Introduction

Happiness is political. We know this, of course: the individual right to the pursuit of happiness is enshrined in one of our greatest political documents, the Declaration of Independence. The way we think about happiness affects what we do, how we relate to other people and the world around us, our moral principles, and even our ideas about how society should be organized. Happiness has been associated with everything from unlimited consumption with wanton abandon on one side to self-denial and the ability to love one's torturer on the other. What it means to pursue one's happiness, then, depends heavily on what one understands by the term.

Indeed, happiness has been expressly recognized as a political concept at various points in history. Happiness was so clearly in the forefront of political thinking at the end of the eighteenth century that it prompted the French Jacobin leader Saint-Just to assert, "Happiness is a new idea in Europe."[1] It was around this same time that Jeremy Bentham was busy formulating the principles of utilitarianism, a political philosophy with happiness at its very center. Bentham's hedonistic model of happiness[2] is one of two that will be examined in this book. The other model, which I will refer to as eudaemonistic,[3] was championed by William Thompson, a contemporary and friend of Bentham. Bentham's hedonistic happiness is generally recognized as one of the major theoretical cornerstones of the liberal capitalist system. Thompson's is much less familiar and less

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often examined, but his eudaemonistic happiness is a major part of the foundations of democratic socialism as well as the modern cooperative movement.

William Thompson's work has much to offer to contemporary debates. The economic crisis of the past few years has contributed a new intensity to calls for a "new economy" based on alternative economic models.[4] Cooperatives, with over a billion members in more than one hundred countries worldwide, are important to many of these alternative models because they represent the most extensive alternative to the traditional liberal capitalist model. What makes them different is that these autonomous enterprises are founded on a set of principles, articulated expressly as the Co-operative Principles, that includes democracy, equality, and the common ownership of property, and are linked to each other through the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), one of the world's largest and oldest transnational organizations. But, while the cooperative movement is often seen as largely apolitical today, it had its beginnings in the early nineteenth century as a radical movement for social change, precisely as a reaction to the ravages of the newly developing liberal capitalist system. Out of one of the most thorough early critiques of that system, Thompson worked out a political theory of cooperatives, a theory that came to be called, in fairly short order, socialism.[5] But far from the state socialism that developed in the twentieth century, which left people as alienated from each other and the means of production as did the liberal capitalist alternative,[6] Thompson's ideas have more in common with contemporary anarchist ideas of participatory democracy and local control as the means by which to establish the conditions for the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Thompson receives little attention from political theorists, but in many ways he prefigures important elements of radical democratic theory today. Indeed, advances often attributed to Marx—for example, where Brown credits Marx with the "discovery of power in the social and specifically economic realm"[7]—could as easily be references to Thompson who, after all, wrote his major work twenty years before Marx wrote the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Where Laclau and Mouffe in defining their vision of radical democracy say that they "have proposed that [the] proliferation of antagonisms and calling into question of relations of subordination should be considered as a moment of deepening of the democratic revolution,"[8] they might be interested to

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find similar ideas expressed in Thompson's critique of subordination and his discussion of the requirements of democracy.

Thompson offers contemporary political theory something it largely lacks, a close attention to the functions of institutions. Lamenting that the "Marxist project of illuminating the place of capitalism in political and social life has pretty much vanished from the orbit of political theory," Brown writes that "to theorize the politics of recognition, the sexual order of things, the nature of citizenship, or the reconfiguration of privacy, without taking the measure of their historically specific production by capitalism, is literally not to know the constitutive conditions of one's object of analysis."[9] Thompson's work is instructive in this regard, as he clearly connects the problems of subordination to the institutional apparatuses that produce it, even as the shape and nature of those institutions have become more firmly entrenched and hardened. But Thompson goes farther: he connects his theory to institutional forms that are meant to address the problems he identifies.

If institutions in general and the cooperative movement more specifically have received little attention from political theorists, it is also the case that the cooperative movement has lost sight of its political nature—especially in the United States.[10] This has not always been the case in the U.S., as cooperatives have been associated with populist movements at various points in its history[11] and, as any reader of the online journal *Grassroots Economic Organizing* knows,[12] within the movement itself there exist elements that clearly understand its political character. Despite this, the vast mainstream of the cooperative movement in the United States—one of the largest in the world, with more than 120 million members, over $3 trillion in assets, and over $500 billion in annual revenue[13]—has little sense of itself as a political movement. While this book may do little to affect the depoliticization of the cooperative movement in the mainstream, it may help to provide a clearer sense of the ideological roots of the movement and strengthen arguments that cooperatives may be an important component of deep-seated social change to build a more just and equitable society.

William Thompson

There exists a vast secondary as well as biographic literature on Bentham (1748–1832), legal and political theorist and acknowledged founder

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of utilitarianism,[14] to which nothing substantial may be added here. Because Thompson is not nearly so well known,[15] a short introduction is warranted. Although often overlooked and not always acknowledged, Thompson's contributions to socialist theory[16] and feminism[17] have at least been fairly well established. He also receives at least a mention—although rarely much more—in most historical work on the cooperative movement, at least where the pre-Rochdale period prior to 1844 is discussed,[18] but in some his contribution is ignored entirely.[19] What is lacking in all this is a sustained, systematic consideration of Thompson's philosophy and political thought. This book is intended to at least begin to fill that gap by connecting these strains in order to establish both Thompson's importance as a political thinker and the cooperative movement's importance (or potential) as a political movement.

Thompson's Life and Works

Although he would deny it, Thompson (1775–1833) represents perhaps the paradigmatic case of a traitor to his class:[20] born the only son of a wealthy Protestant merchant in Cork, Ireland, Thompson went on to become one of the founding theorists of socialism. As Claeys notes, his *Inquiry into the Principles for the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness* (1824) became "the most substantial textbook" of the early British socialist movement.[21] Having become a supporter of the republican cause early on (he was said to carry the French tricolor attached to his walking stick as he walked the Irish countryside),[22] he came into contact with Robert Owen, the Welsh industrialist whom many consider the founder of the cooperative movement, when Owen came to Ireland on a speaking tour in 1822. Although initially dismissive of Owen's plans for cooperative communities as little more than an "improved system of pauper management,"[23] in the *Inquiry* he presents a full-throated endorsement for the Owenite system. In Thompson's hands, however, the Owenite communities become not only a way to address the problems of poverty, as Owen initially considered them, but a vehicle for deeply rooted social change.

Thompson came into contact with Bentham through his interest in education. Along with his father, he was a trustee (or "proprietor") of the Cork Institution (now University College Cork), which was founded with the objective of providing education for poor working men.[24] In 1818, Thompson published a series of letters on the management of

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the Cork Institution (of which he was highly critical) and the value of education in the *Cork Southern Reporter,* a local paper; these were later compiled into his first publication, a pamphlet titled *Practical Education for the South of Ireland*.[25] In this context, Thompson drew up plans for a school based on principles expounded by Bentham in his *Chrestomathia,* which led him to write to Bentham in October 1818.[26] Their correspondence eventually led to a three-month stay by Thompson in Bentham's house in 1822–23, where he began writing the *Inquiry*.

Thompson's *Inquiry,* his primary work, is a very interesting book. All but dedicated to Bentham, Thompson refers to both utility and happiness throughout, beginning the first chapter with the statement that "*Utility* . . . the pursuit of the greatest possible sum of human happiness, is the leading principle constantly kept in view . . . in this inquiry."[27] Similarly, the principle of security, which is of utmost importance to Bentham as a principle subsidiary to utility, is central to Thompson's concerns. However, their differences are substantial: Where Bentham argues that security and equality usually conflict (and that equality must give way when they do), Thompson argues for their reconciliation. Where Bentham argues for the benefits of competition and private property, Thompson argues that these undermine the very possibility of happiness for the vast majority of people and argues instead for systems based on cooperation and common property. Where Bentham argues that there should be no limits to the accumulation of wealth and points to the positive aspects of opulence, Thompson argues that with great wealth come great vices, which have a debilitating effect on society. Where Bentham focuses his attention on the requirements of happiness for discrete individuals independently pursuing their self-interest (subject to the constraints, such as laws, imposed by social forces), Thompson is concerned with establishing the social conditions for individuals to achieve happiness such that their self-interest is aligned with the common interest.

At some point—perhaps during his stay in Bentham's house—Thompson met Anna Doyle Wheeler, which led to the publication in 1825 of the *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery.* The *Appeal* is a radical work that begins with a condemnation of the exclusion of women from political participation, presents a powerful argument against all systems of subordination, and ends with the claim that the empowerment of women cannot take

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place until new social institutions are developed that replace systems of exploitation with systems based on equality and cooperation.

Around this time Thompson became heavily involved in efforts by Robert Owen and others to establish a cooperative society in London, while continuing to oversee his lands in Ireland[28] and promote the idea of cooperation. In response to Thomas Hodgskin's *Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital,*[29] Thompson published a short essay, *Labor Rewarded: The Claims of Labor and Capital Conciliated,* in 1827, in which he argues that the only effective way for workers to combat the exploitation of the capitalists was to gain control of capital themselves, and "UNITE IN LARGE NUMBERS" in cooperative communities.[30] Clearly identified as a leader of the cooperative movement, he was also active during this time lecturing and publishing essays in journals dedicated to promoting cooperative ideas and the establishment of cooperative communities.[31]

In 1830 Thompson published his last work, *Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities on the Principles of Mutual Co-operation, United Possessions and Equality of Exertions and of the means of Enjoyments,* and worked with Owen and others to convene the first Cooperative Congress in England in 1831. The plan he laid out in *Practical Directions* was formally adopted by the Congress and he was given the task, with Owen and others, to convene meetings in London in order to begin the effort to establish a community. As part of this, Thompson offered his own lands for those who would work to establish a community there,[31] although no society was formed.

The Congress met again in 1831 and once more in 1832, before Thompson succumbed to a lifelong respiratory condition and died in 1833, at the relatively young age of fifty-six. His attempt to leave his body to science and his estate to the formation of a cooperative community (with the exception of an annuity for Anna Wheeler) led to his sisters filing a suit to overturn his will. In the nearly twenty years it took to settle the case, the lands were sold to pay for attorneys' fees.[33] When the suit was finally settled, William Pare, Thompson's executor, received "some residue," which he used to publish an abridged edition of the *Inquiry* in 1850, reissued in 1869.[34]

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Thompson's Legacy

The existence of Pare's abridged version may have had some effect on Thompson's reception after his death. The abridged version, one reviewer notes, had "a number of the more philosophical sections . . . deleted" and the book was also "depoliticized in places," including the removal of "an important critique of family inheritance."[35] Karl Marx, who cites Thompson in some of his later work, presents a particularly interesting case. As an Irish historian (who might be accused of some bias in the matter) puts it, Marx was "less than generous in his acknowledgments to Thompson."[36] Nonetheless, Marx does cite Thompson at some important points. Always a critic, what is remarkable about Marx's citations of Thompson is that they come without criticism. For example, Marx includes two very lengthy extracts from the *Inquiry* in his discussion of surplus value in *Capital, volume II*—without comment.[37] Based on his citations to Thompson in *Capital, volume I,* which he saw through to completion, we know that Marx read the original 1824 edition, but Engels, who prepared *Capital, vol. II* for publication, appears to have only been familiar with the abridged edition, based on the citations we may assume he added to Marx's text.[38] But while Engels attributes the "discovery" of surplus value to Marx,[39] Anton Menger, who provides one of the first critical examinations of Thompson's political and economic theory, argues that Marx's "whole theory of surplus value, its conception, its name, and the estimates of its amount are borrowed in all essentials from Thompson's writings."[40] These claims, including Thompson's theory of surplus value, will receive greater attention in chapter 4.

Thompson's relationship with another leading intellectual of the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill, is more difficult to assess. As a young man, in 1825, Mill was part of a group of Radicals who engaged in a series of debates organized by the London Cooperative Society. The side of the Owenites was championed by Thompson, and it is in the context of a discussion of these debates in his autobiography that Mill's only reference to Thompson, anywhere in his work, appears, as he indicates familiarity with both the *Inquiry* and the *Appeal,* and says that Thompson was "a very estimable man, with whom I was well acquainted."[41] However, Mill ignores Thompson in his political economics, and even in his later writing on socialism. Nonetheless, contemporary scholars have suggested that Mill's feminism was strongly influenced by Thompson,[42] and when

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reading Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* next to Thompson's *Appeal* one may be struck by the many similarities. It should be noted, of course, that Thompson was not the only feminist writer in the period, nor the only one with whom Mill may have had a personal relationship (Anna Wheeler, with whom Thompson wrote the *Appeal,* was certainly one of these), but it is difficult to overlook the parallels between the two works.

More contemporary writing on Thompson suffers from various deficiencies. E. K. Hunt's two essays on his political economics reference the original edition in the text but include the abridged version in the citations, and Hunt fails to consider any of Thompson's other work in coming to the conclusion that Thompson is, in effect, insufficiently radical.[43] Gregory Claeys's work, while far more firmly grounded in the literature,[44] shares a curious feature with Hunt's, which is the tendency to misread Thompson's careful working through of counterarguments, specifically around the question of the possibility of a competitive system based on what he refers to as the "natural laws for the distribution of wealth." Like Hunt, Claeys takes this to reflect support for competition under certain conditions. However, as I argue in chapter 4, Thompson's powerful arguments regarding the debilitating social effects of competition under any conditions cannot possibly be read as an endorsement.

Another curious feature of the literature on Thompson is that his relationship with Bentham is generally dismissed as having any significant impact on his work—despite the fact that Thompson references Bentham with reverence. There is no question that they had their differences regarding theory, but as I think the subsequent chapters will make clear, it would be difficult to agree with Lowenthal that "there was no real connection, but in fact the widest divergence between Bentham and Thompson,"[45] with Hunt's statement that "Thompson's claim to being a disciple of Bentham has to be rejected,"[46] or with Claeys that "despite Thompson's immediate acquaintance with Jeremy Bentham, the influence of the latter upon his thought has probably been exaggerated."[47] Theirs was not simply an "acquaintance," as Claeys puts it, and Thompson did not simply "use the greatest-happiness principle merely as a convenient formula for expressing his own benevolent inclinations."[48] While their differences are substantial, the parallels and similarities are, as well. Thompson's conceptual framework is heavily dependent upon Bentham's: happiness is the basis for utility, and a set of subsidiary principles provides the foundations for the theory that follows. As will

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be discussed in later chapters, Bentham's subsidiary principles are incorporated into Thompson's. Indeed, Thompson could be interpreted as providing a kind of alternate reading of Bentham's ideas, different from that of the political economists of his day, as is suggested by Minter Morgan, someone who knew both men well.[49]

The central concepts of Bentham's and Thompson's theories—happiness, utility, and the subsidiary principles of security, subsistence, abundance, and equality (for Bentham) and security, equality, voluntarism, democracy, and common effort/common property (for Thompson) are explored in detail through much of the book. Before getting to that, another important area of difference, having to do with analytic categories, needs to be discussed, that will help in understanding the contours of what follows.

Conceptual Contrasts between Bentham and Thompson

There is a long-running debate between critical theorists and postmodernists over whether it is helpful or not to identify distinct realms, or spheres, of human activity, one "public" and the other "private."[50] In some ways it is anachronistic to bring up here, since Bentham and Thompson were long gone by the time Habermas and Foucault, two figures often cited in this debate, came on the scene. Nevertheless, it provides a useful framework by which to understand some of the differences between Bentham and Thompson. To be sure, neither Bentham nor Thompson refer to anything like a "public sphere" or a "private sphere," and, in fact, in what follows I will use a different set of categories. The point here is not to debate whether or not the public and private spheres exist in any meaningful way, but to see how the specific concepts raised here, of politics, society, and democracy, take on different meanings depending on whether one understands them as autonomous but interrelated, or as describing different dimensions of human relationships in all the domains of our lives.

Central Concepts: Politics, Society, and Democracy

Bentham's primary interest in his work was legal reform, and the instrument for this was the legislative institutions. This is, for Bentham, the domain of politics. In order to reform legal institutions, it was necessary

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to reform the state institutions. So, politics is concerned with matters that pertain to the institutions of government—the actions of the sovereign (be that a monarch or understood as the people in their function as the sovereign), the legislature, the judiciary, and those administrative bodies they establish to carry out their will. This perspective is evident, for example, in an unpublished manuscript, the *Institute of Political Economy,* in which he says in a footnote that, "Politics . . . is an experimental science. . . . Each science has its pathology. Laws are the material medica of the political body—[its] therapeutics [is] legislation."[51]

If politics is a domain of activity primarily pertaining to the legislative body and legislating, then society is the object to which those laws are directed. Indeed, even here "society" is probably too broad a term, as it was with *individuals* that Bentham was principally concerned.[52] These were, of course, private individuals, whose actions are guided by their expectations of pleasure and pain or, read a different way, their expectations of reward and punishment, which are shaped in part by political institutions (that is, by law and its enforcement).[53] Society is an important domain, as this is where people either do or do not realize their happiness, but even as it is *shaped* in important ways by political institutions, it is a domain otherwise separate from the political realm. In other words, it is an object on which politics acts, but that does not in itself contain politics.

From this perspective, democracy is understood as a formal mechanism that pertains to politics. It has a specific purpose: to hold legislators accountable. In Bentham's political theory, the people are limited to two political functions: as the sovereign, to constitute the legislative body to which is delegated the sovereign power, and to hold the legislative body accountable through what he calls the Public Opinion Tribunal.[54] This will be discussed at further length in chapter 5, but here let it just be said that democracy is, in Bentham's theory, instrumental: the primary reason Bentham endorsed the representative system for electing legislators was because he believed that this was the best way to align legislators' own interests in maintaining their power with the people's interests. A different way of expressing this is to say that the purpose of the political system is to ensure security to enable individuals to pursue their interests without causing harm to other individuals—essentially, by protecting their property and wealth. Democracy ensures the proper functioning of government in this regard, as a mechanism to enforce the

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fiduciary responsibility of legislators to serve the public interest rather than their own.

On virtually all of these points, Thompson's perspective is entirely different. Thompson is much more concerned with relations of power, whether these occur in formal institutions or relationships, or within informal institutions or relationships. This is demonstrated most clearly in the *Appeal,* which is ostensibly an argument for suffrage for adult women but that gets much of its rhetorical power from a sweeping argument against all systems of subordination, demonstrating how the *domestic* subordination of women is part and parcel of the *political* subordination of women. In other words, the relations between men and women in the home that place women in a subordinate position to men is a *political* relation. If we understand subordination as a kind of power relationship, then we can recognize that any relationship in which power is instantiated in some way has politics. Politics, in this sense, is a dynamic or a dimension of relationships, whether those relationships are understood as existing within a particular institution (or set of institutions), between institutions, or even between an individual and an institution(s).[55]

Society is also something much broader for Thompson than it is for Bentham. In effect, society is the collection of relations between the individuals of which it is composed. These relations are shaped by a variety of social institutions—of which the institutions of government are one part. This is evident in the way Thompson discusses "social science" in the *Inquiry*.[56] Here he calls "the application" of "*social science* . . . the art of social happiness."[57] Later, he says that the pursuit of this science is necessary, "to assist in wiping out the stain from science, noticed thirty years ago by Condorcet, but still adhering, that though she had done much for the *glory* of mankind, she had done nothing or little for their *happiness.*"[58] His examination of society—the social science—incorporates all of the institutions of society, including state institutions, economic institutions, and what are sometimes termed "social institutions," such as marriage. These are *all* social institutions to Thompson, because they all shape society in various ways; each does so in different ways and may be subject to different forces, but each describes a different means by which the relations of individuals within society are shaped.[59]

With his radical understanding of equality and social institutions, democracy clearly carries a different meaning for Thompson than it does

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for Bentham. Democracy is integrated into Thompson's political theory not as an instrumental procedure for ensuring that rulers fulfill their fiduciary duties and are accountable to the ruled, but as a principle of social interaction. If security stands as a principal organizing principle for Bentham, equality plays that role for Thompson. Relationships conducted on the basis of equality can be understood as democratic in a deep and radical way that a more formal, restricted conception of democracy cannot encompass. Of course, not every social relationship can be equal in this way—for example, children will always be, in some ways at least, subordinate to adults. But there are many dimensions to our relationships, and we may be equal in some respects—for example, being equal in terms of moral worth—while unequal in others. The question is the extent to which the inequalities that exist justify the exercise of authority of one person over another within a particular domain of action.

While Thompson makes a place in his theory for representative institutions of governance, democracy functions in his theory through public opinion. But where the Public Opinion Tribunal in Bentham's theory operates as an external force on the institutions of government, and the people's self-government is attenuated through representative institutions, in Thompson's theory public opinion serves as a means through which people directly engage in self-government in their daily interactions with those around them. If social institutions are structured in such a way as to promote cooperation, then people will be naturally self-governing in the sense that they will act in ways that benefit the community rather than selfishly seeking their own self-interest at the expense of the community. Thus, through the careful structuring of social institutions, the alignment of self- and social interest—the Holy Grail of moral philosophy at least since Cicero—can be achieved.

Political Economics

The conceptual distinctions between Bentham and Thompson ultimately affect their ideas about political economics. There is not much to be said here about Bentham's views—despite some minor disagreements, he is a devoted disciple of Adam Smith, as he freely admits.[60] Thompson was also influenced by Smith's work, but he diverges from Smith on a number of important points, and I want to highlight some of the major elements of

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his thought here. A much fuller discussion will be found in the following chapters, especially chapter 4.

Thompson takes much from Smith, including the value of the division of labor and class conflict between what Smith calls the "masters" and the "labourers." The labor theory of value, from Locke to Smith to Ricardo, is crucial to his analysis and his argument that the full produce of labor should, by right, belong to the person who produces it. However, Thompson is not really interested in some of the central concerns of the political economists, for example the determinants of rent versus profit and how the level of wages affects these things, or policies with respect to international trade. Rather, in a manner that broadly anticipates Marx, Thompson critiques the fundamental premises of the earlier political economists.

Just as women's happiness is incompatible with their subordination to men, the greatest happiness is incompatible with labor subordinated to capital. Thompson goes to great lengths in the *Inquiry*—it occupies the first quarter of a very long book—to discover what he calls the "natural laws for the distribution of wealth" under the ideal conditions for the "system of individual competition" (which is as close an analog to "capitalism" as Thompson gets). These laws require that (1) all labor is voluntary, (2) the worker receive the full produce of his or her labor, and (3) all exchange is voluntary.[61] However, even if these conditions were obtained, two facets of the capitalist system would prevent them from leading to the greatest happiness: competition and private property. The problem with the former is that it sets individuals against each other in the race to accumulate property. Thus, other members of society are seen not as one's compatriots but as rivals. Private property presents a further challenge, in the first place because it is the object of competition, and secondly because the winners in the competitive system are then able to subordinate the losers, and use their relative advantage to further advance their position.

Thompson's proposed solution, a version of the Owenite cooperative community model, resolved these problems while still enabling what was, in his terms, "large-scale" industrial production. Members of a community—at least five hundred but not more than two thousand—would produce all that was needed by the community. The communities were to be large enough to take advantage of the benefits of the division of labor while maintaining a high degree of equality. All would share equally

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in the proceeds of all of the productive activity of all of the members—it was, in effect, a labor exchange, although not formalized as such. No one outside the community would extract its surplus and whatever surplus they produced would be shared equally by all the members.

An important feature of these communities is that all property is to be held in common by the members, with each having an equal share. In this way, the problems of private property and competition are avoided. Where the competitive capitalist system establishes a tension between self-interest and the social interest, a community or enterprise in which all are owners on an equal basis unites individuals and aligns individual interest with social interest. Democratic governance is built into the structure of the institution, because under no other arrangement could property be said to be truly held in common. Such a system must also maintain a high level of equality, including through the equal distribution of the fruits of labor.

No community based on Thompson's plan was ever established, even though he offered his own lands for one. After his death in 1833 the cooperative movement he helped to lead nearly died out. However, new experiments began in the early 1840s that took root and eventually grew into an important part of the global economy. The cooperative movement he helped birth looks very different today from what he had envisioned, as it is based on autonomous enterprises rather than autarkic communities—but it is also far larger than he could have imagined. The cooperative movement—Thompson's role, its later development and its current state—will be discussed in chapter 6. But that comes by way of conclusion. An explication of the theory behind it comes first.

Plan of the Book

While Bentham's work is widely known and has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny, there exists no thorough, extended examination of Thompson's political thought, a gap in the literature this work is intended, in part, to address. While my primary focus is on Thompson, I do not ignore Bentham. Thompson at least appears to appropriate many of Bentham's ideas, but he follows them to very different conclusions, and the starting point for my research was a desire to understand why that is so. What follows, then, is some back-and-forth through the chapters in

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examining the work of these two men, who in many respects were closely allied despite substantial and significant differences in their arguments.

What follows is broken up into two parts, explicitly organized so as to follow a path from abstract philosophy to political theory to political practice. Part I is concerned with the concept of happiness. It begins with a very brief chapter on the history of the concept in order to help orient the reader to its development from the ancient Greeks to the present day. Those who would prefer to get to the meat of the matter—the exploration of Bentham's and Thompson's ideas—can skip this chapter. Chapters 2 and 3 are concerned with Bentham's and Thompson's ideas about happiness, and form the philosophical bedrock for what comes after. These are the only two chapters in which Bentham and Thompson are treated separately (except for chapter 6, as Bentham has no part in that particular story). A full chapter on Bentham's ideas on happiness was considered necessary because this is—perhaps surprisingly—a relatively neglected part of Bentham's thought. Despite the vast secondary literature on the notion of "the greatest happiness," it appears that just what Bentham means by "happiness" has received little attention. In the subsequent chapters, Bentham is discussed primarily in order to establish a ground for a more detailed discussion of Thompson. The contrast between the two helps to bring Thompson's ideas into sharper view; on occasion, it sheds some new light on Bentham, as well.

Part II is concerned with the political theory based on happiness—utilitarianism. The first of these chapters, chapter 4, examines the theory of utility itself, with particular attention to political economics. Of course, many books have been written to explore Bentham's utilitarianism, and what is of greatest interest here are only those parts of Bentham's theory that most clearly relate to Thompson's. Thus, most of the chapter is concerned with Thompson's ideas. The next chapter takes the prior chapter's differential development of the concept of utility forward into an exploration of Bentham's and Thompson's democratic theory. Here again, there is plenty of material available on Bentham's ideas,[62] so while enough Bentham is provided to form a clear contrast, most of the chapter is given over to Thompson's ideas. Finally, chapter 6 explores how Thompson's ideas were taken up by the cooperative movement, in order to demonstrate the persistence of Thompson's ideas as well as to suggest that this provides a way to think about the cooperative

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movement on political terms, as a political movement supported by a coherent political theory.

But it starts with happiness.

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