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The Political Thought of C. B. Macpherson: Contemporary Applications

Frank Cunningham, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 210

Igor Shoikhedbrod, Dalhousie University (igor.shoikhedbrod@dal.ca)

Frank Cunningham's *The Political Thought of C. B. Macpherson* delivers skilfully on its central aim of demonstrating the enduring relevance of Macpherson's political thought and its contemporary applications. It is with good reason that Cunningham's book has received praise from eminent political theorists and philosophers, all of whom commend the book's author for bringing Macpherson's political thought to bear on contemporary political challenges.

Cunningham begins his careful study by acknowledging the profound influence that Macpherson exerted on his thinking (v). Readers familiar with Cunningham's previous books, particularly *Democratic Theory and Socialism*, *The Real World of Democracy Revisited* and *Theories of Democracy* will discern a clear Macphersonian thread running through each of these works. However, it would be a mistake to overlook Cunningham's original contributions to democratic theory, as well as his lifelong commitment to defending a democratic vision of socialism, both of which are on display in this book.

The Political Thought of C. B. Macpherson is a concise work, written in a manner that is both engaging and accessible. The book is divided into three parts, starting with a broad overview of Macpherson's project, transitioning to questions of theory and concluding with contemporary challenges. Cunningham's opening overview of Macpherson's project offers a lucid explication of central Macphersonian concepts—"possessive individualism" (3–4), "developmental democracy" (9) and "retrieval" (10)—that sets the parameters for subsequent chapters. In short, Macpherson defined possessive individualism according to the view that "the individual is proprietor of his own person, for which he owes nothing to society" (3). Macpherson traced the lineage of this concept to the work of Hobbes and its subsequent reverberations in liberal thought. To be sure, Macpherson also identified a developmental democratic countercurrent to possessive individualism in the works of J. S. Mill, T. H. Green, and arguably Marx, which emphasized the individual's capacity as "a doer, creator, and enjoyer . . . of human attributes" in association with others (9). The real question for Macpherson was whether this developmental countercurrent could be retrieved against the hegemony of possessive individualism.

While rival historians of political thought have criticized the concept of possessive individualism as a limited prism for interpreting such thinkers as Hobbes and Locke, Cunningham offers good reasons to believe that Macpherson deployed the concept more broadly—that is, with a political focus and sensitivity to historical processes in the long run (18–19). If one approaches the conceptual applicability of possessive individualism in the *longue durée*, then it seems fair to infer that

Macpherson's use of the concept fared significantly better than James Tully's (1980) erstwhile attempt at portraying Locke as a faithful adherent of natural law limits on appropriation. It should be recalled that Locke's theory of just appropriation replaced the natural law argument for the right of first possession. Sadly, Lockean arguments from "improvement" continue to inform contemporary forms of dispossession in liberal-democratic societies.

Chapters 2 and 3 present Macpherson as a committed liberal democrat and socialist in opposition to those who would deny either of these credentials, whether from the liberal right or the socialist left. Cunningham concludes his third chapter with an appendix on "Macpherson and Marxism" by cautioning against unhelpful classifications. While Cunningham is correct to note that Macpherson's intellectual debt to Marx does not mean that he subscribed to Marxism in its entirety, readers would have benefited from a more elaborate discussion of central areas of convergence and divergence. At any rate, Cunningham makes it clear that Macpherson's aim was to conjoin the best of both traditions, whether by launching a Marxist "raid" on liberal democracy or, conversely, by "laying the ground for a liberal-democratic raid on Marxism" (54).

Cunningham's reluctance to classify Macpherson philosophically informs his subsequent disagreement with Phillip Hansen and Robert Meynell. Hansen seeks to situate Macpherson in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, while Meynell attempts to demonstrate Macpherson's unwitting recourse to Hegelian methodology (59–62). Cunningham rejects both approaches, first, by distinguishing between the ambitions of political theorists and political philosophers, and second, by demonstrating the advantages of Macpherson's practically oriented political theorizing, which lends itself to different philosophical justifications and is broad enough to garner appeal among diverse political perspectives.

Cunningham's originality shines through most clearly in the third part of the book, which draws upon Macpherson to reflect on contemporary issues that he either undertheorized or neglected. These final chapters showcase Cunningham's rich interdisciplinary repertoire, which applies Macpherson's inclusionary conceptions of property and developmental democracy to contemporary debates about neoliberalism, globalization, and intellectual property. Cunningham also leverages the insights of former students and interlocutors (Lynda Lange, the late Charles Mills, among others) to make sense of contemporary forms of racism and sexism, as well as the multiplicity of challenges confronting cities. Cunningham certainly succeeds at the task that he set for himself. He will be missed by students and scholars of political thought.

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Dangerous Opportunities: The Future of Financial Institutions, Housing Policy, and Governance

Stephanie Ben-Ishai, ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021, pp. 208

Geoffrey Hale, University of Lethbridge (geoffrey.hale@uleth.ca)

The 2017 crisis of depositor and investor confidence near-panic that led to the near-failure of alternative lender Home Capital before its rescue by vulture fund investors (including Warren