

C.B. Macpherson's perspective is commonly thought to be a blend of T.H. Green's ethical liberalism and Marx's political economy.¹ He looked to Green for his ontology, the notion of human fulfilment, and to Marx for his empirical analysis of the relationship between the property theory of classical liberalism and class oppression. What is being overlooked is that Green and Marx both looked to Hegel for inspiration, one for his theory of an overarching unifying spirit, the other for his political economy. I intend to show that, by bringing the two together, Macpherson unwittingly engages in a retrieval of the original and much maligned Hegel. This essay begins with a brief biographical sketch to account for how Macpherson might have picked up his Hegelian idealism and then proceeds to draw parallels between Macpherson's and Hegel's work. For my interpretation of Hegel, I adopt what Allan Patten calls the civic humanist reading of Hegel promoted by such scholars as Robert Pippin and Robert Williams.¹ Patten, Pippin and Williams hold that Hegel's infamous Geist is not the omnipotent spirit that negates individual will, but rather a term for the activity in which ideas, reason and action blend in a logical and dialectical fashion. Of course, Macpherson and others of his generation would not have been aware of this interpretation of Hegel, so I do not claim that he had this understanding of Hegel's work or understood his own work in these terms, only that this was the source of Macpherson's approach though he received it second hand. Recognizing this clarifies much of the confusion about his liberal-marxist critique of liberal

¹ Peter Lindsay, *Creative Individualism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996)

¹Allan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (University of California Press, 1997); Robert Pippin, "Hegel, Freedom, The Will," in Ludwig Siep, ed., *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Akademie Verlag, 1997). Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

democracy.

As Peter Lindsay has rightly noted, Macpherson openly embraced certain metaphysical assumptions which underlay his critique of possessive individualism, but “metaphysics was neither his passion nor his strong suit.” I contend that had he delved deeper into those waters he would have found himself drawn to the civic humanist Hegel. By understanding Macpherson’s work in this way we can get a more complete grasp of his perspective and where it might lead us. In Lindsay’s superb book *Creative Individualism*, he often employs Hegel’s formulations to shed light on Macpherson’s theories. Now we need to recognize Macpherson’s similarity to Hegel for what it is, the extension of a tradition that has been a major force in defining Canada’s political culture.²

Macpherson’s status as an accidental Hegelian can be gleaned somewhat from his biography. By identifying his direct and acknowledged influences, we can establish the plausibility that Hegel somehow sneaked in under the wire without Macpherson knowing. Of course, the biographical element is secondary to the interpretation of his writings from which we can discern his position on certain critical philosophical and political points. The touchstones of this study are freedom, ontology, methodology and the philosophy of history. The focus here will be freedom, ontology and political economy, though the philosophy of history will be implicit in the historical approach to philosophy.

² This paper is part of a larger project in which I argue for the need to recognize the significant impact of Hegelian idealism on Canadian political thought and culture.

After a brief biographical sketch to establish plausibility of this project, I will set out Macpherson's conception of freedom as he articulates it in his criticism of Berlin's "Two Concepts". This will show the similarities between the positive liberty of Macpherson and that of Hegel, despite Macpherson's passing references to Hegel's idealism as an oppressive doctrine. This is followed by an account of his neo-Aristotlean ontology which he derived from the British Idealists. Here too, the origins of this will be traced to Hegel. Finally, I will give an account of Macpherson's use of Marx and show that the economic theories he borrows from Marx had been learned from Hegel, and where Marx adapts Hegel's work, Macpherson does not follow.

Biography of a Budding Idealist

Crawford Brough Macpherson (1911-1987) was born, raised and spent the greater part of his life in Toronto, with the exception of three years of graduate work in England, one year teaching at the University of New Brunswick and a few years sabbatical abroad. He took his B.A. in political economy at University of Toronto (1929-32) where he also won scholarships in the Classics. The stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, which exhibited the potential ruthlessness of *laissez-faire* capitalism, doubtless had an impact on the young scholar's perspective on the important link between economics and social justice. But to discern the roots of his mature conceptualization and articulation of political and philosophical issues, we can look to his teachers at U of T. He studied Plato under Fulton Anderson, and economics from retired London School of Economics professor E.J. Urwick. He learned that his greatest intellectual interest was political theory, which he studied under the tutelage of professor Otto B. van der Sprenkel, a left-wing European academic who had himself been a student of Harold Laski at L.S.E. after fleeing fascism

on the continent. Sprenkel was Macpherson's professor during a two year sojourn in Toronto before leaving to teach in Australia. Sprenkel introduced Macpherson to Marx's thought, which Macpherson claims he did not quite take to, and, more importantly, to the work of Laski, under whom Macpherson would later write his M.A. at L.S.E.³

Whether or not Macpherson claims to identify with Marx, it is clear he had been exposed to Marxist thought and adopted much of Marx's insights regarding class domination and labour. There might be some mild temptation to say that Marx's status as a left-Hegelian alone is sufficient to claim that his students are neo-Hegelian. Yet, this could only serve to blur the picture rather than clarify it. Besides, that Hegel's influence on western political thought was widespread has never been in question, so attributing a touch of Hegel to a thinker would hardly be enlightening. What is being looked at here is that Hegel's importance to Macpherson has been far greater than previously appreciated. That said, the influence of Marx does give us a hint that a neo-Hegelian might be lurking. Marx's conceptions of historical dialectics and the importance of labour to personal fulfilment are ideas picked up from Hegel and are also vital to Macpherson. But Macpherson was not a materialist. Rather, his reading of history was in tune with Hegelian blend of the concept and the concrete that had infused much of the Canadian school system in Macpherson's time through the British Idealists, and at U of T these ideas would have been reinforced by the likes of Fulton

³ William Leiss, *C.B. Macpherson: Dilemmas of Liberalism and Socialism* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1988), 25.

Anderson.⁴ In other words, Macpherson was more purely Hegelian than Hegel's student Marx, and what he found attractive in Marx were those things that fit that Hegelianism.

⁴For an account of the history of idealism in Canada see, Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981).

Anderson had been a key member of “the Toronto school of intellectual history” founded by George Brett, which the philosopher and Brett’s biographer John Irving called “the first indigenous philosophical movement to develop in Canada.”⁵ Anderson represents a link in the tradition that brings Hegel to Macpherson via British Idealism. It was Brett who brought the views of the British Idealists to U of T.⁶ He had been a student of the British Idealists Bosanquet, Bradley, and Green at Oxford, and a scholar of German philosophy, Herbert W. Blunt, had overseen much of his philosophical education. Blunt had warned him away from system building, which may explain his aversion to the study of Hegel as such. His distinctly Hegelian perspective could be found in that his priority was a conception of freedom that involves immanent critique from which individuals could develop their own ends.⁷ For instance, unlike Plato’s view of reason as a means to transcend the contingencies of human experience, Hegel’s immanent critique critically engages various systems of thought and life on their own terms.⁸ Thus freedom is the consciousness of freedom. The historical dialectic of philosophical ideas facilitated the development of human consciousness and, by extension, human freedom, and so freedom involves gaining an understanding of this development. Under Brett’s influence, philosophy at U of T became the history of philosophy.⁹ The greater understanding we derive from history “creates in us a greater capacity for experience, literally a

⁵ Ibid., 457.

⁶The philosophy department at U of T had already been infused with British Idealism in the 1880s by the tremendously influential Paxton Young. See A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), 200.

⁷ Armour and Trott, 443.

⁸ Smith, 22-28.

⁹ Ibid., 433.

richer inner life within which we can move more freely.”¹⁰ All but his rejection of formal systems of thought mark Brett as an Hegelian.¹¹ He was an objective idealist who admired Hegel’s philosophy of history for the idea of continuity as well as the idea of the organic totality of life.¹² It is likely that Anderson taught this approach to philosophy and history to his students, including Macpherson.

¹⁰Ibid., 442.

¹¹Ibid., 445.

¹²Ibid., 446-7.

Sprenkle's influence can be subsumed in a discussion of Macpherson's lessons from Laski. While taking his M.A. at L.S.E., Laski introduced Macpherson to a left-wing political economy that was highly infused with idealist principles. Along with the Marxist critique of capitalism, the roots of which can be found in Hegel's critique of the one-sidedness of viewing society solely in terms of market relations,¹³ he taught Macpherson an Aristotlean humanist approach to synthesizing otherwise contending forces of the Enlightenment: socialism and liberalism.¹⁴ Whether or not Laski was aware of it, this was precisely Hegel's political project. Like Aristotle, Hegel had a conception of human essence which fulfilled itself in human society, but whereas for Aristotle the human telos was the good, for Hegel it was freedom. Jules Townshend attributes this to Macpherson's exposure, through Laski, to J.S. Mill and the British Idealists.¹⁵ Laski, like Macpherson and his undergraduate political economy professor E.J. Urwick, was a Classics scholar. Both Urwick and Laski read their classics, including Aristotle, through the lens of British Idealists. Townshend points out that Laski had originally intended to open his *Grammar of Politics* with "a discussion of the bearing of philosophy on politics and discuss the idealistic canon of T.H. Green and Bosanquet."¹⁶ But Townshend also distinguishes Laski and Macpherson from the Idealists by their willingness to adopt

¹³*In Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel asserts that the good of property rights is abstract; it lacks moral content as well as concrete institutions to keep it from vacuity and negativity. (p.186)

¹⁴Jules Townshend, *C.B. Macpherson and the Problem of Liberal Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 7. Townshend tells us of the synthesis and the importance of Aristotle without realizing that he is describing Hegel's project. This is also the case with Peter Lamb and David Morrice, "Ideological Reconciliation in the Thought of Harold Laski and C.B. Macpherson," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 35:4 (December 2002), 803.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶Quoted in *ibid.*, 10.

elements of Marx's political economy. If Townshend were acquainted with the argument being made in this thesis he surely would recognize the composite of these intellectual positions is Hegel's system.

The final mentor of Macpherson's early academic career remained his mentor into his maturity. Harold Innis was a tremendous force in the Department of Political Economy. He had been Macpherson's political economy professor at the U of T, and he was head of the department in 1943 when Macpherson returned as a young professor. As a student of Innis, Macpherson had found tedious his strict adherence to the empirical aspects of political economy on history and society.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they worked closely together and enjoyed informal discussion, so it seems reasonable that Macpherson would have picked up some of Innis' ideological disposition. Although Innis' attempt to make a hard science of history bored Macpherson, the underlying Hegelian influence

¹⁷Leiss, 29.

likely reinforced what Macpherson had learned and made them intellectual allies.¹⁸

This account of Macpherson's early academic influences is not presented as definitive evidence that he is a neo-Hegelian. Students do not always follow their teachers. Indeed, they often purposefully rebel against them. Nevertheless, what has been established is that Macpherson had a great deal of exposure to Hegel's ideas without necessarily being aware of their source. Hegel's system was largely out of favour at this time, so his ideas were only partially adopted by those who found any value in his work. It is now time to set out Macpherson's mature thought and see how it fits with current interpretations of Hegel.

Macpherson's Positive Liberty: Response to Isaiah Berlin

¹⁸The influence of Hegel on Innis is briefly mentioned, though it is implied throughout, Judith Stamps' *Unthinking Modernity: Innis, McLuhan, and the Frankfurt School* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 8. Stamps' book shows the parallels between the thought of Innis and Marshal McLuhan and that of the Frankfurt School. This is a fascinating comparison that does much to fill out our comprehension of Innis and McLuhan, and, unintentionally, does much to identify the idealism of two more of Canada's prominent accidental Hegelians,

Hegel has long been dismissed for his theory that history is directed by God's will thereby legitimating any existing regime, however oppressive, and emptying the notion of individual freedom because we are all rendered mere pawns of God's spirit. The civic humanist reading of Hegel provides a far more appealing version of Hegel's conception of freedom, and it is found in a less sophisticated form in Macpherson's work. Macpherson shares Hegel's project of synthesizing individual autonomy with political unity by subscribing to a notion of freedom that entails an intersubjectivity that, rather than constraining individual fulfillment, enables its actualization when combined with rational social institutions. This is neither the atomistic individualism of classical liberalism that emerged from the mechanistic ontology of the Enlightenment, nor an oppressive collectivism wherein the individual is subordinate to rules dictated by an external authority, be it tradition or tyrant. It is rather an intersubjective freedom in which reason plays a vital role. As free agents, we engage in rational evaluations of our choices in light of our higher ends, and this evaluation involves a recognition of others as autonomous beings, and their importance to the constitution of our own identities, as well as the importance of our emotions and drives in our deliberations.¹⁹

Macpherson's conception of freedom further fits Hegel's rational authentic freedom in that, for both, form must be in harmony with content, the overarching goal of the free act is to fulfill one's freedom. The primary motive of the rational will is not satisfying hunger, or chasing the fleeting phantom of pleasure, though such drives are not to be ignored or suppressed; it is to will itself, its essence, which is freedom. Part of this willing is the creation and protection of institutions that

¹⁹ This interpretation of Hegel's conception of freedom can be found in Franco, Patten, Pippin, and Williams.

facilitate freedom for oneself and the other members of the community. We do this by trying to determine which aspects of our inherited society are rational or “actual”, and which are self-contradictory. Macpherson begins with an analysis of capitalism’s *laissez-faire* conception of freedom where some are denied freedom as a result of the whims of a market economy. Macpherson follows Hegel in maintaining that there cannot be freedom for any unless all are free, because just as the telos of the individual is his or her freedom, so is the telos of the society as a whole (Geist) the freedom of all. Thus Macpherson follows Hegel in criticizing the negative liberty of classical liberalism for being too abstract and failing to accommodate aspects of human fulfillment that are essential to a complete realization of freedom. The competitive atomistic environment of contract theorists ignores our inherent intersubjectivity, that is a consequence of our history, culture and need for recognition.

It is evident in Macpherson’s critical essay “Berlin’s Division of Liberty,” that his conception of freedom conforms to the civic humanist Hegel. He takes up the fight to defend positive liberty, though he seeks to distinguish himself from the oppressive positive freedom he attributes to Hegel and others. Macpherson argues that Berlin is wrong to believe positive liberty invariably degrades into state oppression through the enforcement of a particular notion of the good. Macpherson contends that Berlin’s error is a consequence of his overly abstract conception of freedom which, because it is removed from the socio-historical context, is too narrow and misses the extent to which a brute market society restricts access to the means of leading a fulfilling life. It seems to Macpherson that Berlin is unaware that the enjoyment of negative liberty requires first the satisfaction of certain fundamental human needs. In other words, negative liberty cannot exist in a

society that does not also have positive liberty, or what Macpherson calls PL1.²⁰

²⁰Macpherson, "Berlin's Division of Liberty," in *Democratic Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

PL1 is “the desire of the individual to be his own master, to be self-directed, to be moved by his own conscious purposes, to act and decide rather than be acted upon and decided for by others.”²¹ He quotes with admiration Berlin’s account of this idea of freedom, “I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not.”²² This is an especially effective articulation of the importance of the agent’s rational determination and unhindered pursuit of her own ends. PL1 is distinguished from positive liberty’s oppressive form, PL2, which both Berlin and Macpherson associate with Idealists such as Hegel. Here “liberty is coercion, by the fully rational or by those who have attained self-mastery, of all the rest; coercion, by those who say they know the truth, of all those who do not (yet) know it.”²³ The third form of positive liberty described by Macpherson, PL3, “is the democratic concept of liberty as a share in the controlling authority.”²⁴ Macpherson and Berlin agree that this form of positive liberty can exist with or without negative liberty, so it is not pertinent to the core of the debate and can be put aside for now. The key questions are, does PL1 necessarily lead to PL2 and should we be content with protecting only negative liberty?

The heart of the disagreement between Macpherson and Berlin lies in the position of liberty in their respective ontologies and the notion of human fulfilment. For Berlin, freedom plays a

²¹ Ibid., 108.

²² Ibid., 105.

²³ Ibid., 109.

²⁴ Ibid., 109.

secondary role, namely, it is the political condition that enables agents to pursue their higher ends. As a sporadic empiricist, he attempts to ground his theory in an irrefutable natural law and so argues that as bearers of reason, human beings are by nature free and therefore the state should provide a space in which freedom (understood as the capacity to make rational choices) can be exercised with the least possible interference from other agents. In contrast, like Hegel, Macpherson sees liberty as integral to our natural ends; whatever else our goals might be, freedom is our highest end. Of course, most of the particulars of how that freedom is expressed are contingent on the individual's identity, culture, and socio-historical context, and therefore beyond the dominion of political philosophers. Nevertheless, the state has a duty to do more than limit interference; it must also ensure access to institutions and materials that are essential to the realization of that freedom. Otherwise, Macpherson argues, individuals are exposed to the often cruel capriciousness of market relations.

Macpherson maintains that understanding the link between history and human agency enables us to see that combining negative liberty and PL1 need not result in the rise of oppressive PL2. In part, he bases this on the repulsion we feel at the harsh realities the poor and working class face in a pure market society.²⁵ Any somewhat compassionate person will feel the truth that there must be room for more than the brutality of a society lacking PL1. He also bases the need for PL2 on ontological grounds. This Aristotlean, teleological view of the human essence justifies his contention that the means of life and labour are vital to human fulfilment and therefore fundamental and inalienable.

Macpherson's Ontological Support for Positive Liberty:

²⁵This point will be developed in the discussion of Macpherson's economy theory.

Aristotlean Teleology and British Idealism

According to the ontology underpinning Macpherson's conception of liberty, our highest end is true human fulfilment and the attainment of rational autonomy, but he provides no means of measuring this. Instead, the lever he uses to topple each opposing view is that an atomistic, capitalist market economy suffers from an inherent tendency to an unequal distribution of wealth and the means to life and labour. The inaccessibility of the means of life and labour to the poor and working class restricts their powers to develop as human beings leaves them vulnerable to class domination. He considers this to be essential to human freedom and it is generally not given its due by liberal thinkers from Hobbes, through Mill, to Friedman, Rawls and Berlin. But why freedom is so important, and is not always made clear.

One of his clearest articulations of what positive freedom entails, aside from having access to a level of material wealth that is greater than is currently attained by the poor in capitalist societies, is found in his critique of Berlin's defense of negative liberty. He quotes with approval Berlin's description of positive liberty:

The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer - deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them. This is at least part of what I mean when I say that I am rational, and that it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest of the world. I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not.

I quote this lengthy paragraph in full, as Macpherson did, because it is perhaps as complete an account of Macpherson's own conception of positive liberty as we might expect to find. This is made evident in his comments following the quote, "There could scarcely be a more eloquent statement: positive liberty is liberty to act as a fully human being. A man's positive liberty is virtually the same as what I have called a man's power in the developmental sense."²⁶ Though he uses the qualifier "virtually" he nowhere attempts to distinguish his idea of positive liberty from Berlin's definition. We might suppose that his use of "virtually" is meant to avoid explaining why he has not said it himself earlier.

²⁶Ibid., 105.

He quotes Berlin again, once more admiring his sound articulation of liberty: “all men have one true purpose, and one only, that of rational self-direction.”²⁷ Here he is cautious about proposing a human telos, but he does not contradict it. It is a truth that can be abused by oppressive political forces: “There is perhaps no logical fault in attributing to the doctrine of positive liberty the assumption that something as broad as this is ‘the one and only true purpose of man’ but it can be dangerously misleading, for already it suggests a monism which in fact is not there.” He does not consider the monism to be there, and despite some hint of discomfort, he ultimately agrees with the logic that positive liberty is the one and only true purpose of man. Elsewhere he more explicitly accepts the teleological perspective:

Whether that Western tradition is traced back to Plato or Aristotle or to Christian natural law, it is based on the proposition that the end or purpose of man is to use and develop his uniquely human attributes or capacities. His potential use and development of these may be called his human powers. A good life is one which maximizes these powers. A good society is one which maximizes (or permits and facilitates the maximization of) these powers, and thus enables men to make the best of themselves.²⁸

The human telos is to maximize one’s powers to develop worthwhile human attributes. He refers to this concept of powers as ethical not descriptive.

A man’s powers, in this view, are his potential for realizing the essential human attributes said to have been implanted in him by Nature or God, not (as with Hobbes) his present means, however acquired, to ensure future gratification of his appetites....

²⁷Ibid., 111.

²⁸ Macpherson, “The Maximization of Democracy,” in *Democratic Theory*, 8-9.

The ethical concept of man's powers ... necessarily includes in a man's powers not only his natural capacities (his energy and skill) but also his ability to exert them. It therefore includes access to whatever things outside himself are requisite to that exertion.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., 9.

Macpherson does not venture into describing what some of these attributes might be or which are the most worthy. He considers the determination of this to be the domain of the individuals. He only goes so far as to reassert his aspiration for a society which is directed by “a concept of man as exenter and developer of *his own* powers.”³⁰ Like Hegel, Macpherson admires Hobbes for introducing the idea that he derived “the bond which holds the state together and the nature of state-power from principles which lie within us and which we recognize as our own.”³¹ However, they both look to Aristotle for a conception of human nature that is not Hobbes’s ontology of sheer limitless appetite.³² Aristotle provides a conception of human fulfilment that involves the willing self-restriction of want in favour of a higher good. This is a good that is determined in part by its ability to support the strength and order of the community. One’s ends are never thought apart from

³⁰Ibid., 21.

³¹ Quoted in Franco, 4; Macpherson maintains this interpretation of Hobbes’ contribution in, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 15.

³² Hegel criticizes the modern conception of freedom represented by Hobbes and others for being one-sided. He argues that freedom must entail a reconciliation of the particular good and the universal good. See Allen W. Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 57.

their impact on the community and their worth is measured in terms of their contribution to the improvement of the community. “From Aristotle until the seventeenth century it was more usual to see the essence of man as purposeful activity, as exercise of one’s energies in accordance with some rational purpose, than as the consumption of satisfactions. It was only with the emergence of the modern market society, which we may put as early as the seventeenth century in England, that this concept of man was narrowed and turned into almost its opposite.”³³

³³Ibid., 5.

Macpherson agrees with Aristotle that the human essence is bound to community. He argues that society is to be viewed not as an impeding agent, but as a positive agent in the development of capacities. Every individual's capacities are socially derived, and their development must also be social. "Human society is the medium through which human capacities are developed. A society of *some* kind is a necessary condition of the development of human capacities."³⁴

Macpherson thus combines negative liberty and PL1. There is a conflict between making one's own decisions independently of another's will and being a member of society. "It is rather to say that the rules by which he is bound should be only those that can be rationally demonstrated to be necessary to society, and so to his humanity. Or it may be put that the rules society imposes should not infringe the principles that he should be treated not as a means to other's ends but as an end in himself."³⁵ As we find in Hegel, the rational society is one in which the institutions facilitate rather than impede individual autonomy, thus allowing for a harmonious dialectic between individual freedom and the common good. But Macpherson's stated reference point is Aristotle, not Hegel, for this conception of human essence. So what makes Macpherson more Hegelian than Aristotlean? It is that Macpherson, like Hegel, retrieves Aristotle without abandoning the modern

³⁴ "Problems of a Non-Market Theory of Democracy," in *Democratic Theory*, 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

conception of universal equality.

Equality for Aristotle was reserved for those male citizens with a capacity for theoretical and practical reasoning. Because this capacity was not considered universal, society was necessarily hierarchical. Whereas with the liberal thought of the 17th century came a new conception of freedom: “The preference for individual freedom of choice of work and reward rather than authoritative allocation of work and reward: without this value judgement men would be content with a hierarchical customary society.”³⁶ But such a hierarchy would no longer be acceptable in principle. By reducing humanity to sheer appetite, liberal theory leveled the field. The instrumental reason without theorizing about the higher good defined for Aristotle the character of a slave, whereas Hobbes took it to be the new measure of humanity. Neither Macpherson nor Hegel admire this facet of liberal ontology, but they embrace the universal equality it entails. The question then is how to maintain the equality and yet revive the high intellectual expectations Aristotle had for the fully developed human being? Their solution is the rational society that secures universal access to the fundamental elements that facilitate human reason, including a basic standard of material wealth and education, as well as institutions that give a political voice to citizens.

³⁶“The Maximization of Democracy,” 17.

Macpherson attributes his historical understanding of Aristotle's importance to John Stuart Mill and T.H. Green, not Hegel. The ontology of 17th century liberals was drawn from³⁷ and helped to perpetuate a society that could entirely disregard the suffering and oppression of the poor and labouring classes and do so in the name of freedom. Freedom as a descriptive rather than an ethical concept meant fewer moral restrictions on choices, but more real material restrictions for those without capital. The aspiration may have been the greater good, but the result was bleak. Mill and Green responded with "repugnance ... to the crass materialism of the market society, which had by then had time to show what it could do."³⁸ Liberal thinkers from Hobbes to Locke had developed a conception of human essence as infinite consumer. This was ideal for the flourishing of a capitalist society, but the general disregard for humanity beyond respect for security and private property left many without the means to life and labour and thus forced them to surrender their powers to the capitalist class in labour arrangements where the greater portion of the fruits of their labour would go to the owners of capital, leaving them merely sustained. Late 19th century liberals not only felt repugnance but recognized that the resulting discontent could not be ignored. The demand for democratic franchise was growing, hence it was vital that a more ethical liberalism be developed. If not, those with the power to vote would be motivated by self-interest rather than a concern for the common good and democracy would be a ruthless tyranny of the majority. There was a need for "an image of liberal-democratic society which could be justified by something more morally appealing (to the liberal thinker and, hopefully, to the new democratic mass) than the old utilitarianism."

³⁷Macpherson argues that Hobbes' conception of man in the state of nature was in fact a description of contemporary bourgeois man and all his beliefs and assumptions in a state of lawlessness. See his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 27.

³⁸ "Maximization," 6.

Utilitarianism had based society on its ability to facilitate the individual's power to maximize utilities for satisfying desires. Green's ontology was quite different. "The end or purpose of man was to use and develop his uniquely human attributes. A life so directed might be thought of as a life of reason or a life of sensibilities, but it was not a life a of acquisition."³⁹ Green's liberalism would be based on,

³⁹ "Ontology and Technology," *Democratic Theory*, 32.

a view of man's essence not as a consumer of utilities but as a doer, a creator, an enjoyer of his human attributes. These attributes may be variously listed and assessed: they may be taken to include the capacity for rational understanding, for moral judgement and action, for aesthetic creation or contemplation, for the emotional activities of friendship and love, and, sometimes, for religious experience. Whatever the uniquely human attributes are taken to be, in this view of man their exertion and development are seen as ends in themselves, a satisfaction in themselves, not simply a means to consumer satisfactions. It is better to travel than to arrive. Man is not a bundle of appetites seeking satisfaction but a bundle of conscious energies seeking to be exerted.⁴⁰

Green sought to restore the classical ontology of humanity's inherent moral dimension, while maintaining universal equality. "It assumed not only that each individual was equally entitled to the opportunity to realize his human essence, but also (as against the Greeks) that men's capacities were substantially equal, and (as against the medieval tradition) that they were entitled to equal opportunity in this world."⁴¹ They would thus combine the pre-liberal moral ontology with individual freedom of liberal society and the equality of democratic society.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Maximization", 4-5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 10.

⁴² "Ontology and Technology," 32.

**Macpherson's Economic Theory:
Reaching Hegel Through Marx's Critique of Capitalism**

Macpherson argues that despite their good intentions, Green and other 19th century liberal thinkers did not succeed. With Mill and Green neither the freedom to maximize utilities nor the freedom to maximize one's own powers was achieved.⁴³ Both descriptive and ethical liberals failed to appreciate the impact of class interests. Macpherson believes that we must acknowledge class division in order to refine liberal democracy and make it an environment where our developmental powers are truly accommodated. For this he dons his political economist hat and determines whether the liberal ideals of freedom and equality are empirically realized in the current system, or whether the system suffers from an inherent contradiction that must be overcome either by reforming the predominant ontology so that it better suits the concrete reality, or by reforming the institutional structure to fit the liberal-democratic conception of a just society. Macpherson is satisfied with Green's ontology, but he looks to Marx to iron out the practical element.

⁴³“Maximization,” 6. A. J. M. Milne agrees that Green underestimates the need for state intervention, but clarifies that he does not maintain a laissez-faire approach and is primarily concerned with ensuring the needs are met for the moral agent to “achieve the highest level of rationality”, and private property is vital component of this. *The Social Philosophy of English Idealism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 154-7.

To argue that liberal democracy fails in its professed goal of freedom and equality, Macpherson has employed Marx's class based analysis of the oppressive effects of the capitalist system. The predominant conception of private property results in profound social, political and economic inequality that is enforced by the state. In effect, the state serves the interests of the capitalist class. Whereas Macpherson learned from Green the importance of developmental powers, he learned from Marx of the potency of extractive powers and the transfer of power.⁴⁴ He argues that the capitalist class owns the means of life and the means of production and are therefore able to harness the labour of the working class so that after initial costs of production the value added is the property of the capitalist. This is effectively a transfer of powers, that is "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description."⁴⁵ Twentieth-century economists are blind to this transfer of power because according to the Hobbes-to-Bentham market man ontology they have inherited, one's power entails whatever means one has to procure satisfactions, including previously amassed wealth, earned or inherited.⁴⁶ Macpherson argues that this transfer of powers, which is enforced by the state as the coercive force upholding existing property laws, contradicts the liberal democratic claim to maximize each individual's powers.⁴⁷

Mill had hoped that with democracy people would get involved in government, take an interest and counteract the inhumanity of the economic structure of his time. He found abhorrent a

⁴⁴ "Maximization", 10-11.

⁴⁵ Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume One", in *The Marx-Engles Reader, Second Edition*, Ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 336.

⁴⁶ "Maximization," 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

system in which those who worked hardest at the most punishing jobs received the least remuneration while those who did little to nothing held the larger portion of wealth. His solution was the principle of “proportion between remuneration and exertion.”⁴⁸ In his defense of property, he included a defense of capital on the grounds that it was the product of previous labour and abstinence. In other words, he opposed the disparity in wealth but he did not attribute it to the rules of capitalism. Macpherson challenges this:

What he failed to see was that the capitalist market relation enhances or replaces any original inequitable distribution, in that it gives to capital part of the value added by current labour, thus steadily increasing the mass of capital. Had Mill seen this he could not have judged the capitalist principle consistent with his equitable principle. Failing to see this, he found no fundamental inconsistency, and was not trouble by it.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Quoted in Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 53.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 55-6.

According to Macpherson, capitalism inevitably leads to the gross disparity witnessed by Mill and requires more than democracy to counterbalance it. Macpherson argues not only that democracy fails to curb the ills of capitalism but the party system serves to blur class lines and keeps universal franchise from benefitting the working class. In a two party system, the parties end up fighting for the middle in order to win the most votes, and in a multi-party system it is rare that a party wins a majority so coalitions are usually the result, effectively diluting any clear agenda such as class interests.⁵⁰ Macpherson argues further that the rise of the welfare state transformed much of the working class into petty bourgeoisie thereby weakening their common voice. The latter point does not suggest to Macpherson that perhaps democracy did have a softening affect on capitalism. It does not negate his core argument that capitalism facilitates a large scale transfer of powers from the working class to the capital owning class and thus restricts the ability for the working class to use freely their powers for their own development. As a consequence of the failing of the party system the working class did not exercise their vote to promote their interests as a group but instead followed the lead of the middle class. Ultimately, the systematic blurring of class lines and the social imbalance in education and wealth subverts the working class capacity to participate and promote their interests. Money and education are not equal in society, therefore neither is the political weight of the individuals. The sense of powerlessness results in apathy. After all, in a society where “the maximization of wealth is the maximization of happiness”⁵¹ people’s worth is measured in terms of

⁵⁰Ibid., 66.

⁵¹“Ontology and Technology,” 27.

what the market will give them for their labour.

The trap of market society is that its ontology of the infinite consumer not only serves as an enormously effective motivator for ceaseless productivity, but it also creates the illusion of infinite scarcity. The combination of these renders the perpetual pursuit to overcome scarcity a valid and rational purpose, even long after society has reached a level of productivity sufficient to satisfy the needs of all citizens to achieve personal fulfilment. There is an artificial creation of needs that emerges from this liberal ontology and is nourished by advertising which “creates desires which otherwise would not exist.”⁵²

Macpherson does not believe this equality can be offset by the welfare state because it is grounded in certain misconceptions of human essence and property. Macpherson describes market man as “an infinite consumer whose overriding motivation is to maximize the flow of satisfactions, or utilities, to himself from society, and that a rational society is simply a collection of such individuals.”⁵³ Market man views himself in terms of property; he owns himself, his labour and the product of his labour and his relationship with others is a contractual exchange of property. The capitalist society that nurtures market man invariably cannot provide universal access to the means of life and the means of labour, and thus leads to exploitation of the worker by the capitalist class. Where the workers’ labour ought to be a source of self-fulfilment as the concrete realization of themselves in the world, it only serves to widen the gap of autonomy that exists between themselves and the owners of capital. As Bhikhu Parekh has pointed out, Macpherson is suggesting there is an

⁵²“Ontology and Technology,” 33. This quote is of particular interest because it introduces a link between Macpherson and other Canadian communication theorists who could also be counted among Canada’s accidental Hegelians: Innis and McLuhan.

⁵³*The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, 43.

“inequality of men’s humanity. In capitalist society some men are human, while the rest are ‘reduced to a commodity’.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Bhikhu Parekh, *Contemporary Political Thinkers* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), 57.

Macpherson finds that Marx alone recognizes that universal freedom for individuals to actualize themselves will not be achieved until we overcome the alienation of the worker from his labour by ensuring the right to own the means of life and the means of labour.⁵⁵ According to Macpherson, central to Marx's insight is his capacity to situate liberal democracy in a history of ontologies, against which the contradictions of capitalism could be rendered evident. In contrast, political theorists who do not consider the historical context of ideas end up universalizing the basic features of contemporary man and society and turning 'an historically valid relationship into a necessary and universal principle.'⁵⁶

There are divergent views on the degree to which Macpherson was marxist, a liberal, or some combination of both. Depending upon their persuasion, his critics fault him for being insufficiently marxist, liberal, or either.⁵⁷ They find in his work the errors of either side. For instance, Parekh

⁵⁵ "Needs and Wants: an Ontological or Historical Problem?", in *Human Needs and Politics*, ed., Ross Fitzgerald (Pergamon Press, 1977), 34.

⁵⁶ Parekh, 50. This, of course, is the historical philosophical method Marx learned from Hegel.

⁵⁷ David Morrice contends that he neither has enough faith in liberalism's gradual progress nor marxism's revolutionary change, "C.B. Macpherson's Critique of Liberal Democracy and Capitalism," *Political Studies* (1994), XLII, 659.

criticizes him for holding fast to the possessive individual by proposing merely to extend property rights to include guaranteed access to the means of life and the means of labour.⁵⁸ Parekh argues that Macpherson's focus on the material dimension of human development ignores the importance of social relations. But I contend that if we view them dialectically rather than in isolation, it becomes apparent that there is a distinct position here that does succeed in transcending liberal atomism and marxist totalitarianism tendencies.

⁵⁸Parekh, 72.

Seeing Macpherson's work as most thoroughly rooted in Hegel than any other helps us to conceive how this dialectic works. But to address the natural response, it would seem that Macpherson's evident debt to Marx would immediately discount any affiliation with Hegel. Following Feuerbach, Marx defined his work in terms of a radical break from Hegel's supernatural philosophy where the state's authority seemed sanctioned by God's will acting in history. Marx claims to invert Hegel. Where Hegel begins with cosmic unity and asserts that what is ought to be, Marx begins with what is to get an idea of the whole, from which point of understanding he seeks to change society to make it as it ought to be.⁵⁹ This antagonism of philosophical idealism versus scientific materialism is commonly regarded to be irreconcilable. Where Hegel is the ethereal philosopher of passive accounting of what has occurred, Marx is the scientific philosopher of action with a prescription for the future.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

K.-H. Ilting argues that the perception of Hegel as a passive apologist for the status quo can largely be traced back to Marx's commentary on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, in which Marx breaks from his mentor. Ilting maintains that was achieved only by consistently ignoring Hegel's intentions.⁴⁸ "Marx seems almost obsessively determined to push the obvious intentions of Hegel into the background."⁴⁹ Despite Marx's contention that Hegel subordinates the individual to the state, Ilting observes that Hegel's fundamental assertion in the philosophy of right is the obligation of the modern state to assure the citizen's freedom to actualize the right to self-determination.⁵⁰

The modern state is first and foremost distinguished from the political communities of antiquity by the fact that its citizens have the right to a private sphere. But in Hegel's work these liberal civil rights are expanded into fundamental social rights: individuals are to be guaranteed not only the 'recognition of their rights' to a private sphere, but over and above that they are to have assured 'the full development' of their personal individuality and particularity. But according to Hegel's conception, these private civil rights must be complemented by political rights.⁵¹

Hegel's express goal in *Philosophy of Right* is to bring together classical social unity and modern autonomy. Ilting does concede that there are weaknesses in Hegel's text which can be attributed to Hegel's effort to avoid censorship imposed by the Karlsbad Decrees passed by the Prussian

⁴⁸ K.-H. Ilting, "Hegel's Concept of the State and Marx's Early Critique," in Z. A. Pelczynski, ed., *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,), 104.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 105

⁵⁰ Ibid., 95.

⁵¹ Ibid., 95.

government in 1819; however, Marx overlooks these failing entirely in his effort to put an end to philosophical reflection about human telos, and “turn his attention primarily to the analysis of social and economic processes.”⁵² He thus narrows the range of philosophical reflection and instigates a strong tendency toward dogmatism. Ilting’s interpretation is in keeping with what Alan Patten calls the civic humanist reading of Hegel.⁵³ According to this reading, Hegel believes that the modern ethical life which places great importance on self-actualization means that, in a state that adheres to this as its primary agenda, the individual can attain objective freedom. That is, agents can realize their subjective desires in participation with the state.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 113.

⁵³ Patten, 34.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 35.

The true distinction between Marx and Hegel lies not in the materialist-idealist distinction. Marx shared Hegel's conception of human history progressively moving toward fuller human freedom. His emphasis on the productive life of human beings does not negate the important philosophical assumptions regarding human ends and ideology. The economic element was not the only determining factor of history for Marx. He simply muted the importance of culture in reaction to what he believed was Hegel's religious promotion of Geist⁵⁵ The real distinctions are found in Marx's neglect of philosophical reflection in favour of economic consideration; his rejection of the state as a device of bourgeois oppression (rather than a concrete facilitator of the modern ethic of freedom); and his commitment to revolutionary deposing of the state in favour of communism. From a Hegelian perspective, Marx's work is a regressive step that is one sided in its emphasis and naive in its aspiration for prescriptive philosophy. For Hegel, the philosopher cannot transcend his or her historical context, only identify its contradictions and seek a reconciliation between the cultures principles and the institutional structures. Moreover, the state is the institutional structure that gives form to the social agenda. Without it, there is only the tyranny of the stronger. In short, those points on which Marx does indeed break from Hegel are the same elements that distinguish Macpherson from Marx. Macpherson hopes to work out the contradictions he finds in liberal democracy without revolution⁵⁶ and without ignoring the importance of ontology. Macpherson seeks reforms, but

⁵⁵Peter Singer, *Marx* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 38.

⁵⁶Lamb and Morrice, "Ideological Reconciliation in the Thought of Harold Laski and C.B. Macpherson, 802.

reforms achieved through a state that represents the people and extends the domain of private property to include the right to own the means of life and the means of production.

Nevertheless, reading Hegel's *Geist* as non-mystical and his commitment to individual freedom does not mean there is a link between Macpherson's economic theories and Hegel. For this we look to H.S. Harris. He provides an excellent account of Hegel's anticipation of the "Marxian analysis of the economic dialectic of factory capitalism."⁵⁷ For Harris, the difference between Hegel's and Marx's criticisms of the alienation of the worker in an age of mass production is, "while both Hegel and Marx are Christian socialists, Hegel is less of a *believer* and for that very reason, a better philosopher."⁵⁸ Like Marx, Hegel was critical of the classical liberal economics of Adam Smith. For instance, similarly to Macpherson who argues that the solution lies in overcoming scarcity through a combination of efficient production provided by technology and the end of the view of human essence as insatiable desire, Hegel rejects Smith's conception of the ideal economic scenario being continuing growth. Instead he follows Steuart for whom the ideal was stability with

⁵⁷H.S. Harris, "The Social Ideal of Hegel's Economic Theory," in Lawrence Stepelevich and David Lamb, eds., *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press,), 49. This has also been discussed in Shlomo Avineri's *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

⁵⁸Harris, 52.

full employment.⁵⁹ This approach leaves room for accommodating deeper human needs whereas Smith's wealth centered theory gives free reign to a rich elite rather than general prosperity.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 62.

The key distinction between Hegel and Marx is that Hegel held that the state played a vital function in ensuring that the market place was serving the ethic of individual self-actualization, and Marx maintained that the market could be transformed to uphold this ethic without the state and that so long as the market was permitted to be anything but inherently ethical itself, the state would only serve to enforce the inequalities. Hegel comments on the ideal of communism, claiming that the principle of denying property has no truth for us. “The fate of property has become too powerful for us to tolerate reflections on it, as if its abolition were thinkable for us.”⁶¹ He acknowledges that it can be an impediment to the freedom of the spirit, but it is unavoidable.⁶² “The economic sphere is the one in which personal freedom and initiative must be allowed to display itself.”⁶³ Macpherson

⁶¹ Quoted in Harris, 53.

⁶² Ibid., 53.

⁶³ Ibid., 66.

may have found this point in T.H. Green's work.⁶⁴

⁶⁴For Green private property "is a power which a man must have if he is to be a moral agent and make a rational life for himself." Milne, 156.

Hegel's solution to the amoral market is the representation of estates in government that will direct the economy to ensure the common good. This amalgam of private interests comes together to form a general will that is quite different from Rousseau's. Rousseau's general will does not accommodate the expression of particular interests and is bound to be authoritarian and repressive.⁶⁵ For Hegel, the state must balance the wills of the various estates within the constraints of a system of constitutional rights.⁶⁶ This holds remarkable similarities to the form of participatory democracy that Macpherson proposes in *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, in which he advocates for a combination of the existing party system and estates representing different economic interests. Macpherson's commitment to universal ownership of the means of life and the means of production is also found in Hegel's economic theory. Harris describes Hegel's position as follows:

Only a society in which men *own* the means of their subsistence can be a community of moral agents. They must own that means neither as a political community, nor as an assembly of stockholders, but rather in the way in which the artisan is accorded absolute ownership of his tools of trade in Magna Carta. In other words, in a factory economy there must be factory cooperatives.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Macpherson's Hegelianism can be found in his conception of positive liberty, his neo-Aristotlean ontology, and his economic theory. Though not fleshed out here, his historical hermeneutic method also has its roots in Hegel's work. Macpherson's critique of liberal democracy and his proposal for alternative forms of participatory democracy and property relations were also

⁶⁵Ibid., 57.

⁶⁶Ibid., 64.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

anticipated by Hegel. While Macpherson's direct sources are Mill, Green, and Marx, closer study shows that the ideas he borrows from them are found in the civic humanist Hegel, and those ideas he rejects are precisely the elements that distinguish them from Hegel. We know that Macpherson regarded Hegel as an apologist for an oppressive regime, according to the standard interpretation of his contemporaries, so we must conclude that his Hegelianism is purely accidental. By reading Macpherson this way we free ourselves from the debate about whether he was sufficiently liberal or marxist. We see instead how he can hold the two aloft in a dialectic, where one balances out the excesses of the other. Moreover, we can use the great wealth of insights being generated in Hegel studies to shed light on Macpherson's highly influential analysis of liberal democracy.

**C.B. Macpherson's Accidental Hegelianism:
Making Sense of His Liberal-Marxism**

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