Numerous studies have been made on the social and political thought of Thomas Hobbes, but his thought on social welfare was not discussed until J.W. Seaman in 1990.\(^1\) Seaman criticises the interpretations of K. Thomas, W. Letwin, C. B. Macpherson, J. M. Buchanan and G. S. Kavka,\(^2\) and tries to offer new interpretations of Hobbes’s views on welfare, and thus a different understanding of his theory of social contract and of inalienable rights. Specifically, he takes note of the two policies, “public charity” and “prevention of idleness” presented in the thirtieth chapter of _Leviathan_, and tries to show that they were considered as the means for peace based on natural laws.

Seaman’s criticisms of preceding studies of Hobbes in this field are persuasive, but there are three deficiences in his arguments: first, he does not take into account the implications of Hobbes’s fourth natural law, “gratitude”, which is indispensable for understanding “charity”, second, he does not discuss Hobbes’s thoughts on colonization, which is also important for the present discussion; and third, he neglects to compare Hobbes’s views with those of his predecessors.

This paper aims to clarify the characteristics and vitality of Hobbes’s thought on social welfare in relation to the basic structure of his political and economic thought and those of his predecessors.

I.

As Seaman notes, it is under the title of “Publique Charity”, in the thirtieth chapter of _Leviathan_, that Hobbes discusses social welfare:


Whereas many men, by accident unevitable, become unable to maintain themselves by their labour; they ought not to be left to the Charity of private persons; but to be provided for, (as farforth as the necessities of Nature require,) by the Laws of the Common-wealth. For as it is Uncharitableness in any man, to neglect the impotent; so it is in the Soveraign of a Common-wealth, to expose them to the hazard of such uncertain Charity.  

In this paragraph those who “become unable to maintain themselves by their labour”, “by accident unevitable” become “the impotent”. In addition, at the beginning of the next paragraph entitled “Prevention of Idlenesse” it is said that “but for such as have strong bodies, the case is otherwise”. Considering these, there is no doubt that it is the physically weak who are unable to work through no fault of their own that are to be the object of “public charity” by the laws of the commonwealth. By “Charity” Hobbes means “desire of good to another” in common with “benevolence” as well as “good will”. It seems that “the necessities of Nature” signifies the various commodities necessary to maintain each man’s “own life”, which is “his own nature”.

According to Hobbes, “the People” “are to be taught by their Soveraign” “this one Commandment of mutuall Charity; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy selfe”, which means “the summe of the Second Table” of the Commandments of Moses; and this charity, which is one of “the Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions; commonly called the Passions” is a Law of Nature like “Justice, Gratitude, Modesty, Equity, Mercy & the rest” which are also “moral Vertues”.

Furthermore, Hobbes thinks that “the honour of great Persons, is to be valued for their beneficence, and the aydes they give to men of inferiour rank, or not at all”. The reason lies in his view of man’s power: “the Power of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good”. That is to say, to Hobbes, possession which is one of the resources of

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 *Leviathan*, p.123.

7 Ibid., p.189.

8 Ibid., pp.382-3.

9 Ibid., pp. 118 and 123.

10 Ibid., pp.216 and 399.

11 Ibid., pp. 385-6.

12 Ibid., p. 150.