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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

C.B. Macpherson (1911-1987) a été l'un des penseurs les plus influents et les plus controversés de son temps. Il est le plus souvent associé aux thèses de « l'individualisme possessif » et du « transfert des pouvoirs ». Parfois considéré à tort comme étant marxiste, ce qui lui a attiré les foudres des partisans de l'École de Cambridge en pleine guerre froide, Macpherson a dit lui-même tenter d'utiliser les ressources de la tradition marxiste pour clarifier et ranimer le libéralisme. À une époque où le néolibéralisme est devenu hégémonique dans toute la société civile occidentale, un regard nouveau est aujourd'hui porté sur Macpherson. En faisant de la propriété un phénomène philosophique, Macpherson a transformé le bon sens de son époque (et de la nôtre) en un problème politico-éthique, ce qui revêt un grand intérêt non seulement pour les historiens, mais aussi pour toute gauche émergente qui cherche à baliser un avenir plus rationnel.

A Half-Century of Possessive Individualism: C.B. Macpherson and the Twenty-First-Century Prospects of Liberalism

IAN MCKAY

Abstract

C.B. Macpherson (1911–1987) was one of the most influential and controversial thinkers of his time, identified above all with the theses of "possessive individualism" and the "transfer of powers." Although sometimes misidentified as a Marxist, and as such critiqued by proponents of the Cambridge School in the depths of the Cold War, Macpherson by his own description was attempting to use the resources of the Marxist tradition to clarify and revive liberalism. At a time when neo-liberalism has become hegemonic throughout western civil society, Macpherson is being revisited today. By treating property as a philosophical event, Macpherson transformed a commonsense of his time (and ours) into a politico-ethical problem, a proposition of great interest not only to historians but also to any emergent left seeking to define the outlines of a more rational future.

Résumé

C.B. Macpherson (1911-1987) a été l'un des penseurs les plus influents et les plus controversés de son temps. Il est le plus souvent associé aux thèses de « l'individualisme possessif » et du « transfert des pouvoirs ». Parfois considéré à tort comme étant marxiste, ce qui lui a attiré les foudres des partisans de l'École de Cambridge en pleine guerre froide, Macpherson a dit lui-même tenter d'utiliser les ressources de la tradition marxiste pour clarifier et ranimer le libéralisme. À une époque où le néolibéralisme est devenu hégémonique dans toute la société civile occidentale, un regard nouveau est aujourd'hui porté sur Macpherson. En faisant de la propriété un phénomène philosophique, Macpherson a transformé le bon sens de son époque (et de la nôtre) en un problème politico-éthique, ce qui revêt un grand intérêt non seulement pour les historiens, mais aussi pour toute gauche émergente qui cherche à baliser un avenir plus rationnel.

To live in the ultra-capitalist twenty-first century means engaging with five constitutive contradictions. There are the three explored in depth by Marx — whose primary polarities consisted of ruling and ruled classes, the social relations and forces of production, and equilibrium and catastrophe in the inherent processes of accumulation. To these must be added two more: that between social reproduction and accumulation, as capitalism's all-pervasive logic of commodification disrupts its equally pervasive dependence upon the family as the incubator of labour-power, and that between the survival of the very species upon which capitalism depends and the processes of resource extraction and use now generating global environmental devastation. Such contradictions are not abstractions but the dynamic crystallizations of actual social relations, and they work globally, locally, and personally. Nor are they forces acting above and beyond us: in ways small and great, unconscious or lucid, passive or active, we constitute them as they in turn constitute us. And the concepts with which we seek to capture these forces are equally not static heirlooms from the past, but dynamic forces that themselves are organic shapers of our present and future. Critical historians stand under an injunction to retrieve from their intellectual traditions those capable of grasping these contradictions. Historical consciousness in this sense requires not just rigorous researches into the past but a willingness to historicize oneself and the precepts, many of them unexamined, that structure one's own life.

In this paper, I examine the work of Crawford Brough (rhymes with 'Rough') Macpherson (b.1911, d.1987), with special reference to his theorization of "possessive individualism." This may seem a rather counter-intuitive choice, because some might reasonably question whether Macpherson's historical and theoretical work, much of it bearing dates from 50 or more years ago, can hold many lessons for us — at least if we are not devoted to his specialties of political theory or early modern English history. Yet I would defend it. I see in Macpherson someone whose concepts are of the type we need today — boundary-challenging, trans-disciplinary, open to debate, and above all arising from the interface of the two great ideologies, liberalism and Marx-

ism, that still so profoundly shape today's intellectual world. Macpherson is an indispensable intellectual resource for understanding the twenty-first-century realities that are reshaping out lives. His works are precious not because they supply eternal verities about the ideological history of the past four centuries, but because they suggest irreplaceable insights into our contemporary crisis. [1] Or, more exactly, because he exemplified, and to some extent initiated, a tradition of analysis — drawing from both liberalism and Marxism — that is useful to the critique and overcoming of the global market logic that neoliberalism has made hegemonic in the twenty-first century. Situated within the liberal tradition and yet drawing upon intellectual resources from outside it, Macpherson persuasively countered liberal histories of liberalism — with their emphases upon the 'tradition' as a closed, sometimes self-evidently worthy, body of thought — with the unique insights of an 'inside outsider.'

Macpherson's project was one of revising liberal democratic theory with the hope of both making it more democratic and rescuing what was valuable in liberalism from its long identification with capitalist market relations. As Jules Townshend puts it, the thesis of "possessive individualism" became Macpherson's "theoretical signature."[2] Macpherson provided the most useful distillation of it in *Democratic Theory* (1973). According to the proponents of this form of liberalism, human beings, seen as absolute natural proprietors of their own capacities, owe nothing to society for them. Their essence consists in freedom to use their capacities to pursue satisfactions, a freedom properly limited only by the principle of not harming others. "Freedom therefore is restricted to, and comes to be identified with, domination over things, not domination over men. The clearest form of domination over things is the relation of ownership or possession. Freedom is therefore possession. Everyone is free, for everyone possesses at least his own capacities." Second, society comes to be seen, not as "a system of relations of domination and subordination between men and classes held together by reciprocal rights and duties," but as an assortment of free equal individuals related to each other through their possessions, that is, related as

owners of their own capacities and of what they have produced and accumulated by the use of their capacities. The relation of exchange (the market relation) is seen as the fundamental relation of society. Third, political society comes to be interpreted as a rational device for the protection of property, including capacities; even life and liberty are considered as possessions, rather than as social rights with correlative duties.[3]

Macpherson wants us to appreciate the analytical realism of possessive individualism and to understand its limitations. Realistic in many of its assumptions about the changing early modern world within which it evolved, possessive individualism entailed a narrow, materialistic, and ultimately distorted sense of humanity, one that mistook wealth for virtue, or (following Aristotle) the means of life for its purpose. It also entailed, with deleterious results, a net transfer of powers from some people to others. As Macpherson wrote in 1965, "'Human beings are sufficiently unequal in strength and skill that if you put them into an unlimited contest for possessions, some will not only get more than others, but will get control of the means of labour to which the others must have access … So in choosing to make the essence of man the striving for possessions, we make it impossible for many men to be fully human. By defining man as an infinite appropriator we make it impossible for many men to qualify as men."[4] It was because capitalist social relations both compromised liberty and constituted a barrier to the development of many people that they were destructive. Thus Macpherson's two great theses — *Possessive Individualism* and the *Transfer of Powers* — were interrelated.

It is important to emphasize throughout that, when evaluated according to historian Michael Freeden's morphological criteria (outlined in his illuminating study of *Ideologies and Political Theory*) Macpherson was emphatically, and by his own self-designation, a *liberal*, a critical but loyal follower of John Stuart Mill. For both Macpherson and Mill, "liberalism was a philosophy whose moral center is the individual," whose "ontological priority" (over, e.g., society) it assumed, and whose "freedom to realize his or her human capacities" it unswervingly sought.[5] All

his works of scholarship were predicated on these underlying liberal assumptions.

Liberty was always Macpherson's core value. Although generally reluctant to pigeon-hole himself, when he did so, Macpherson declared his full allegiance to the liberal democratic tradition. When writing of Canadian foreign policy in 1963, for example, he wrote unequivocally from the standpoint of "us," i.e., the "members of white advanced countries," engaged in a struggle to "save the best in Western values — the liberal humanism and individual freedom which cannot now be found in the Soviet countries."[6] Macpherson's liberalism owed a substantial (and acknowledged) debt to the fin-de-siècle British "New Liberals." When we read descriptions of the outlook of turn-of-the-century British Idealists, who rejected the atomistic conception of society and the *laissez-faire* assumptions of an older liberalism, and emphasized instead each citizens' "self-development" and "the moral role of the state"[7] — we might as well be reading passages from Macpherson. Macpherson made no secret of his indebtedness to John Stuart Mill, T.H. Green, and Leonard Hobhouse for his philosophy of "developmental-democratic liberalism," in which the free person was regarded as "a doer, a creator, an enjoyer" of "uniquely human attributes."[8] He was equally indebted to R.H. Tawney who in both his innovative histories (*The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912) and *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926)), and in such works in socialist theory as *The Acquisitive Society* (1920) and *Equality* (1931), was a pivotal figure in the interwar transatlantic left.[9] Various labels might be attached to Tawney — Fabian, Christian socialist, left liberal — but perhaps "egalitarian radical idealism" comes closest to distilling his political philosophy.[10] Tawney's influence upon Macpherson came through in three ways. First, in his strictly historical studies, Tawney could be said to have carried out the empirical work on England's 'great transformation' upon which Macpherson could build his more abstract considerations of political theory. Second, both in his writing and in his activism, he was engaged in a form of socialist politics that sought to preserve liberal freedoms. And third, he rested his political

arguments upon abiding moral convictions, both Christian and Aristotelian, that were resistant to counter-arguments based on efficiency, utility, or convenience.[11]

Herein, of course, can also be found some of the reasons for Macpherson's declining influence from the late 1970s on, when neoliberalism began its ascent, market criteria came to be sanctified, and many left academics were converted to anti-humanism. Just as F.A. Hayek was announcing in 1944 that state planning constituted *The Road to Serfdom*, Macpherson was developing the opposite viewpoint — that capitalism, once liberalism's loyal partner, had become the liberals' most dangerous enemy. *Democracy Needs Socialism*, he would say in essence — echoing a slogan of Canada's social democratic Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.[12] Macpherson viewed liberalism more as an evolving doctrine, one that had outgrown the capitalist social relations within which it had first developed. He saw liberalism as fundamentally threatened, at its very core, by those who insisted upon capitalist social relations and the transfer of powers they entailed. Hayek, von Mises, and Friedman — the new "masters of the universe" — saw the central function of the state to consist in "the proactive construction and protection of the conditions for the market economy," if necessary through the minimization or even abrogation of democratic governance itself: as Daniel Stedman Jones observes, "the language of profit, efficiency, and consumption replaced that of citizenship, solidarity, and service."[13] New Liberals and Neo-Liberals, for all the baffling similarity of their sobriquets, are arguing for quite different socio-political orders.

What is the liberalism to which both camps swore allegiance? "Liberalism" is a notoriously polysemic term, yet it seems possible to discern five major values championed by most of those who claim to speak authoritatively on behalf of the liberal tradition:

> (a) in religious life: the right to form one's own views of God and existence without penalties, i.e., freedom of religious conscience — combined with a (religious or secular) belief in the transcendent moral dignity and autonomy of the individual;[14]

> (b) in political life: the juridical equality of all citizens without discrimination, possessed as they are of equal civil and political rights, governed by an ethical ideal of equal respect, under the rule of law and constitutionally limited government; to which is linked the right to pursue political and other objectives in association with others of like mind and interest;[15]
> (c) in personal life: generosity and kindness, fairness and decency, a warm sense of humanity and fairness — 'liberality' — combined with an empathetic appreciation of human diversity, extending to tolerance of the different ways of life and value-systems inherent in modernity;[16]
> (d) in intellectual life: creativity and curiosity; the right to freely pursue inquiries of one's own design, without coercion and without fear — perhaps, indeed, through projects in the 'liberal arts,' i.e., all those intellectual and artistic pursuits, not directly attached to technical or professional training, within which one's individuality is enriched and horizons broadened;[17]
> (e) in economic life: the right to private property, especially private property in the means of wealth creation; and support for "free enterprise," often with the expectation that the free market can, with minimal regulation and supplementation, work to the benefit of all.[18]

A liberal might hold — and many Victorian and Edwardian liberals did hold — that these various meanings of the term could be easily harmonized with one another in one overarching ideological framework.

Nonetheless, responding to the ills of industrial capitalist life, many others, starting among the major theorists with John Stuart Mill, started to sense a growing contradiction between the first four of these values and the last. For his part, Macpherson not only acknowledged that (e) had been a foundational doctrine of the great tradition, but also considered that it had once (before c. 1870) constituted a reasonably reliable representation of social reality.[19] Yet after the arrival of the very "democracy"

about which early liberals had expressed marked misgivings, and after the transition from proprietorial to corporate capitalism, (e) then revealed itself to be an obstacle to the free and full development of human beings — an ideal that was always, Macpherson insisted, the irreplaceable core principle of liberal thought.

Contrariwise, from Hayek forward, and often surreptitiously drawing upon a selectively appropriated set of ideas from Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theory, neo-liberals argue that (e) outweighs everything else. Indeed, they say, the energetic pursuit of items (a) through (d) misses liberalism's fundamental meaning. This variant of liberalism — one that entails the pervasive application of market criteria to all spheres, from the personal to the planetary — has in our time come to speak for the entire tradition, whose founding fathers, Locke above all, come to be regarded as scientific authorities propounding, not so much arguments about their times, but truths about all times.[20] Liberalism becomes timeless, universal, and (thanks to its incorporation of the science of the market) unassailable — with the consequence that those who historicize and relativize its assumptions came to be regarded as heretics. This, in brief, was what happened to Macpherson in the years after 1965. Without changing his core convictions, Macpherson, who was once working with widely-accepted New Liberal arguments, came to be regarded as a crypto-Communist.

One good reason for historians to re-engage with the work of Macpherson, then, is to obtain a sharp sense of the world of free inquiry and social activism that was lost when neo-liberalism swept the globe in the closing years of the twentieth century. Another is to engage with concepts within the liberal tradition that seem important to any newly invigorated democratic politics in our own time. Yet to understand these concepts is not as straightforward as a reader of Macpherson's clear, Voltairean prose might at first sight imagine it will be. For if Macpherson's mansion was plainly laid out and furnished according to the specifications of New Liberalism, one should also notice that it was located high upon a mountaintop, where the view was clear and the air thin and pure. There is a distinctive atmosphere to the House of Macpherson. Such Macpherson classics as *Pos-*

sessive Individualism and *Democracy: Essays in Retrieval* are clinical in the way they inspect political theories. The text in question is ushered into the room, placed upon the operating table, and then slowly and remorselessly a scalpel-wielding Dr. Macpherson lays bare its contradictions.[21] In the overwhelmingly idealistic atmosphere of the Macpherson *corpus*, one examines the logical problems of Locke or the inconsistencies of Burke rather in the spirit of expounding a problem in mathematics — and often on the idealistic assumption that once an error in logical reasoning has been exposed, it will be rectified.

A classic instance of Macpherson at work can be found in his calm dissection of Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty," an argument that prioritizes "negative liberty" (i.e., freedom *from* state coercion) over "positive liberty" (i.e., freedom *to achieve and develop*.) Berlin in essence develops a "thin-edge-of-the-wedge" account of positive liberty: a government intent on encouraging individuals to develop themselves might be led on to enforce particular standards upon them.[22] The Macpherson response to this addition to the emergent armature of neo-liberalism is to parse what Berlin means by "liberty." In noting Berlin's various logical mistakes, Macpherson also faulted him (in the company of many mainstream liberal thinkers) for failing to notice that although such institutions as the laws of property and contract might coerce non-owners "incidentally and non-intentionally," they still did coerce them. [23] Berlin had insisted on drawing a sharp line between the conditions of liberty and liberty itself. Many liberals agreed with him: formal legal or political restrictions on liberty were far more troubling to them than those that arose from lack of opportunity or poor education.[24] In particular, they could not see (and still cannot see) that property claims can constitute a violation of the freedom of others, even if they are not deliberately intended as such. Macpherson, on the other hand, argued that "lack of access to the means of life and the means of labour must diminish negative liberty, or the area in which a man cannot be interfered with."[25] If democracy is not to entail mere replacement of one governing elite by another but rather a commitment to enabling each person to live life as fully

as he or she wishes, then impediments to that self-realization — such as those arising from a lack of access to property — count every bit as much as formal restrictions on liberty.

One could almost imagine, in the House of Macpherson, that someone — say, the president of multinational corporation — who had unwittingly inherited the mantle of possessive individualism would, upon learning of the theory's logical inconsistencies, cease and desist from it at once. Macphersonian analysis occurs at a very high altitude of abstraction. Welcomed into it is a series of liberal luminaries, treated almost as our contemporary co-explorers of modernity.[26] It is less clear that the House of Macpherson would prove equally congenial to those who did not share his formidable intelligence or cultural background. Instead, as was the case with John Stuart Mill, sometimes within it one encounters a distinctly aristocratic atmosphere, as when we hear Macpherson muse that workers, subjected to mindless work, were naturally apt to become somewhat mindless themselves.[27] Macpherson's implied audience was a liberal audience — the "we in the advanced countries" concerned to preserve "liberal humanism and individual freedom."

If the context in which Macpherson *developed* his theory was in some respects akin to that of a *fin-de-siècle* New Liberalism adapted by Tawney to the exigencies of interwar Britain, the context within which his most influential works were *received* was that of the Cold War. In the United States, the "death of ideology," the "consensus" view of history, the disdain of all explanations emphasizing the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism — all these were actively constructed in a vigorous and self-aware corporate offensive.[28] Macpherson hardly ingratiated himself to Cold War liberals in 1965 by bringing out *The Real World of Democracy*, a book based on a series of radio lectures that became an inspiring manifesto for a number of left-moving intellectuals.[29] "We in the West," he proclaimed, "are gradually realizing that the West no longer has a monopoly of civilization or world leadership … [W]e in the West have built up a system which we value very highly. It combines a large measure of individual liberty with a fair approximation to majority rule. None of the other systems have

managed it, and we don't intend to be talked out of our achievement no matter how necessary a policy of co-existence with the other systems may be" (4). It was not at all likely, said Macpherson, that the "close correspondence between liberal-democracy and capitalism" was merely "coincidental" (5-6). So far so very liberal, one might have thought. Yet Macpherson went on to discuss two "non-liberal" forms of democracy, those of Communism and those of many states in Africa and Asia. Macpherson thought these regimes too had cause to call themselves democratic, insofar as they were "moving towards a firmly held goal of an equal society in which everybody can be fully human" (47). Altogether, these three forms made up the "real world of democracy." "And when all three concepts of democracy are seen in perspective," Macpherson wrote, "[t]hey have one thing in common: their ultimate goal is the same — to provide the condition for the full and free development of the essential human capacities of all the members of the society" (53). In its context, this was a plea for détente and the recognition of the dignity and complexity of decolonizing states. Yet, note that even in this "popular" work, Macpherson's *fin-de-siècle* idealism is patent: here the *concepts* of democracy (and not living and breathing democrats) are endowed with an "ultimate goal," inherent it seems in their very conceptual *telos*. The text concluded with a popularized and accessible statement of Macpherson's core arguments:

> The dilemma has been that if we allow freedom to naturally unequal individuals, we are in fact denying equal freedom and humanity to all but the stronger and more skillful. For to allow freedom of enterprise and of acquisition has been to deny equal access to the means of labour, that is, to deny equal access to the means of a fully human life. The choice had to be made between freedom along with denial of full humanity to all but the stronger and more skillful, or denial of freedom in the interests of more equal chances of humanity. The liberal capitalist society chose freedom and denial of full humanity. The choice no longer has to be made. It had to be made only while scarcity was king … (91)

Macpherson foresaw a time when the "accumulation of wealth" would no longer be of "high social importance" — he was directly paraphrasing John Maynard Keynes — and there would thus arrive "a change in the code of morals." Indeed, the time had arrived when "we" — i.e., "We in the West" — should discard the "morality of scarcity," for "By discarding it, and only by discarding it, [can] we … resolve the contradiction implicit in the market concept of freedom and in the *market concept of the human essence*, which concepts … were built into the liberal-democratic justifying theory. We can then hope to retrieve the democratic values of equal freedom and equal access to a rational purposive life" (94-5, emphasis added).

It was a gross misinterpretation to imagine the Keynes-quoting Macpherson, plainly placing Soviet democracy on a far lower level than either its Western or Third World counterparts and implicitly imagining liberal societies to comprise a unified "we" capable of making a consensual "decision," to be any sort of proto-Communist. Yet he had diverged from the script of Cold War liberalism simply by admitting that regimes outside the West were pursuing objectives that could be aligned with J.S. Mill's developmental script. In the Cold War context, ideas that might have been thought merely 'progressive' 60 years before had come to seem deeply troubling. In truth, the borders around 'liberalism' were narrowing, especially when it came to raising any profound questions about the *market concept of the human essence*. Questions habitually asked by New Liberals were becoming unmentionable under Cold War conditions — and remain so under contemporary neo-liberalism.

It is well worth remembering, when pondering the 1960s and 1970s, that some of the fiercest conflicts of the Cold War took place in the manor houses and corn-fields of seventeenth-century England. Reputable historians who had explored Britain's transition to industrial capitalism now found themselves assailed on methodological and political grounds. From Peter Laslett to William Leiss, Macpherson's liberal critics treated him as a "stealth Marxist." Peter Laslett considered Macpherson a "dogmatic, economic sociologist of a familiar, but refined, Marxist cast."[30] And

Laslett would go on to observe in his introduction to Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* that Macpherson wrote "from a point of view which scorns 'petty bourgeois socialism,'" thus implying (without any evidence) Macpherson's kinship with the authors of the *Communist Manifesto*.[31]

At a much higher level of abstraction were the methodological critiques emanating from the Cambridge School of political theory, with which Laslett, John Dunn, J.G.A. Pocock, and Quentin Skinner were all associated. In many such critiques, Macpherson was brought forward as a model of how history should *not* be written. Skinner, in some respects the most philosophically ambitious and talented of them all, argued (I draw upon James Tully's fine *précis*) "… that to understand a text it is necessary to understand it as a complex of linguistic actions and thus to recover what the author was doing in writing it — the text's 'point' or 'force' — by placing it in its convention-governed linguistic context." Young Skinner was the scourge of all those who sought to trace the morphology of a concept over time, who imposed false coherence upon texts and upon the authors who wrote them, and who tried to link given intellectuals with the rise of broader socio-economic phenomena, a move that put "the independent life of ideas in history … in danger." Any statement was "inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention, on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and thus specific to its situation in a way that it can only be naïve to transcend." By 1974, Macpherson had become "Exhibit A" in Dr. Skinner's Book on Bad Historical Practice. His attempt to write the "history of 'possessive individualism'" was faulted for its reliance on particular canonical texts and its "unhistorical level of abstraction." The "key to excluding unhistorical meanings," Skinner proclaimed, "must lie in limiting our range of descriptions of any given text to those which the author himself might in principle have avowed and that the key to understanding the actual historical meaning of a text must lie in recovering the complex intentions of the author in writing it."[32] A boundary – indeed a wall topped with barbed wire – was constructed between the true and the false historians.

There are many things to be said *pro* and *con* Skinner's textualism. With respect to the interpretation of specific texts, the strategy has much to commend it. If our project is to describe the life and times of Hobbes, Locke or Bentham, there is every good reason to explore each of their arguments in its specific context. There is also every reason to be skeptical of attempts to place them in radically different contexts — to imagine, for example, a consistent and coherent body of constitutional doctrine persisting from the eighteenth century to our own time, or a straight line in socialist theory from Lenin's *What Is To Be Done* to Stalin's Gulag.[33]

Yet once one moved from seeing textualism as *one* approach to the past to seeing it as *the* only proper approach, a certain narrowing of boundaries and hardening of ideological arteries took place. In particular, textualism's tendency has been, in Joseph Femia's words, to treat ideas from the past as "purely historical phenomena, forever locked into their determinate contexts." Those liberals who applauded the skewering of a supposedly Soviet Macpherson were perhaps unaware that a strict application of the new methodology also ruled out any "form of historical interpretation predicated on a distinction between the 'manifest' and 'latent' content of a body of thought." (Farewell, then, to a veritable panoply of liberal political historians and theorists). Femia remarks, "What is 'dead' in the thought of our ancestors must always be presumed to outweigh the part which is 'living'. But the historicist need not operate on the facile assumption that past ideas are *entirely* and *inextricably* bound up in a straitjacket of particular circumstances, particular questions and particular intentions." The substantial risk posed by Skinnerism was that of treating every historical utterance and action as a unique event, and in that case, historical inquiry becomes well-nigh impossible: "If all historical events are *sui generis*, then we cannot write history; we can only pile up documents …"[34] Such impatience with Cambridge textualism *pur et dur* is widespread among intellectual historians of many stripes today.[35] One might add that Skinner, when he attempted to go beyond one text to a general pattern, tended to invoke direct patterns of causality and interest that one does not find in the subtler, if more idealistic, works of Macpherson.[36]

There was a certain grim irony in the textualists' attacks on Macpherson. They "read into" Macpherson a (completely unproven) Marxist intentionality, in the process often jauntily disregarding their own injunction to contextualize and unravel the "things" the author was attempting "to do with words." They found within Macpherson's texts only what they already knew was there. Among their numerous inheritors, Macpherson's heresies remain, rather like same-sex incidents in Victorian England, abominations not to be named, let alone respectfully discussed. It is bleakly amusing that in the presumably authoritative Routledge four-volume guide to liberal thought edited by G.W. Smith, we find an argumentative critique skewering "The Macpherson version," but no words directly from the arch-heretic himself.[37] One is reminded that there can be nothing quite so illiberal as Cold War liberalism, now preserved by its many neo-liberal inheritors.

This is not to say that all of the contemporary critiques of Macpherson were unjustified. Macpherson was apt to work from the particular text to the grand abstraction — from a passage in Locke to an implicit overarching conception of the political order — without then submitting this generic abstraction to further interactions with the complexities of the empirical world.[38] He was not, in that sense, a dialectical thinker. *Democracy in Alberta* does not make a persuasive or even consistent case for Alberta as a single-class society; Macpherson's Hobbes is implausibly preoccupied with economic relations alone, rather than religion, monarchical succession, science, or honour;[39] his Locke enunciates a clearly capitalism-friendly labour theory of value, not one susceptible to readings that would hobble rather than facilitate acquisitiveness; [40] his Burke no less one-dimensionally is reconstructed without due regard for his social organicism and respect for the rights and traditions of the colonized;[41] his Bentham is merely the celebrator of economic utility and not an opponent of vested interests and cruel punishments; [42] his (underspecified) humanist ontology, strongly influenced by Aristotle, left us with 'the creative individual' as a transhistorical abstraction.[43] In each case (and more), scholars have rightly protested against a level

of ideal-typical abstraction in Macpherson that seemingly ran counter to their own careful reconstructions of particular people and particular problems. In the half-century since *Possessive Individualism*, much more has come to be known about each of his featured thinkers and of the broader world in which they worked.

Macpherson was a social critic, political theorist, and philosophical historian attuned to the *longue durée* and the general pattern, and many of the assaults upon him, only a few of which drew any blood, were actually beside the point. His general thesis that, over three centuries, a body of liberal theory had arisen in Britain that had made extensive accommodations with an emergent capitalist order has not been significantly shaken.[44] This thesis did not require, as some of his critics alleged, that the rise of capitalism had been completed by 1600 or for that matter by 1900. It was no refutation of Macpherson to show that, for instances, Hobbes's England lacked a fully-developed market in land, or that Burke's included aristocrats, prelates, and pre-capitalist political traditions, or that many of the thinkers he analysed were far removed from any notion of *laissez-faire*. As a thinker attuned to the *longue durée* — an attribute that became even more evident in his works after *Possessive Individualism* —, Macpherson was very much alive to the complexities of history and even to the place of accident within it: neither of which undermined his Aristotelian sense of its essential, unfolding, non-accidental tendencies.[45] Many of the critics who insisted upon the *sui generis* nature of British development were, ironically, putting forth positions entirely congenial to Macpherson's project.[46]

It was sufficient for Macpherson's thesis that *elements* of possessive individualism could be found within the thought of Hobbes and Locke, on the assumption that this worldview was, over decades and centuries, attaining ever more coherence, homogeneity, and global influence. Steadfastly committed to the close authorial focus and abundant contextualizing detail, many of Macpherson's critics refused to allow that philosophical inquiry conducted on another scale with different questions might also usefully illuminate forms emerging over a much longer period at

a higher level of abstraction. When they did lift their eyes from the particular to the general, and from 'my period' to 'the epoch,' they often found themselves, ironically enough, implicitly agreeing with Macpherson.[47]

Liberals denounced Macpherson as the Marxist he *wasn't*. The Marxists, flourishing (at least to a point) in the academy of the 1970s and early 1980s, critiqued Macpherson as the Millian Idealist he *was* — but who for some reason had translated certain Marxist ideas into his own liberal language. Historian Paul Axelrod recalls a moment at one student conference at which Macpherson critiqued capitalism but then went on to defend "academic freedom in the university as a liberal gift that should not be abused." Following the presentation, recalls Axelrod, one of the student radicals "approached Macpherson, shook his fist in his face, and announced, 'we're going to get you!'"[48] On a higher theoretical level, Ellen Meiksins Wood condemned Macpherson for having been "seduced" by a liberal tradition that was not easily disentangled from capitalist property rights.[49] Leo Panitch reproved Macpherson for borrowing so many concepts from Marxism without taking responsibility for helping Marxism develop.[50] Andrew Levine espied in Macpherson a wavering social democrat unable to break with liberalism and create an entirely new political terrain. Macpherson seemed intent on reforming, not revolutionizing, the system.[51]

Such Marxist critics were, in my estimation, not so wide of the mark as their liberal contemporaries. Macpherson had become more interested in the questions raised by Marx by the late 1960s and through the 1970s was reading quite extensively in Marxist literature. One can certainly begin to hear echoes in his work of the Marxist theories of alienation and value. Yet his ideological framework remained a liberal and, more discerning Marxists noted, an Idealist one. In an amusing reply to critiques from the Marxist Victor Svacek and the liberal Kenneth Minogue, Macpherson was cheered that "one's work can be taken seriously both by a guardian of liberal theory and by an activist Marxist."[52] Svacek had estimated Macpherson was five-sixths a Marxist, albeit an "elusive" one, but went on to draw a parallel with an

automobile salesman who sold five-sixths of a car for five-sixths of the normal price — with the "reduction in each case owing to the absence of a transmission." Svacek's Macpherson was, perplexingly, "*in* the Marxist tradition, but not necessarily *of* it." [53] B.P. Ray, tempted in some passages of his important book-length study of Macpherson to treat of his 'Marxism,' in others notes that Macpheron's "Marxist position remained very vague and ambiguous," that his "theory and method are not … Marxist," that he remained unwilling to pursue the implications of class analysis, and that his ethical critique of capitalism did little to advance beyond that of John Stuart Mill. Macpherson, on Ray's reading, tended throughout to see the democratic ideal as an "ethical principle rooted in Western political thought as a whole," and not one continually changed through a complex dialectical relationship with socio-economic forces. Even Macpherson's critique of possessive individualism, which did send off 'Marx alarm-bells' in the liberal academy, actually did little to present a materialist explanation of the phenomenon.[54] On these points, Ray is most perceptive.

Intent on salvaging the "individual," Macpherson (some Marxists charged) had in effect created an ahistorical abstraction. Domenico Losurdo, some of whose recent critical remarks about Macpherson seem to proceed in part on the basis of a faulty translation, valuably notes in his ruthless exposé of the liberal tradition further themes that Macpherson missed or underplayed. Where do we find any acknowledgement of liberalism's global tendency to draw a boundary between the free and the unfree? Or a full acknowledgement that, on much of the planet, liberalism, which was born alongside the racialized chattel slavery of which Locke and Calhoun were such distinguished theorists and practitioners, often performed a role as the great *de*-emancipator?[55] And where, Jennifer Pitts might ask, could we find an inkling of the J.S. Mill who approved of the Opium Wars?[56] Alasdair MacIntyre added, from a communitarian perspective, that Macpherson, strongly committed to rescuing the humanist element of Millian liberalism, wound up by accepting much of Mill's philosophical individualism.[57] (Macpherson graciously conceded that the cri-

tique had considerable merit). Leftists influenced by the Frankfurt School discerned in Macpherson a boundless faith in technology and science as creators of future abundance.[58] In truth, when one adds up the elements of what is normally construed to be a Marxist position — an interest in dialectical analysis, fascination with and commitment to the class struggle, a belief that human nature is socially constituted,[59] a sense that any given social order is riven with conflicts, and a hope that within subaltern classes are stirring a revolutionary challenges to the existing order that a true democrat must support — one finds Macpherson coming up short time and again.

A fuller intellectual history of left-wing thought in the third quarter of the twentieth century would be required for a more complete understanding of why Macpherson and the Marxists so often talked past each other, but in the absence of that book, one can venture the suggestion that one significant factor was left triumphalism. If the entire world was undergoing a transition to socialism, if liberalism had entered into its ultimate death-spiral, if the political and moral contradictions of the welfare state were driving this weak compromise solution to class conflict into a revolutionary crisis — then why dally with the discredited thought of J.S. Mill and his illustrious Canadian acolyte? If, as structuralists and then post-structuralists argued, the search for a "humanist politics" founded upon "human nature" and its developmental possibilities was a relic of a now superseded metaphysics, why persist in it? Or if the project was to "smash the state," why waste time with a liberal so preoccupied with making it more fully democratic?

In retrospect, a good many of these Marxist judgments, proceeding from a shallow and ahistorical belief in the swift and imminent overthrow of capitalism, seem hubristic. And as actually-existing socialism so amply demonstrated, but many Marxists were reluctant to admit, there was also a serious deficiency in the Marxist worldview — a plausible theory of politics. One could certainly glean from Marx a consistent commitment to radical democracy and a passionate commitment to the liberation of human individuality — as Macpherson provocatively

reminded his Marxist critics.[60] Yet there was a dismaying lack of specificity among Marxists with respect to what would happen after the state had been 'smashed.' Fudging this question was itself an act of utopianism, if — as was patently the case — most westerners, including most western working-class people, were unwilling to gamble their freedoms on the mere promise of progress and security.[61]

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, as Macpherson drew more and more upon the Marxist tradition as a means of critiquing and surpassing actually-existing liberal theory and practice, he is appropriately situated within a cohort of left intellectuals, both liberal and Marxist, who wrestled with the problem of reconciling socialism and democracy.[62] If many liberals of his era were chastened by the enormities of "Cold War Liberalism" in Vietnam, many socialists were equally chastened by the crimes of "Cold War Communism." They were alert to the growing distance between Marx's call for total revolution and the obdurate scepticism of the masses upon whom any such revolution would rely. They yearned for grassroots democracy and community activism.[63] This was the heyday of the Anglo-Marxists, the Eurocommunists, Salvador Allende and Yugoslavian self-management, the recovery of Gramsci and the first stirrings of cultural studies, Community Development, Participatory Democracy, and Power to the People — ideals, heroes, and slogans enthusiastically investigated by many participants in Professor Macpherson's seminar room at the University of Toronto. And it was the era in which Macpherson could find many critical liberals responding positively to his Millian central message that, in order to preserve the freedoms they cherished, they would have to question their tradition's age-old links with a crisis-ridden and greed-inducing capitalism. And then came the neo-liberal passive revolution — a restoration of free-market orthodoxies combined with tactical concessions to important constituencies, within an overall reconceptualization of each countries' positioning within the global capitalist order. The paths that seemed to beckon to both liberals and Marxists in the early 1970s — ones that led to new conceptions of democracy and new strategies for achieving it — were blocked one by one.[64]

Had they been listening more carefully to Macpherson in the 1970s and 1980s, his Marxist critics might have picked up some extraordinarily interesting ideas about the world they were struggling to change. Responding to both his liberal and Marxist critics, Macpherson refined his theory of the "transfer of powers." The transfer of powers was a further example of the contradictions built into a liberalism that had made its peace with capitalism. Macpherson argued, realistically, that individuals of unequal strength and skill would over time tend to be similarly differentiated from each other in terms of unequal holdings of property. Those with less property wound up working for those with more property. Over time, the very system that promised the maximization of utilities actually made it harder and harder for the majority to do so.[65] The transfer of powers offered a way in which Marx's theory of exploitation could be generalized beyond the working class — and could also be applied to *soi-disant* socialist states wherein, as was obvious to all who had eyes to see, the capacities and freedoms of the vast majority were siphoned off by privileged and often corrupt minorities.

After the mid-1970s, Macpherson also rethought the concept of property. Responding constructively to criticism, this time mainly coming from liberals, Macpherson implicitly conceded a point they had made about the slipperiness of this term in early modern England: one could have 'property,' his critics had pointed out, in reputation, office, honour, happiness, and health, which meant that some passages in early modern texts seemingly about possessions in a contemporary sense were in reality about more intangible qualities. Yet as he registered this possibility, Macpherson also noticed the Lockean precept his liberal critics themselves had often overlooked: the ultimate justification of property resides in the satisfaction of human needs. The tragedy of liberal theory was that, over time, the justification of property by labour had been transmuted into the defence of corporate domination over production. In Macpherson's Idealist worldview, once people grasped the contingency of this derivation of property rights, and understood that liberal justificatory theory itself had to change, they would then see "the individual prop-

erty right that is needed is not the exclusive right but the right not to be excluded from the use or benefit of those things which are the achievements of the whole society. And the latter right does not contradict, but includes part of the former."[66]

Even more than the critical counter-history implied by "possessive individualism" in the 1960s, the concept of property as Macpherson refined it in the 1970s was predicated upon a positive ideal of "creative and co-operative individualism." Macpherson was attempting to ground the ideals of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* in post-1945 social and economic realities. He did not envisage a comprehensive "abolition of private property" — Macpherson still imagined a future in which individuals had property rights in consumable items — but rather a future in which individuals were vested with the right of access to the means of labour.[67] What if, instead of supporting schemes of "abolishing property," progressives considered *extending* the idea of property, so that it would become "a right not to be excluded by others from the use or benefit of something"?[68]

So far as I know, Macpherson's proposed redefinition of property remained a utopian one, without any clear working out of how such a revolutionary revision might be instantiated. Yet one has the sense, upon encountering it, of a much-needed intellectual breakthrough — in essence, a liberal defetishization of property, whose 'rights' (especially since the *fin-de-siècle* rise of corporate capitalism) have proved so damaging for all the other values that Macpherson cherished in liberalism.[69] In drawing attention to property as politics, Macpherson was paralleling the equally radical insights of Amartya Sen, who so rigorously probed the origins of famine in the democratic deficits created by colonialism.[70]

Contemporary critical scholars are called upon to analyze not just the historical reasons underlying other thought-forms, but also to reflect rigorously upon the nature of their own frameworks — thus becoming aware not only of their framework's historical constitution but also of the ways it might be revitalized.[71] Twenty-first-century Marxists and Millian liberals, often the warring partisans of traditions that do indeed proceed from very

different epistemological and politico-ethical positions, would be well-advised to revisit the social and political theory of the third quarter of the twentieth century, the 'Moment of Macpherson,' when new concepts of freedom and democracy flourished. Of the greatest interest in this Moment were the liminal figures on the ideological borderlands, who stayed in close conversation with their counterparts across the frontier lines.

This 'Moment of Macpherson' is being revisited today, in part because the questions he asked about property were the ones many people in today's ever-more-unequally divided world are also asking. At a time when human extinction can be seriously contemplated as a possibility by the scientific community, it is difficult to locate within the various currents of left anti-humanism that have flourished so dramatically over the past 30 years in the academy, any coherent or consistent grounds upon which this impending catastrophe for the species might be critiqued and averted. (Indeed, can a Foucauldian even consistently regard it as a catastrophe?) The recovery of left humanist voices from the twentieth century is perhaps an indication of a general discontent with the state of contemporary critical theory. Since the 1980s, critical theorists proved adept at diagnosing the manifold errors of the Enlightenment — and grievously deficient in suggesting alternatives to them.

Possessive individualism as a critical thesis about the logic of liberal order suggested that, through intense meditation upon foundational texts, liberals might become aware of their philosophy's underlying problems and imagine ways to rectify them. The "late Macpherson" — the Macpherson of *Property* — was imagining just such a revitalization. Macpherson saw more clearly than his contemporaries — and indeed many of *our* contemporaries — how central and treacherous was the question of property. He saw property, so to speak, as a philosophical event. Even to treat it in this way was provocative, because doing so had the effect of transforming a thing into a process, a 'commonsense' into a problem. The sobering implication of his analysis is that if this core issue is avoided, democracy will continue to deteriorate. Even the findings of Thomas Piketty, who has empirically doc-

umented the extent to which inequality has grown dramatically over the past decades, have been conjoined to the most modest of proposals for a progressive annual tax on individual wealth. For his pains, he has been dismissed as a "utopian."[72] From a critical perspective, whether left liberal or Marxist, what is "utopian" is rather the blithe confidence that the contradictions of capitalism will permit the continued flourishing of human civilization.

Can Macpherson's historical and theoretical work be helpful to historians today? At one level, simply to re-engage with the social and political thought of the 1960s and 1970s — so close and yet so far away — can work to remind us of the world of radical imagination and hopeful practice we have lost to neo-liberalism. Exposure to the emancipatory thought of a past era destabilizes the arrogant certainties of the present by revealing how recently such nostrums became uncontested truths. In today's neo-liberal commonsense, now broadcast non-stop on television and hammered home on every editorial page, the passion for acquisition reigns supreme. No one who reads Macpherson's powerful critical examination of the rise of western liberalism can fail to discern how the themes he targeted are pervasive in contemporary culture. Contrary to much conventional academic wisdom, Macpherson's ideas were neither disproved nor discredited, and "possessive individualism" retains an unrivalled power as a diagnostic tool of our western capitalist liberal civilization. Historians disposed to dissect and critique power relations might also profit from Macpherson's analysis of the "transfer of powers," which offers a way in which historians of race, class, and gender can transcend static, reified, and often depoliticized tripartite stratifications of social reality to reveal shared logics of exploitation. Macpherson can also be used to open eyes to the historical complexities of property and the limitations of imposing our own notions of it upon the past or projecting them into the future.

As for the wider population of activists and justice-seekers, one might draw the lesson that the next left will arise out of the smouldering ruins of the great twentieth-century citadels that once bore the names 'Liberalism' and 'Socialism.' Its architects will need to consider carefully what of enduring value is to be

rescued, transformed, and redeployed in this century from the ideological fortresses of the last. In the opinion of Macpherson, the challenge lying before those loyal to the legacy of J.S. Mill was to use the insights of historical materialism to persuade their fellow liberals to sever longstanding links with possessive individualism, that property-centred *ethos* that arose alongside their political theory in the seventeenth century. It was a message only some could hear, and it lacked a feasible scheme of implementation.[73] Yet Macpherson's discerning critique of liberalism's democratic deficit, the consequence of its long embrace of possessive individualism, has lost none of its force.[74] His appraisal of the transfer of power which siphons capacities — above all, perhaps, *time* — from subalterns can be appreciated as a prescient analysis of the 24/7, über-connected, highly exploitative world of twenty-first-century capitalism.[75] Macpherson's form of worldly utopianism has its value in identifying with great clarity the obstacles to a rational future. One of Macpherson's enormous attractions today is that, as a thorough and sincere liberal, he anticipated not only many of the underlying contradictions of our contemporary world but also the conceptual revolution that might begin to understand, and perhaps contribute to overcoming, them. That revolution begins not within the safe if smouldering citadels of our old traditions, but beyond them in a new space — whose more generous borders were first glimpsed by the cohort of radical democrats of the 1960s and 1970s, and whose full reconnaissance is on the agenda of their successors.

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Endnotes:

1 See C.B. Macpherson, *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); *The Real World of Democracy* (Toronto: Anansi, 1965, repr. 1995); *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, repr. 1977); *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977); ed., *Property: Mainstream and Critical Positions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); *Burke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982); *The Rise and Fall of Economic Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). References to Macpherson's books relate to these editions. As an indication of the posthumous revival of Macpherson's fortunes, most of his major texts have been recently re-issued from Oxford University Press with insightful introductions by Frank Cunningham, whose advice and encouragement are here gratefully acknowledged.

2 Jules Townshend, *C.B. Macpherson and the Problem of Liberal Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1.

3 Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, 199.

4 Macpherson, *Real World*, 79. Throughout I make no attempt to amend Macpherson's generic use of 'Man' to cover all of humanity, a usage to which he clung well into the age of Second Wave feminism.

5 Peter Lindsay, *Creative Individualism: The Democratic Vision of C.B. Macpherson* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 51–2.

6 C.B. Macpherson, "Positive Neutralism for Canada?," *Commentator* (September 1963): 10. This quotation is especially significant because, for some of Macpherson's detractors, his inclusion of Soviet and Third World regimes under the rubric of 'democracy' exposed the weakness of liberalism. They read his texts of the 1960s simplistically and polemically, very much in a Cold War spirit.

7 Sandra den Otter, *British Idealists and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6–7; Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 209.

8 Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, 4.

9 See R.H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1912); *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926; repr. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2008); *The Acquisitive Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1920); *Equality* (London: Unwin, 1931). For studies of Tawney, see R. Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and his Times: Socialism as fellowship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). For a contemporary collection that amplifies Tawney's work on England's transformation, see Jane Whittle, ed., *Landlords and Tenants in Britain, 1440–1660: Tawney's* Agrarian Problem *Revisited* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell & Brewer, 2013). Although one might also argue for the influence of Harold Laski on Macpherson, insofar as Laski can also be seen as a figure whose career combined liberal and Marxist thought, the Tawney link (based on a shared historical idealism, organicist sociology, and moral critique of capitalism) is a much more powerful one. Macpherson made no secret of the direct line that led from Tawney's *Acquisitive Society* to his own *Possessive Individualism*.

10 "There was no room for intellectual dogmatism in this approach; but there was also no compromise with the enemies of freedom for the sake of 'efficiency', 'productivity' or any material advantage, and certainly no mercy for the upholders of privilege": Rita Hendon, "Introduction," to R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 8.

11 Stefan Collini, in "For the Common Good," *Times Literary Supplement* (17 January 2014), writing of both Richard Hoggart and R.H. Tawney, remarks: "… their common affirmation of certain deep, powerful truths shines through. Profit is a hollow and unworthy goal. The unchecked imperatives of the market deform and destroy human lives. The only force capable of resisting the destructive power of capital is the collective will to give expression to a common good through legal means — or in other words, the state" (5). He could be writing of Macpherson.

12 No one, to my knowledge, has systematically explored the links between Macpherson's thought and the social theory of the CCF, perhaps mediated especially through his partner Kay. For his partner's strong peace activism and CCF ties, see Kay Macpherson, *When in Doubt, Do Both: The Times of My Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

13 Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). For other insightful analyses, see Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 2008); Colin Leys, *Market-Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

14 See especially Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*, trans. R.G. Collingwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press and London: Humphrey Milford, 1927); Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

15 For the "procedural liberalism" immensely popular in American political science, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971); *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); for the archetypal British model of liberal politics, see Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *Gladstone* (London: Macmillan, 2000); E. Eisenach, ed., *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

16 Note here E. Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010); for a recent and fervent North American celebration of liberalism, juxtaposed to social forms that are "illiberal … hyper-conservative, fundamentalist, theocratic and fascist," see Milan Zafirovski, *Liberal Modernity and its Adversaries: Freedom, Liberalism, and Anti-Liberalism in the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 1–2.

17 See in this regard John Stuart Mill's many works, to which Richard Reeves, *John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007) offers a readable introduction. See also R. Devigne, *Reforming Liberalism: J.S. Mill's Use of Ancient, Religious, Liberal, and Romantic Moralities* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); A. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1992, repr. 2001). For an illuminating history of the humanities, see Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The search for principles and patterns from antiquity to the present,* trans. Lynn Richards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

18 For discussion, see Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

19 Here is a position it is difficult to imagine any Marxist wholeheartedly embracing. Even Marx as a journalist writing for a liberal newspaper in the 1840s would have dissented from this proposition: see Gopal

Balakrishnan, "The Abolitionist—I," *New Left Review* 90 (December 2014): 101–36.

20 See Vere Chappell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), which lists no fewer than 57 references to God in its index, 34 to morality. It contains no references to slavery, notwithstanding Locke's actual enthusiastic participation in the trade. For discussion, see B. Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

21 And here — disagreeing with those who would make Macpherson into some sort of Hegelian — resolving a "contradiction" meant unraveling a logical error, not exploring an historical dynamic.

22 Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); for a very different critique, see John Gray, "On Negative and Positive Liberty," *Political Studies* 28 (1980): 507-26.

23 Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, 98.

24 For discussion, see B.N. Ray, *C.B. Macpherson and Liberalism* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 1999), 200–1; Robert Meynell, *Canadian Idealism and the Philosophy of Freedom: C.B. Macpherson, George Grant, and Charles Taylor* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 11–2, 66–8.

25 Ray, *Macpherson*, 91.

26 Even Thomas Hobbes, for all his reputation for brutishness, was rehabilitated as an illuminating authority: Macpherson would directly draw upon him later on for his own theory of the transfer of powers. Antonio Negri goes so far as to consider Macpherson a disciple of Hobbes: see Ray, *Macpherson*, 338.

27 Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, 67.

28 Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the 'American Way': The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

29 Macpherson, *Real World of Democracy* (1965). Parenthetical page references in the following paragraphs refer to this edition.

30 Cited in Townshend, *Macpherson*, 67.

31 Peter Laslett, Introduction to John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960; repr. 2005), 106n.

32 Quentin Skinner, "Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his* Critics, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 102.

33 See Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered:* What Is to Be Done? *in Context* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), a demonstration of some of textualism's strengths. Rather than accepting the "textbook Lenin," the incipient totalitarian who disparaged trade unionism and believed in a vanguard party imposing its will from above, Lih painstakingly looks at Lenin's text as

a particular argument designed to accomplish specific democratic objectives in a determinate context. A vast library of denunciatory books thus comes into question. For a more general statement, see Lars T. Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

34 J. Femia, "An historicist critique of 'revisionist' methods for studying the history of ideas," in *Meaning & Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 168.

35 One thinks, for instance, of Seidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, with its bold historicist claims for a continuing Christian tradition as an influence on a core liberal category of analysis.

36 Quentin Skinner, "Some Problems in the analysis of political thought and action," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his* Critics, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 97–118. If it is legitimate to argue, as Skinner does here, that Protestantism was linked to the emergence of capitalism, why is it then illegitimate for Macpherson to suggest, with far more subtlety, that there might have been a fit between the emergent language of liberalism and the socio-economic transformations entailed in early modern capitalism?

37 See David Miller, "The Macpherson version," in G.W. Smith, ed., *Liberalism: Critical Concepts of Political Theory*, Vol. 1 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 148–158.

38 For the theory underlying this observation, see Galvano della Volpe, *Logic as a Positive Science* (London: Verso Books, 1980); Mario Montana, "On the Methodology of Determinate Abstraction: Essay on Galvano Della Volpe," *Telos* 7 (Spring 1971): 30–49.

39 Note Hya Jung, "Democratic Ontology and Technology: A Critique of C.B. Macpherson," *Polity* (February 1979), 254, as cited in Ray, *Macpherson*, 327; for a more recent work, see Jeff Collins, *The Allegiances of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

40 See G. Sreenivsan, *The Limits of Lockean Rights in Property* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Nonetheless, Macpherson's observation that Locke finds ways — e.g., a money economy — to get around these seemingly strong limits to unlimited accumulation has won widespread, if often discreetly,expressed, support.

41 See Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999; David Bromwich, *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and the Beautiful to American Independence* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2014).

42 Ray, *Macpherson*, 103–4; 316–8; Miller, "The Macpherson version."

43 Peter Lindsay, *Creative Individualism: The Democratic Vision of C.B. Macpherson* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 33–4; 51, who asks an especially pertinent question: "Why should the log-

ical question posed after an examination of human nature have as its point of reference those same humans? Why not ask one of many other possible questions, such as, What sort of society would claim the most glorious achievements given the needs and capacities of humans? Or perhaps what society would best preserve the planet's ecological balance, given the needs and capacities of humans? In short, Macpherson's move from the facts of human existence to an analysis of the society which would be best for them is missing the step which would justify privileging that analysis over and against analyses with different points of reference (e.g., society or nature, as opposed to the individual)." (51) One might go further and ask if one still remains content with a liberalism whose "moral center is the individual" (52) when 'the individual' is so plainly a historically and culturally specific abstraction?

44 Subsequent sophisticated Marxist work on 'the transition,' upon which Macpherson could not draw in the 1960s, has emerged over the past 30 years. One finds among its many contending theses a tendency to accept a notion of sixteenth-century 'agrarian capitalism' that is quite congenial to Macpherson's theory. Some important recent titles include Jairus Banaji, *History as Theory: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2010) and "Putting Theory to Work," *Historical Materialism* 21, 4 (2013): 129– 43; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002) and *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London: Verso, 2011).

45 For a discussion of Aristotle and the non-accidental, see Ross Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007) and, with more specific reference to the Marxist tradition, Scott Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx* (London: Open Court, 1985).

46 See Peter Laslett, "Market Society and Political Theory," *Historical Journal* 7 (1964): 1; for general commentary, see Townshend, *Macpherson*, 90. Nor, and here was a source of much confusion, did his thesis require that the thinkers upon whom he focused so intently — notably Hobbes, Locke, Harrington, Burke, Bentham, and James Mill — had singly or together hatched a "Master Plan" for liberal capitalism. In fact, in contrast to the emergent Cambridge School, Macpherson's argument did not centrally rest on exploring authorial intentions. He assumed that intellectuals might not be fully aware, either of the social forces pushing them to write in certain ways or of the ultimate historical significance of their own words. It was entirely possible they were contributing to the elaboration of a worldview, albeit increasingly a "predominant" one, of which they were at least partly unaware. "[T]he question of conscious intention to support a position, as distinct from what one may, with his-

torical hindsight, see as an objective support of that position, can rarely be conclusively answered," he pointed out (Macpherson, *Economic Justice*, 1987, 136).

47 For a sampling of such moments, see Townshend, *Macpherson*, 95, n103.

48 Paul Axelrod, Review of Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Age*, in *Historical Studies in Education* 22 (2010): 114–6.

49 Ellen Meksins Wood, "C.B. Macpherson: Liberalism and the Task of Socialist Political Theory," *Socialist Register* 15 (1978): 215–40.

50 Leo Panitch, "Liberal Democracy and Socialist Democracy: The Antinomies of C.P. Macpherson," *Socialist Register* 18 (1981): 144–68.

51 Andrew Levine, "The Political Theory of Social Democracy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6, 2 (June 1976): 183–193.

52 C.B. Macpherson, "Humanist Democracy and Elusive Marxism: A Response to Minogue and Svacek," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 9 (1976): 423.

53 Victor Svacek, "The Elusive Marxism of C.B. Macpherson," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 9 (September 1976): 395–422, citations at 419.

54 Ray, *Macpherson*, 338, 353, 354, 366, 355, 371, 358, 367.

55 See Domenico Losurdo, "Liberalism and Marx: An interview with Domenico Losurdo," *Platypus Review* 46 (2012), Online at platypus1917.org/2012/05/.../liberalism-and-marx-domenico-losurdo <accessed 14 July 2014>; *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

56 J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

57 Alasdair MacIntyre, "On Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval by C.B. Macpherson," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6, 2 (June 1976): 177–81.

58 Ray, *Macpherson*, 330.

59 Ray, *Macpherson*, 218 notes that there is but "one lonely paragraph" — in *Democratic Theory*, 57 — in which Macpherson acknowledges that "society" is not merely an impeding agent but "a medium and a necessary condition" for the development of capacities.

60 And as Marshall Berman brilliantly recalled in his *Adventures in Marxism* (London and New York: Verso), 1999.

61 See Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), especially 180–90.

62 A partial list of pivotal intellectuals widely discussed in the English-speaking world who explored this problem would include Louis Althusser, Perry Anderson, Samuel Bowles, Frank Cunningham, Herbert Gintis, Sue Golding, Christopher Hill, Ernesto Laclau, Ralph

Miliband, C. Wright Mills, Chantal Mouffe, Alex Nove, Carol Pateman, Karl Polanyi, Nicos Poulantzas, John Roemer, Carmen Siriani, Charles Taylor, E.P. Thompson, and Raymond Williams.

63 For a stimulating recent treatment, see A. Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action during the American Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

64 In the case of Macpherson, this shutting down of democratic possibility is exemplified by William Leiss, *C.B. Macpherson: Dilemmas of Liberalism and Socialism* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988 — reprinted, with considerable chutzpah, in 2009). His Macpherson is an intellectual fossil from the 1930s, a carrier of an authoritarian Marxist dogmatism that blinds him to the inevitability and goodness of the world market. Unlike die-hard utopians such as Macpherson, we can now appreciate that the Market — the very "heart and soul" of an emergent social type (116) — is here to stay. Just look at the world's thriving 24 "quasi-market societies," with Ireland and Iceland sharing the benefits of a stable and prospering capitalism with Japan and the United States. All this in a book reprinted shortly after 2008 … For a discerning analysis of the financial crisis and its perplexing ideological upshot, see Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

65 For a useful exposition, see Ray, *Macpherson*, 44–5.

66 Ray, *Macpherson*, 117.

67 Macpherson, *Property*, 207.

68 Ibid., 4.

69 In terms of our earlier list, items (a) through (d) were in a corporate world increasingly compromised by (e).

70 See Amartya Sen, *On Economic Inequality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976; 1997); *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). For stimulating reflections on property and the "expanded scope of public control," see Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 106–21, a Macphersonian intervention useful on many other questions as well.

71 Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*: *Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

72 See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldmanner (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2014). For an excellent review that notes both Piketty's immense contribution and his theoretical deficiencies, see Benjamin Kunkel, "Paupers and Richlings," *London Review of Books* (3 July 2014): 17–20. For related analyses, see especially Zygmunt Bauman, *Does the Richness of the Few Benefit Us All?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Göran Therborn,

The Killing Fields of Inequality (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Janet C. Gornick and Markus Jäntti, eds., *Income Inequality: Economic Disparities and the Middle Class in Affluent Countries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). For a bracing analysis of the extent to which a politics of inequality has come to be the "new normal" in twentieth-first-century Canada, see Donald Gutstein, *Harperism: How Stephen Harper and his Think Tank Colleagues Have Transformed Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2014) — a title which also reveals how important it is to grasp how a hegemonic group can transform philosophical ideas into material realities.

73 In particular, how much of the market can be preserved in a post-capitalist order was a topic of intense debate, from which any 'next left' will have to learn. See especially David Schweickart, *After Capitalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); with Bertell Ollman, Hillel Ticktin and James Lawler, *Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists* (London: Routledge, 1998); *Against Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *Capitalism or Worker Control? An Ethical and Economic Appraisal* (New York: Praeger, 1980); "Economic Democracy: A Worthy Socialism That Would Really Work," *Science & Society* 56, 1 (Spring 1992): 9–38.

74 See especially Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2014); Donatella della Porta, *Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2013); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

75 Daniel Cohen, *Homo Economicus: The (Lost) Prophet of Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).