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ARTICLES

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Realism, Imagination and Ontology: Human Development and the Post-Liberal Turn in Contemporary Political Philosophy

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Słowa kluczowe: Liberalizm, rozwój społeczny, realizm polityczny, C. B. Macpherson, teoria demokracji

Abstract

This article expounds upon a salient theme of the contemporary post-/anti-liberal transformation, which is broadly conceived as an opposition to the agenda of social (human) development. The primary objective of this paper is to present an alternative theorization of the social (human) development approach proposed by C. B. Macpherson, as a response to the current crisis of liberalism (and the late-liberal democracy) and liberal political philosophy. The argument is articulated through the following four stages. The introduction maps out the problem and some aspects of the broader undertaking to which the current study belongs. The first main section of the text presents a map of positions and processes involved in invalidating the "meta-empire of late liberalism." The second main part delineates Macpherson's interpretation of the liberal political ontology as having the potential to reaffirm the concept of social (human) development and circumvent the repercussions (or alternatively reorient them) of the neorealist/anti-idealist wave of criticism currently confronting liberalism as a political system and the discipline of liberal

political philosophy. The conclusion of the study discusses the anticipated consequences of Macpherson's defense of developmental liberalism, especially in relation to a possible integration of two theoretical contexts: progressive/critical social philosophy and the tradition of positive-freedom liberalism.

Introduction

The following reflections are part of a research initiative dedicated to the reconstruction and reaffirmation of the "positive" social and political philosophy of liberalism, with social development (human development) serving as its guiding principle. The most prominent, effective, and recognized variant of this intellectual family is the human capabilities approach, represented by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Sabine Alkire, Mozaffar Qizilbash, and Ingrid Robeyns.[1] The human capabilities approach is implemented through trans-, inter-, or multi-disciplinary projects integrating numerous fields of the social sciences and humanities. Social philosophy, political philosophy, positive psychology, welfare economics, and philosophy of economics (meta-economics) play a prominent role, as does "world philosophy" (comparative and pluralistic philosophy). My research focuses on a lesser-known version of this orientation that was introduced to contemporary political thought by C. B. Macpherson through his anti-possessive, developmental theory of democracy based on a series of normative and ontological assumptions and implications. Macpherson's theoretical program is rooted in the tradition of social, pluralistic, idealistic, and ethical liberalism of J. S. Mill and T. H. Green, currently exemplified by the ideas and practices of participatory, radical, and deliberative democracy, as well as the concepts of positive freedom, human autonomy, and broadly understood "republican good" (Carole Pateman, David Held, Carol C. Gould, John Christman, Nancy Hirschmann, Philip Pettit, Elizabeth Anderson,

[1] The main textbooks, compendiums, and collections of monographic articles provide an overview of the general idea and specific assumptions, claims, arguments, results, applications, and controversies surrounding this research program. These texts also present and analyze the literature (sources and discussions). See, for example, Chiappero-Martinetti et al. (2020); Comim et al. (2018, 2024); Comim and Nussbaum (2014); Deneulin and Shahani (2009); Düwell et al. (2014); Fukuda-Parr (2009); Lessmann and Rauschmayer (2014); Nussbaum and Sen (1993); and Robeyns and Brighouse (2010).

and others). Macpherson's work can also be seen as an extension of and a contribution to the broad stream of critique of the laissez-faire (neoliberal) economy and society. This progressivist tradition of sociopolitical thought is founded on Thorstein Veblen's analysis of "conspicuous consumption," R. H. Tawney's egalitarian objections to the "acquisitive society," and Karl Polanyi's concept of "fictitious commodities."

The present project endeavors to make two primary contributions. Firstly, it considers Macpherson's concept and the entire current of developmental liberalism (also described as eudaimonic liberalism) from a comparative perspective within the context of world philosophy and pluralistic (de-parochial) sociopolitical thought. A predominant theme in this case is the developmental and emancipatory-egalitarian dimensions and potentials of Muslim law and the Islamic normative system, primarily in the areas of human rights, environmental rights/environmental ethics, gender equality, and human and social welfare. Secondly, the project explores the relationship between liberalism and liberal political philosophy, on the one hand, and the category of social development (human capabilities, growth, prosperity, happiness, quality of life, developmental ethics, developmental democracy, and other related theoretical programs), on the other hand. It tries to define the conditions for using the category of human/social development in contemporary political and social philosophy as such.

The subsequent considerations pertain to the latter area in which this project seeks to achieve its goals and make its contributions. In light of recent scholarship on liberalism, which faces a worldwide attack as a mainstream "background culture" and ideology of modernity (Ivison, 2024a; Kelly, 2022a, 2024; Lefebvre, 2024a), the initial section of the text delineates the diagnosis and consequences resulting from those challenges. The liberal "meta-empire" has been criticized for its absorption by capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. It has also been the subject of censure on account of its lack of "a strong common moral horizon around which community can be built" and for disregarding "concerns and moral motivations of ordinary people" (Deneen, 2018; Fukuyama, 2022; Ignatieff, 2017; Rose, 2022). Consequently, this polemical trend targets the 20th-century paradigm of practicing, teaching, and institutionalizing political theory and philosophy. The establishment of this paradigm (the analytic tradition, distinguished from the continental one) is associated with John Rawls's liberalism of "justice as fairness" and "political liberalism." The post-analytic turn can be defined as a realist and minimalist trend

in political theory that repudiates Rawlsian liberalism as an "ideal theory," deeming it a manifestation of moralism, which is an expression of the "inflation" of moral aspirations. The second part of the article discusses selected points from Macpherson's theoretical-political project that are relevant in the context of a potential defense of developmental ("eudaimonic") liberalism in the face of the political-realist critique of late democracy. This section argues that the post-analytic turn, in its methodological and epistemological attempts to redefine the entire field of political philosophy, critically diminishes prospects for social (human) development, along with related concepts such as human capabilities, developmental democracy, or the idea of political and socioeconomic equality as such. The concluding remarks of this article explore the potential for reaffirmation and recuperation of these concepts, even though they are fundamentally questioned. This final section proposes a synthesis of progressive and critical social philosophy with the tradition of positive-freedom liberalism. This integration is particularly salient in the context of the problematic theoretical and normative ramifications of political realism, as identified by Macpherson and Finlayson, as well as by numerous liberal authors, including Stuart Hampshire and Judith Shklar, for whom "realism about politics and normative aspiration are not mutually exclusive" (Gadomski, 2025; Ivison, 2024a, p. 13; Ivison, 2024c).

Liberal Political Philosophy and The Realist Turn: The Rise and Demise of Meta-Empire

The ideas of social development and contemporary centrist liberalism (or, more broadly, modern centrist liberalism, understood historically, systemically, functionally, and structurally at the same time) face similar challenges. Liberal political philosophy, an academic/intellectual project supporting liberalism and liberal democracy as a sociopolitical system, has been the subject of criticism and claims that it is in crisis. As a discipline, it establishes a specific mode of management, normalization, standardization, and normativization of the structures of knowledge. The crisis it faces is a crisis of philosophy, theory, and political thought in practice. It encompasses applications, implementations, and realizations, as well as the requirement to expose theory and philosophy to influences, determinations, and conditions

arising from the environment, context, various ontologies/ontics, phenomena, processes, trends, orientations, and movements. Regardless of whether the crisis is incidental, single, exceptional, circumstantial, or permanent and systemic, it should be linked to the dynamics of the development and transformation of the discipline of political philosophy as an expression and reflection of liberal political culture. The terminal stage of "centrist liberalism" (social, political, economic, cultural, interstate/intersocial, i.e., global order/system) entails epistemological and methodological revolutions (changes and paradigm shifts) in the structures of knowledge and the accompanying institutions. These changes manifest in diverse forms, traversing extensive and deeply entrenched domains of knowledge production (Ascione, 2021, 2024; Lee, 2011; Wallerstein, 2011; Wilkin, 2023). In this exposition, the discussion is limited to the post-analytic turn, with particular attention to the notion of the political and the concomitant concept of political realism/amoralism.

The post-analytic turn is a realist and minimalist trend in political theory initiated by Walter Lippmann, Joseph Schumpeter, Friedrich Hayek, Bernard Berelson, and Giovanni Sartori (Fèvre, 2022; Hagemann, 2022; Held, 2006, pp. 77–92, 125–157; Macpherson, 1977, pp. 22, 48–50, 77–92; Reinhoudt & Audier, 2018; Schefold, 2022). It is currently represented primarily by Bernard Williams, Raymond Geuss, Matt Sleat, Edward Hall, John McCormick, and Mark Philp. This trend rejects liberalism as an "ideal theory," considering it a manifestation of moralism, which is an expression of the "inflation" of moral aspirations (Ivison, 2024a). In this instance, we observe a continuation, to a certain extent, of the disputes between idealism and anti-idealism regarding democratic theory at the turn of the 20th century. This is analogous to the positions of conservative Victorian critics of "economism," "parliamentary anarchy," or "dehumanized" liberal political culture, such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold (Goldman, 2002, 2011; Lippincott, 1938). Simultaneously, it evokes the "debates" between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann concerning the relationship between politics, the political identity of individuals, and the public sphere in relation to phenomena such as the widespread, mass, and anonymous circulation of information, views, opinions, attitudes, preferences, and choices (Bjørkdahl, 2024; Curtis, 2020; Macpherson, 1977, pp. 69–76). In its latest incarnations, the trend targets the 20th-century paradigm of practicing, teaching, and institutionalizing political theory and philosophy, the establishment of which is associated with

John Rawls's liberalism of "justice as fairness" and "political liberalism." Duncan Bell considers Rawls's "ideal theory" to be the most important element of the meta-tradition of utopian studies, which emerged and solidified after the anti-utopian decades following World War II (Bell, 2026).[2] In a "technical" sense, the ideal theory is the substantive equivalent of the category of realistic utopia, according to John Rawls's famous formulation: "By showing how the social world may realize the features of a realistic Utopia, political philosophy provides a long-term goal of political endeavor, and in working toward it gives meaning to what we can do today" (Bell, 2026, p. 21; Rawls, 1999b, p. 128).

The meta-tradition of analytical political philosophy refers to numerous and diverse domains of social and intellectual life, both theoretically and institutionally.[3] Since the 1970s, it has also been the primary framework for research and educational activities in philosophy and law departments, mainly in the US and the UK, and has had a significant impact on academic centers worldwide. This was primarily made possible by the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy*, *State*, and *Utopia*, followed by works in the traditions of public reason liberalism (Jürgen Habermas, Gerald Gaus, Kevin Vallier) and deliberative-epistemic conceptions of democracy (David Estlund, Cheryl Misak, Robert Talisse). The "ideal theory" or "realistic utopia" ("meta-utopia," following Bell's designation, or "utopia of utopias" in Nozick's case[4]) has served as a methodological tool within the framework of idealization, modeling, and approximation ("partial

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[2] It must be noted that the aforementioned considerations do not take into account alternative approaches to "ideal theory" or the associated polemics, particularly in the context of philosophy and critical theory concerning ideology, marginalization, exclusion, stigmatization, and epistemic and hermeneutic injustice (see, for example, Mills, 2005, 2018; Noe, 2020).

[3] Of course, this study cannot include any discussion of the long, complicated history, the wealth of problems, or the various trends and approaches (necessarily plural) within analytic philosophy. Attempting to define this tradition, without limiting it to the context of social and political philosophy, is also beyond the scope of this study. It is necessary to refer to the extensive literature and research related to the current investigations: Bevir (2011a); Bevir et al. (2007); Braybrooke (2006); McDermott (2008); Steinmetz (2005); Vrahimis (2013); and Wolff (2013). See also footnote 6 below.

[4] Unlike classical utopian theories, which offer a single, static vision of an ideal society, the utopia of many potential (imagined) possible worlds allows each individual living in a libertarian minimal state to choose one that is fully consistent with their own

compliance")[5] concerning the "problem of stability" in the theory of justice. This problem focuses on the criteria for evaluating arguments in favor of principles of justice as well as on the establishment of priorities among these principles when designing institutions and applying them to the basic structure of a well-ordered society (Rawls, 1999a, pp. 154–158, 398–440; 1999b, pp. vi, 3–6, 143–144, 159–168). It can also be considered the basis for distinguishing and justifying the two contemporary traditions of political philosophy: analytical and continental (Arnold, 2020; Owen, 2016).[6]

The challenge posed by ideal theory within post-analytic criticism and the fundamental changes across the entire field/discipline that we are experiencing as a consequence of these processes did not, however, consist solely in methodological doubts. As Elizabeth Anderson suggests, "Knowledge of the better does not require knowledge of the best [i.e.] … [a] system of principles of conduct [that] would settle all possible claims on our conduct in all possible worlds, or in the best of all possible worlds" (Anderson, 2010, p. 3). According to Amartya Sen, the attempt to reduce overt injustices requires reflection and comparative judgments. In this case, identifying fully just political systems is neither necessary nor sufficient (Owen, 2016, pp. 178–179; Sen, 2006, p. 217; Sen, 2009, pp. 12, 58). Furthermore, the primary challenge lies not in the systematic, consistent, and exhaustive separation of analytical and continental currents. Rather, what we are dealing with is a fundamental revaluation and radical reconstruction of political philosophy, analogous to that experienced by political science and international studies (especially international relations theory), which were built on the paradigm of statism and positivism (states as subjects and actors of positive international law) and transitioned to the paradigm of realism (Anghie, 2004, pp. 211–220; Anghie, 2015; Christov, 2024; Forrester, 2019, pp. 140–171; Guilhot, 2011; Kelly, 2022a, p. 116; Kelly, 2022b, pp. 409–428). Within these projects, the normative models of political thought, theory, and philosophy are primarily being questioned (Williams, 2005).

idea of a good life rather than conforming to designs resulting from consensus among all (Nozick, 1974, pp. 311–312, 328; see also Bell, 2026; Lehto, 2025; Novak, 2022).

[5] See, for example, Erman and Möller (2015); Larmore (2018). For the diversity of approaches and methodological reservations concerning ways of understanding "ideal theory," see also Robeyns (2008).

[6] See however also: Chin and Thomassen (2016); Chin (2016); Vrahimis (2022); Critchley (2001, pp. 54–74); Critchley (1998, pp. 5–13).

At the same time, as a consequence of the post-analytic and realist turn, attempts are being made to "rewrite" the history of political thought, including redefinitions of liberalism, democracy, and republicanism. There is an emphasis on the role of authors such as Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Lenin, and, above all, Schmitt, instead of Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, who were the main sources of inspiration for Rawls's argument about justice as the first virtue of social institutions (Geuss, 2008, pp. 23–40; Kelly, 2022b, pp. 3, 20, 24, 305–367). The prevailing conception of politics is undergoing a profound metamorphosis, culminating in the realization that the notion of "the political" stands as the crux of political thought (Kelly, 2022a, pp. 113–116). Such a reformulation is accompanied by significant normative and ontological shifts, including a repudiation of the substantive notion of a moral-political system or ethics in politics, of the idea of natural law or the laws of nature as a set of rights, obligations, and principles, and the "statist" approach.

The inspiration for the above-mentioned realist/amoralist currents, as well as their methodological and epistemological basis, lies in the changes that took place in the perception and practice of the professionalization of analytic political philosophy in the 20th century. The historical and ideological genealogies of this tradition have been formulated in studies such as *Liberalism in Dark Times* by Joshua Cherniss; *Liberalism Against Itself* by Samuel Moyn; John Rawls: *The Path to a Theory of Justice* by Andrius Gališanka; and, above all, *In the Shadow of Justice* by Katrina Forrester (2019). Those research projects, aimed at providing an appropriate historicization and contextualization of Rawls's thought and liberal political philosophy, have presented a different picture than the one widely accepted in "canonical" studies, programs, and institutional designs. The theory of "justice as fairness" was perceived as having been shaped by the context of the Cold War's "clash of ideologies" with libertarianism and communitarianism as its main opposing approaches. In this case, the point of contention lies in beliefs concerning the distribution of and access to rights and freedoms, agency and empowerment, a just state, the rule of law, and social and political power. These doctrines assign a central role to the individual and individualism within the idea of autonomy. They are challenged by references to real, empirically obtained dimensions of identity, recognition, and the rights of groups and communities, as seen through the lenses of global politics, geopolitics, and cosmopolitanism, for example (Kelly, 2022a, pp. 113–114). These issues

have been discussed since at least the publication of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History* (Gowan, 2010; Owens, 2007; Tuck, 1999). They were crucial to the development and success of liberal theory in the context of the Cold War (particularly in the works of Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper, and Friedrich Hayek, who – along with Rawls – were strongly influenced by this context but contributed also to its transformation and refinement). Currently, they form the basis of the post-Rawlsian (and therefore post-analytic) trend represented by researchers whose intellectual trajectories and goals differ significantly from those pursued in *A Theory of Justice* or *The Law of Peoples*. Authors such as Charles Beitz, Simon Caney, Thomas Pogge, Chandran Kukathas, Andrew Altman, and Christopher Heath Wellman study phenomena of migration, humanitarian disasters, and the expansion of supra- and anti-state networks, centers, and sources of wealth, influence, control, and resource appropriation. They also discuss new theories of war, including cosmopolitan, systemic, and postcolonial approaches (those referring to conflicts waged under persistent colonization or coloniality) (Altman & Wellman, 2009; Caney, 2005; Fabre, 2012; Hutchings, 2019; Kelly, 2022b; Keohane, 2012; Kukathas, 2003, pp. 255–270; Kukathas, 2020; Sassen, 2016, 2021).

Another alternative to the liberal-analytic approach, combining methodological and anti-moralistic aspects, emerged as part of a methodological revolution in intellectual history (historiography) associated with the Cambridge School (John Pocock, John Dunn, Quentin Skinner, and James Tully). The traditional moral language of political theory and philosophy, which focused on individual freedom and the principles of justice that underpin society, was challenged within this new genealogical approach to normalization and professionalization developed under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, as well as Richard Rorty and Bernard Williams (Kelly, 2022a, p. 114).[7] Here, politics and normativity were subjected to procedures of "archeologization" to reach

[7] As in the case of other major trends and orientations in contemporary political and social philosophy (political theory, social theory) and the social sciences and humanities as such, it is impossible here to reconstruct, even in terms of its main foundations and "components," the concept/program of "contextualization studies" in historiography. See, for example, Bevir (2011b); Browning (2016, pp. 67–88, 111–133); Koikkalainen (2011); Turowski (2014, p. 57 (n. 156), p. 121 (n. 468), pp. 448–450); Turowski (2021, pp. 10, 56); and Whatmore (2021, pp. 61–66).

the invisible, excluded, and "contingent" layers of history, events, beliefs, discourses, and speech acts concerning domination, struggles for power, and resistance instead of justice and the search for "the first virtue of social institutions." The discourse within this domain is predominantly influenced by Machiavellian, Nietzschean, and Schmittian neo-realists. This paradigm, centered on the concept of "the political," combined with the contextualism of the Cambridge School, problematized the general methodologies of approaching and expressing political science issues in legalistic language which had previously effectively "colonized" liberal political thought (Forrester, 2011, 2019, pp. 241–246; Hall, 2024; Purdy, 2019; Shklar, 1986). It also challenged the notion of an autonomous individual and its "eudaimonistic" interpretations (referring to the idea of human/social flourishing). Consequently, the notion of individual development (human and social capabilities) is regarded as an ahistorical, decontextualized, and therefore apolitical "idealized-moralized essence" that is detached from the realm of politics.

Developmental Liberal Democracy – Political Imagination Against Dystopian Reality?

As mentioned in the introduction, these reflections contribute to a larger project centered on the concept of social development as it relates to C. B. Macpherson's human capabilities program. This author's perspective is considered pioneering for contemporary "liberal eudaimonism." While there is no clear or direct line of influence, let alone a "programmatic" relationship, among the various representatives of this orientation, their common historical and ideological sources, among other factors, suggest more than a coincidence or parallelism between approaches that differ in all other dimensions (Ballingall, 2010; Cunningham, 2019, pp. 74–77; Turowski, 2014, pp. 40–42, 311–313, 414–415). In the case of Macpherson, this shared tradition refers to his attempts to reconstruct, reevaluate, and reaffirm liberal ("Western") democracy. The aforementioned endeavor is further supported by the author's additional theoretical proposals regarding the "real world of democracy" in the 20th century. He examines the historical-genealogical dimensions of "possessive individualism", tracing its development from Hobbes through Bentham. The discussion also encompasses

the 20th-century post-liberal and neoclassical perspectives of John Chapman, John Rawls, Isaiah Berlin, and Robert Wolff, as well as Milton Friedman's neoliberalism. Additionally, the doctrine (theoretical system) of liberalism is addressed. Macpherson's examination encompassed both dimensions, which he designated as "realized." They found expression in his conceptualization and study of "developmental/positive democracy" (as opposed to "protective/defensive/negative democracy," or the "democracy of negative freedom") as a model of sociopolitical system and of human nature (Macpherson, 1973, 1977). Concurrently, he endeavored to capture and present the changes that these dimensions underwent as a result of historical evolution. In his works, including *The Real World of Democracy* (Macpherson, 1966; see also: Macpherson, 1973, pp. 157–169; Macpherson, 1987), he rejects the "Cold War thematization of the discipline" (following the normalization and professionalization of the analytical-liberal paradigm, as discussed in the previous section of the current text). He does not subscribe to the notion of distinguishing liberal democracy—as a coherent system of moral principles and practices of OUR freedoms—from *their* "communism," "third world totalitarianism," or "third world tyranny," or of construing an identity and scientific-institutional canon based on such a dichotomy. According to Ian McKay (2014, 2017, and a publication announced for 2019; see also Cunningham, 2019, pp. 7, 12, 21), Macpherson performed a series of "iconoclastic acts" in this context, thereby destabilizing the accepted, reified oppositions and polarizations of the time. These dualisms were impossible to remove in epistemological and methodological terms because they were pragmatically and ideologically necessary and useful. Conversely, by demonstrating the existence of and critiquing the relationship between liberalism (liberal democracy) and capitalism, he examined the latter primarily as the context of liberal democracy. He examined it with all its inconsistencies and lack of coherence, but above all, in all its geographical and historical diversity, rather than as a theoretical, trans- and ahistorical, speculative, and abstract essence that refers, in one way or another, to any "substance" of liberalism. This is his original approach to the problem of political ontology (ontology of democracy or ontology as such) especially as it was explored in his 1973 book, *Democratic Theory*: *Essays in Retrieval*.

In Macpherson's concept of political ontology, the central category is human development. It is linked to the notions of capacities and powers (Macpherson, 1966, pp. 52–59). There is an obvious convergence here with

Amartya Sen's analyses concerning human capabilities, which are examined in relation to two basic concepts: capabilities and the potential to transform them into functioning, defined as valued ways of being and living or valuable beings and doings (agency) (Alkire, 2016; Sen, 1995, pp. 36–55). Capabilities, and therefore freedoms, are understood "positively," as in the tradition of Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Stuart Mill, and T. H. Green, in the context of their "translation" into human powers, and not negatively as the absence of constraints on choices and actions. Macpherson places particular emphasis on the social and relational nature of human capacities and development. They are "received" from others in the form of direct gifts or help, or as a guarantee of security (Macpherson, 1973, pp. 40–41). This approach refers to one of the most important components of Macpherson's entire theoretical construction: the idea of "power transfer" (Macpherson, 1962, pp. 53–61; Macpherson, 1966, pp. 40–43; Macpherson, 1973, pp. 10–14, 16–19, 40–52, 64–66). Apart from constituting a pivotal element of Macpherson's theoretical contribution to contemporary social and political philosophy, it was also a contributing factor to the controversy surrounding this contribution and its subsequent interrogation and rejection.[8] It was considered a manifestation of an ahistorical, essentialist, fundamentalist, and abstract position in which human abilities and powers are reduced to strictly understood, static, unchanging, and predetermined "essences" or "nature" (along with their assigned teleological goals) (Cunningham, 2019, pp. 87–88; Gould, 1989, pp. 332–333, n. 7; Gould, 2004, pp. 32, 48; Hansen, 2015, pp. 232–233). These accusations were directed at both his critical thesis of possessive individualism and his more affirmative analyses of developmental democracy and ontology. In both cases, there appears to be a misinterpretation or a deliberate refusal to comprehend Macpherson's "open" (transdisciplinary or "agnostic") methodology (Ballingall, 2010; Cunningham, 2019, pp. 69–70, 87–89; Hansen, 2015, p. 352, n. 27; McKay, 2014, pp. 318–320; McKay, 2019; McManus, 2024; McManus, 2025, pp. 162–175; Neal, 2012; Turowski, 2014, pp. 55–59, 448–450, 461–462). Nevertheless, the most salient aspect in this case is the separation of substantive components of his approach, including

[8] See Carens (1993), in which such objections are raised by most contributions; Hansen (2015, pp. 3–14, 269–304); and Hansen and Caterino (2019, pp. 46–51). A thorough examination of the criticisms of specific aspects of Macpherson's theory is provided by Townshend (2000) and Turowski (2014).

theoretical frameworks and conceptual models, as well as the political ontology of democracy, from historical analysis. Readers and critics of his work are not always cognizant of the depth to which these "doctrinal-structural" elements are embedded in his historiographical research studies. For example, we can point to his famous—and again controversial—interpretations of the socioeconomic context of Thomas Hobbes's theory of power, society, and the state, which resulted in their "suspension" from academic recognition (Turowski, 2021, pp. 7–13, 33 n. 2). In these interpretations, the category of power—and its "transfer" among individuals in society—is key to understanding the political anthropology, epistemology, ontology, technology, and theology developed by this thinker, the founder of liberalism. This ontological dimension of Hobbes's thought has garnered attention in the most recent scholarly works (Lloyd, 2012), [9] but historically, it has been marginalized, with greater emphasis placed on the ideological and political contexts.

Concluding Remarks: Retrieving Egalitarian Liberal Political Philosophy

In light of the above considerations, three brief postulates are hereby formulated concerning the critique of the realist and anti-developmental approach in contemporary post-liberal political thought. These postulates are followed by a concise outline of a program of reaffirmation of liberal political philosophy in response to "the fact that liberalism is under attack worldwide" (Lefebvre, 2024b, p. 30).

1. First, despite the categorical tone sometimes imposed by the content and subject matter of the discussion on this topic, as well as by the form in which it is conducted, the methodology of criticism of developmental/centrist liberalism is far from unambiguous and definitive. However, the undermining of the "ideal theory paradigm" can be said to be subject to limitations in its scope. The issue under consideration here appears to extend beyond the binary opposition between the ideal and the non-ideal. This assertion holds

[9] Lloyd (2012, pp. 53–54) notes–along the line of interpretation offered by Macpherson, but also for example Strauss (Turowski, 2022), although her reading concentrates on gender/feminist aspects of Hobbesian political theory–that the essence of power, according to Hobbes, is its "relativity/relativism" (non-absoluteness), comparability, and competitiveness (rivalrous nature).

particularly true in the context of Rawls's "original" theory of justice. This concept itself has undergone significant modifications in this respect. In its final formulation, as presented in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, the author posits that the principles of justice may vary depending on the criteria adopted in the original position. Consequently, it is not possible to address (and speculate upon) only one "ideal" concept of justice (i.e., its principles and rules of priority established through reflective equilibrium, which determines the "transition"/"connection" between the real and theoretical/ideal orders) (Owen, 2016, pp. 178–179; Rawls, 2001, pp. 65–66, 132–134; Sen, 2009, pp. 12, 58).

2. Secondly, with regard to the "substantive" or argumentative dimension, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the ramifications of the realist turn, as articulated, for instance, by Lorna Finlayson (2015, pp. 111–135). She posits that delineating a boundary (and the criteria for disciplinary, academic, and intellectual legitimacy) between the ideal and the non-ideal entails the recognition of the former as a domain characterized by insurmountable demands. Consequently, the latter is presented as requiring the acceptance of all conditions imposed by the "real world" on imperfect human beings and human nature in its entirety. From this perspective, the notions of political subjectivity/agency and social change are conspicuously absent, as are any philosophical, intellectual, and critical discourses associated with these matters. In turn, political debates function as a means of "pacifying" all voices of opposition, including those that are at odds, for example, with liberalism and its implicit sexual or racial exclusivism. However, a more assertive attitude of "political realism" toward critical voices and demands can also be recognized. It is reminiscent of an apology for boundless imperialism, the blaming of rape victims ("rape-mythologizing"), or depictions and fantasies of savagery, primitiveness, and "anti-civilizational barbarism" in the name of fear and moral panic (or other "non-ideal constraints," such as unfavorable historical, social, or economic conditions; disagreement; human vulnerability or human nature as such; and problems of institutional design etc.). The paradoxical result of this kind of attitude, apart from the delegitimization of the ideal, is the depoliticization of the non-ideal, which effectively amounts to accepting it as something unchangeable (Finlayson, 2015, pp. 115, 130–131).

3. An intriguing correspondence can be identified between Lorna Finlayson's remarks and C. B. Macpherson's methodological and programmatic reflections in the introduction to his work *The Life and Times of Liberal*

Democracy (Macpherson, 1977, pp. 5–8, 22). In this study, he discusses models of liberal democracy and, more broadly, the state of contemporary liberal political thought. Macpherson presents the changes, developments, and transformations between and within these models as examples of dynamic processes of idealization on the one hand and "realization" on the other. These processes include movement and circulation from a protective/realistic model to a developmental/idealistic model, which is then replaced again by a realistic pluralistic-elitist-market model, followed by an orientation towards a participatory model, again idealistic. In this manner, Macpherson sought to substantiate his argument (and a segment of his overarching theoretical standpoint) in favor of a combination of developmental democracy (in terms of classical "social liberalism") and participatory democracy (in its contemporary form, incorporating "radical-deliberative" perspectives) (McManus, 2025, pp. 172–173). In this way, he opposes "pure realism," which leads to the "extinction" of such political dynamics within a kind of "reverse Platonism" with frozen essences of anarchy in the state of nature, the struggle for survival and security, and the acceptance of any normative order introduced as a result of a "positivistic" decision by a "Machiavellian-Schmittian" prince-sovereign-god.

Macpherson's theoretical framework, despite the infeasibility of incorporating it more comprehensively within the scope of this presentation, provided the foundational theoretical and methodological underpinnings for this study. One of the factors contributing to its distinctive status is its potential role as a response to the contemporary criticism of and crisis of liberalism (and liberal political philosophy) previously outlined. This response addresses two distinct aspects: firstly, the general crisis confronting this ideological orientation and discipline, and secondly, the prospects for defending or reviving the philosophical and political project centered on human capabilities/social development. As previously stated, this project can be considered in relation to other significant endeavors that offer critical perspectives on "laissez-faire tendencies" in historiography and the theoretical framework of the economy and society of the Western world. One such concept is Karl Polanyi's notion of "fictitious commodities," which refers to assets/goods that are valued higher than their real economic value. Polanyi's perspective asserts that land, labor, and capital – the predominant "productive inputs" within the modern capitalist system – ought first and foremost to be comprehended as the fundamental elements indispensable

for the establishment and fortification of economic processes within the context of social existence. Without these factors, all members of society are vulnerable and will eventually fall victim to selfishness, greed, and the accumulation and concentration of capital.

What would be the primary conclusion to be drawn from the considerations presented in this text, in relation to a broader spectrum of research objectives and in anticipation of further efforts in this area? It is imperative to acknowledge the substantial body of criticism that has been previously outlined. This criticism targets the alleged "meta-imperial," "geocultural," and "ideologically centric" (hegemonic) status of developmental liberalism. It results in anti-analytic, post-analytic, and post-liberal initiatives and the realist shift in contemporary political philosophy. Two primary forms of control over Polanyi's "fictitious commodities"—racialization and financialization—are subject to a process of systemic-ideological displacement/forgetting, silencing, or ignorance/invisibility, which seems to be the consequence of the "realist turn" (Bray, 2019, pp. 96–136). These factors, following Finlayson's remarks, act as indelible elements. They obstruct access to all the eudaimonic means associated with these "commodities" (thereby precluding their fulfillment in any manner other than "fictitious," thereby undermining their definition and "essence" as dispositions for social development/human capabilities) (Crespo, 2022; Huta, 2020; Tomer, 2011; Vittersø, 2016). This "blockade" is defined in the classical language of critical philosophy, sociology, and radical economics as exploitation/extraction in its transformation toward commodification/reification ("net power transfer" in Macpherson's terms or domination in terms of republican liberalism/positive freedom liberalism). In contemporary studies and theoretical perspectives (which abandon an anti-liberal bias), it is considered with reference to categories such as accumulation by dispossession (David Harvey), land grabbing (Klaus Dörre), expulsion (Saskia Sassen), expropriatory governance (Mike Levien), and uprooting/disanchoring (Burawoy, 2021), and even the very concepts that are at the root of this entire tradition: class, class formation, and conflict, the proletariat and proletarianization in the era of deindustrialization (Forrester, 2024; McCarthy & Desan, 2023; Winant, 2024), but also the idea of freedom (de-alienation) (Gould, 2020) and multidimensional social, political, and economic (substantive, not only instrumental) equality (Christiano, 2008; Kolodny, 2014; Manor, 2025).

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