, die wir meinen: Entscheidung für die liberale Demokratie* (Munich: Piper, 1982), p. 101.

custom is to be broken or the chains of authority burst; but passion of itself is blind and its world chaotic.²⁵

Yet these thinkers rejected Stears' suggestion that we should separate the task of thinking about what basic principles should be endorsed and the task of persuading people to adopt them. Unlike contemporary political theorists, they addressed their writing to large audiences and were not averse to rhetorical flourish. Indeed they insisted that philosophy should not remain abstract and disengaged, but instead should be informed by consideration of what sorts of argument are likely to motivate - consideration of 'the practical demands of human feeling'.²⁶ They argued that the best answers would have a strong emotional and rhetorical appeal.²⁷ Therefore, while they accepted that rhetoric was an indispensable element of persuasive argument, they maintained that rhetorical arguments were good arguments and there was no need for a division of labour between political theorists and expert rhetoricians. Rhetorical arguments not only motivated people but also gave them reason to act.

Mill, Hobhouse and Hobson's argument that rhetorical argument is a respectable and respectful mode of reasoning has two stages. First, they argued that often we could not give people reason to support campaigns for social justice by appealing only to arguments they already accepted. Like Stears, they insisted that the role of the political theorist was in many cases to get people to revise and extend their intuitions and commitments, and they suggested that the best way to do this might be through the use of rhetoric. Second, they suggested that people could not be persuaded to take on any commitments, and that when they were exposed to many different arguments, they were most likely to be persuaded by the more persuasive. Often we cannot give people reasons to support a campaign for justice through appeal only to principles they already accept. This claim stems from the view that our principles and judgments could be faulted for being incomplete as well as for being inconsistent. Thus, for example, Mill argued that Bentham lacked self-consciousness and this meant that he could not access the 'cheerful and mournful wisdom' that the experiences of a self-conscious man give rise to. If he had shared in the experiences of self-consciousness of Wordsworth, Byron, Goethe and Chateaubriand the change in his outlook would have been fundamental, affecting all his views.²⁸ A parallel in the case of global justice would be to suggest that many people do not already accept commitments and values that would lead them to accept that they have obligations of justice to do more about global inequality; that in reflective equilibrium, they would still maintain that spending on luxury items for themselves is acceptable. Given that people could be mistaken because their views were too narrow or inconsistent, Mill maintained that the role of the political theorist was to seek to make peoples' views both more complete as well as more correct. Therefore, part of this role was

25. L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), p.50.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

to make people alive to aspects of their experience that previously they had been unaware of. In this task, rhetoric and emotional appeal were indispensable.

Indeed, one of the main argumentative techniques used by Mill, Hobhouse and Hobson was to offer persuasive re-descriptions that would suggest a radically new way of viewing our behavior or commitments and shatter our previous understanding. For example, in *The Subjection of Women*, Mill suggested that rather than chivalrously supporting dependent women, men stunt their development to produce willing slaves.²⁹ Thus instead of asking what the most coherent account of principles that lie behind our practices and commitments might be, the attempt is made to offer such a convincing insight into why and how we might approach the situation in a different fashion, that our previously settled outlook dissolves and a different view can be elaborated. Examples of these sorts of attempts to make people feel the import of new commitments can also be found in moral education. When confronted with an egotistic child, we try to make them consider others by painting a vivid image of their distress, and we hope that these descriptions will extend the child's sympathies and give her reason to care about her effect on others. Indeed, we can also see the techniques employed in the 'Make Poverty History' campaign as an attempt to shatter complacency by making us alive to the reality and import of suffering in the developing world.

However, while we may accept that rhetoric can make people feel new commitments and see things in different ways, we might wonder whether we have any guarantee that rhetoric will lead us to accept the right commitments or see things the right way. Mill, Hobhouse and Hobson were confident that better answers were more likely to be accepted because they thought that we were most likely to be persuaded by answers that made best sense of the world, and that in a broad enough conversation the most subtle and sophisticated answers would do best. Not all rhetorical arguments succeed. To persuade someone to see something differently, an appealing re-description has to be offered: a description that resonates or connects with us. One way to do this is to draw on, and reinterpret, convictions and beliefs that may fit uneasily with our current view. Another, is to draw out latent dispositions to respond in a certain way. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill drew on the desire to be modern and exploited the tension between a modern commitment to undermining ascriptive identities and the insistence that women were born to fulfill a different role.³⁰ The 'Make Poverty History' campaign sought to draw on our susceptibility to be moved by images of suffering. Thus not all re-descriptions have equal chances of success, and within any given context some things are much easier to argue for than others.

Yet why should we think that those descriptions that resonate with us are more

29. J.S. Mill, 'The Subjection of Women' in Alan Ryan (ed.), Mill, (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), p.144. One of the most prominent arguments in the nineteenth century against giving women the vote, was that in order to give space for the fragile feminine virtues to develop, women needed to be protected from the 'rough and tumble' of party politics and provided a purer environment in which the virtues of charm, care and insight could flourish. These arguments can be found in many anti-suffrage pamphlets including Janus, 'Why Women Cannot be turned into men' (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1872), and Beatrice Webb, Letter to Millicent Fawcett' in Women's Suffrage Record, November 1906.

30. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, p. 145.

likely to be correct? One response is to claim that the standard of correctness simply is how well a view makes sense of our experience, and thus we are most likely to be persuaded by those views that are more persuasive. The problem with such a response is that it does not have the resources to explain why people are sometimes persuaded by rhetorical argument to embrace extreme and implausible positions. A more credible position is that those descriptions and convictions that continue to resonate with us after reflection, inspection, and comparison with other descriptions, are likely to be correct. Both Hobson and Hobhouse suggest that while subtle and sophisticated positions may lack the immediate appeal of ‘stimulating and explosive “myths”’³¹, their appeal will be more resilient and enduring. Thus Hobhouse writes:

The advice seems cold to fiery spirits, but they may come to learn that the vision of justice in the wholeness of her beauty kindles a passion that may not flare up into moments of dramatic scintillation, but burns with the enduring glow of central heat.³²

Hobson and Hobhouse suggest that where people do not reflect on their commitments and consider alternative interpretations of their experience, they may be convinced by ‘stimulating and explosive “myths”’ that draw on emotions or experience previously unawakened. But if they can be encouraged to reflect on these myths and are presented with a more complex view that combines insight from their previous view and the new one, a ‘sense of artificial dupery and doping’ will spoil the efficacy of these ‘bright visions’.³³

Moreover, Hobson and Hobhouse both argued that political involvement and commitment to a social movement struggling for justice were likely to stimulate precisely this sort of reflection and confrontation with new ideas. They believed that the exigencies of politics would force people to engage with and seek to understand the views of their opponents, and would thereby encourage them to develop theories that drew on the insights of as many other different views as possible. Hobhouse insisted that:

To be effective men must act together, and to act together they must have a common understanding and a common object. When it comes to be a question of any far-reaching change, they must not merely conceive their own immediate end with clearness. They must convert others, they must show that their object is possible, that it is compatible with existing institutions, or at any rate with some workable form of social life. They are, in fact, driven on by the requirements of their position to the elaboration of ideas, and in the end to some sort of social philosophy.³⁴

The need to build support would make us listen to those to whom we tried to

31. Hobson, *Free Thought in the Social Sciences* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1926) p. 248.

32. Hobhouse (1911), p. 250.

33. Hobson (1926), p. 248.

34. Hobhouse (1911), p. 50.

appeal and modify and revise our position in response, and this would lead us to enlarge our ideas and develop our explanations.

The distance between political theorizing about global justice, and public attitudes to global justice, raises in an acute fashion the worry that while our political theories claim to be about the world, they have very little connection with, or effect on, public debate. So long as we insist that arguments with greater popular appeal distort clear thinking about the requirements of social justice and simply serve only to motivate, attempts to become more engaged will always involve compromise. However, if like Mill, Hobson and Hobhouse we question this division of labour, and insist that the best arguments will have the greatest and most lasting rhetorical force, the way is opened for political theorists to become more engaged without fear that the pursuit of truth and respect for the duty of civility will be compromised in the process. Indeed, the writings of Mill, Hobson and Hobhouse suggest involvement in struggles for social justice, and a commitment to speaking the language of politics can in fact broaden and improve our political theories.

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