AN UNRESOLVED PROBLEM WITH THE ‘DEVELOPMENTAL’ CONCEPT OF POWER IN C. B. MACPHERSON

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Abstract:

While C. B. Macpherson’s study in the history of political thought continues to exercise scholars, his later work in normative democratic theory has undeservedly received scant attention. This paper examines the conceptual centrepiece of Macpherson’s normative theory, the so-called ‘developmental concept of power’, and addresses several apparent problems to which its introduction gives rise. While Macpherson’s theory provides the philosophical resources to respond to most of these problems, I argue that the developmental concept remains beset by what I call the problem of ethical authority.

Keywords: C. B. Macpherson, power, authority, autonomy, possessive individualism, conation.

The political philosophy of Crawford Brough Macpherson is again receiving well-deserved attention, occasioned by the republication of his classic study in the history of political thought, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (hereafter PTPI) as well as his lesser-known normative essays in Democratic Theory (hereafter DT) and The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy.
An Unresolved Problem

(hereafter *LTLD*).\(^1\) Although the brilliance of his argument in *PTPI* has exercised scholars for decades and the work continues to be widely read, Macpherson’s later work has receded from scholarly consideration. This is paradoxically both surprising and not surprising. It is surprising insofar as there Macpherson develops a compelling theory of liberal democracy which, unlike many of its rivals, applies liberal criteria of legitimate political authority to industrial relations. Rather than limiting the scope of liberal justice in the economic sphere to the distribution of ‘primary goods’, Macpherson extends its application to wage labour and private property. The result is a liberal theory of political and economic democracy, sometimes interpreted as a synthesis of J. S. Mill or T. H. Green and Karl Marx.\(^2\) While this theory is of interest in its own right, attending to its central features is also necessary to grasp the full scope of the historical argument developed in *PTPI*. Doing so makes clear that Macpherson’s disclosure of the theoretical origins of ‘possessive individualism’ is conceived as a precondition for casting it aside, which he argues is essential if liberal democracy is to remain an attractive regime. Only if we see possessive individualism for what it is—a set of claims about the human essence with relatively recent historical origins—will we be able to consider it dispensable.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Macpherson 2010; 2012; 2011. Citations of these works will be from their original editions (1962; 1973; 1977a respectively). Twelve additional essays which further develop Macpherson’s normative theory are collected in *The Rise and Fall of Economic Justice* (OUP, 1985), hereafter *RFEJ*.


On the other hand, that political theorists have largely ignored Macpherson’s normative theory is perhaps understandable given his failure to provide it with the systematic articulation of better-known alternatives such as *A Theory of Justice* or *The Morality of Freedom*. By contrast, Macpherson’s theory is developed through a series of loosely integrated essays, most of which were eventually collected in three discrete volumes. Although recent scholarship has made strides towards integrating these essays into a more coherent system, correcting for misreadings and meeting some objections made against the theory, the reconstructed theory leaves many problems unresolved.

This paper examines the conceptual centrepiece of Macpherson’s normative theory, the so-called ‘developmental concept of power’, and addresses several apparent problems to which its introduction gives rise. Unlike those conceptions – popular amongst social scientists of the twentieth century – which define power as the ability to affect the behaviour of others, the developmental concept is defined as an ability to realize one’s essential humanity. Macpherson describes this ability as the power to develop ‘essentially human capacities’, namely by having access to certain types of resources.

While Macpherson’s theory provides the philosophical resources to respond to most of the problems the developmental concept raises, I argue that it remains beset by what I call the problem of ethical authority. The problem concerns the incongruity between understanding power in terms of ethical independence while recognising the inevitability of significant ethical dependency. Here a person is considered independent or

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4 Lindsay 1996 was especially important in this respect.
6 See the following section for a full treatment of this concept.
free insofar as she lives according to a life-plan whose elements she has examined and affirmed for herself.\(^7\) Yet developing a life-plan worth affirming seems to require a complexity beyond the capacity of any single person to deeply examine in its entirety.\(^8\) The agent is confronted with a dilemma: should she abide by a relatively simple conception of the good, minimising its complexity with a view to eschewing the need to affirm some of its factors or components on the authority of others? Or, should she prefer affirming a more complex conception, ensuring it is adequately rich notwithstanding the consequent dependency on others for the many components she cannot deeply assess for herself?\(^9\) For the person who deeply values ethical independence, as Macpherson’s theory suggests we should, improperly navigating this dilemma can undermine autonomous agency. For instance, underestimating the need for ethical dependency in developing a wide, comprehensive conception of human goodness can greatly contribute to a person unwittingly adopting the views of others, some of whose authority she might

\(^7\) I take Kant’s use of the Horatian injunction, ‘\textit{Sapere Aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding}’, to be the best illustration of this view (Kant 1991 [1798], p. 54), emphasis in the original.

\(^8\) There are many other reasons to be sceptical of this construal of liberty. For a critical – yet charitable – overview of these criticisms, see Christman 2009, Chs. 2-5. Christman’s survey is not exhaustive, namely because he does not consider the difficulties arising from postulating a universal conception of human flourishing in conjunction with a normative theory of liberty. I return to this point in the conclusion.

\(^9\) I use the terms ‘life-plan’, ‘conception of the good’ and ‘human essence’ interchangeably throughout.

\(^10\) I explain the nature of this problem in greater detail in the final section of the paper.
have good reason to doubt. In such cases, developmental power becomes self-defeating since it is used to develop capacities in a manner unnecessarily beholden to the views of the ethically unwise. Macpherson introduces the developmental concept as part of his attempt to theorise the distributive requirements enabling each person to have chance at solving the permanent human problem – how best to realise one’s potential as a human being – and not merely to satisfy one’s basic needs. But the developmental concept will fail to identify these requirements insofar as it presupposes an inaccurate grasp of the condition in which the person who seeks to live as well as possible finds herself. Since the problem of ethical authority is a feature of this condition, the developmental concept should be capable of accommodating its implications, or so I argue.

I begin by situating the developmental concept of power within Macpherson’s broader theoretical project and show how it is based on an alternative postulate of the human essence meant to replace possessive individualism. I proceed to address two concerns with the supposed determinants of developmental power. Firstly, I suggest that such power is not meant to be measured by a sufficiency threshold which could be compatible with inequalities in access to ‘the means of labour’. I show how this clarification explains why Macpherson insists on the incompatibility of equal developmental power with a competitive labour market. Secondly, I explore the objection that the developmental concept is too vaguely defined. While Macpherson addressed a version of this concern, I argue that developmental power becomes self-defeating in what he calls a ‘possessive market society’ if it does not include an ability to grasp ‘better’ (i.e. more true) conceptions of the good. Consequently, I claim that the developmental concept becomes embroiled in the problem of ethical authority, not to mention a host of other philosophical quandaries which I do not discuss.
The Developmental Concept & the Critique of Possessive Individualism

In *PTPI*, Macpherson famously argues that English political philosophy of the seventeenth century, beginning with Hobbes, makes a dramatic departure from the traditional view of the human essence. Much of this tradition, going back at least to Plato, conceives of human beings as flourishing when realising intrinsic value through some form of psychological health, classically characterised in terms of self-harmony or ‘consonance’ (*symphōnía*).\(^{11}\) The English theory Macpherson examines replaces this view with a conative theory of value which, in the words of one contemporary critic of such theories, ‘in some way, constructs what is good for someone out of the material of successful conation. What is good for someone [such theories maintain] is the satisfaction of his desires, or the fulfilment of his plans, or the attainment of his goals’.\(^{12}\) Macpherson claims this

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\(^{11}\) While the *locus classicus* for this view is typically attributed to the discussion of *psychē* in *Rep.* IV, and the contrast of the just and unjust *psychai* at *Rep.* IX, 588b6-591a1, it arguably receives a more thorough treatment in the *Laws*. For discussion, see Bobonich 2002. It is also important to note that Macpherson may have exaggerated the extent to which the Western philosophic tradition is agreed on this issue, at least in antiquity. Many of the early modern defenders of hedonism found inspiration in the epicurean tradition as communicated through Lucretius. See Wilson 2008.

\(^{12}\) Kraut 2009, p. 104. Of course, the concept of conation (*Conatus* or *hormē*) also has a long-standing place in the Western philosophical tradition. Nevertheless, its deployment in a theory of well-being in the manner Kraut and Macpherson describe has its origins in early modern theorists such as Descartes and Hobbes. For discussion of its historical development prior to the late Seventeenth Century, see Viljanen 2011, pp. 83-104.
view grounds a set of propositions in the English theory which he calls ‘possessive individualism’, attributing their clearest and fullest articulation to Hobbes.\textsuperscript{13} The traditional view defined the human good in terms of activities, relations, or objects valuable irrespective of whether they are desired. Possessive individualism, Macpherson argues, instead conceives of the human essence ‘as the sum of a man’s powers to get gratifications’.\textsuperscript{14} Hobbes, of course, goes so far as to envision the individual as a machine the object of whose appetite ‘... it registers as good, and the objects of its aversion, evil’, a view which sets the stage for his dramatic rejection of moral teleology in chapter 11 of \textit{Leviathan}.\textsuperscript{15} The good ceases to have value independent of the particular desires of the individual, save insofar as prudence requires the adoption of principles of practical rationality which constrain the satisfaction of desires with a view to securing consistent satisfactions.

The postulates of which possessive individualism consists, according the Macpherson, include the following. First, since possessive individualism values the gratification of those desires the individual happens to have, constrained only by prudential rationality, it also values freedom ‘from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest’, that is, with a view to gratifying his desires. Indeed, the theory is supposed to hold that

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  \item The central thesis of \textit{PTPI} has been vigorously contested, especially by scholars working in the ‘contextualist’ tradition. Yet perhaps the most decisive objection to Macpherson’s argument comes from a ‘textualist’, analytical critique of his attribution of possessive individualism to Hobbes. See Carmichael 1983a for this critique, Macpherson 1983 and Carmichael 1983b for replies, and Townshend 2000, pp. 45-53 for discussion. See Tulley 1993 for an overview of the contextualist critiques.
  \item Macpherson 1962, p. 264.
  \item Macpherson 1962, p. 32.
\end{itemize}
dependence on the wills of others is problematic in all cases where it compromises one’s ability to gratify desires. Only if relations with others are limited to those resulting from strategic reasoning with a view to desire gratification can they be legitimate according to possessive individualism.\textsuperscript{16} Secondly, the theory’s ‘possessive’ quality is said to be introduced by assuming the individual to be the ‘proprietor of his own person and capacities’, both in the sense that ‘he owes nothing to society’ for their development and that he may ‘alienate’ his capacities without undermining his fundamental identity, namely by selling his capacity to labour.\textsuperscript{17}

Throughout his work, Macpherson maintains that this theory ideologically supported and was supported by the social relations of what he calls ‘possessive market society’. The social relations of such a society are characterised by three phenomena. First, and most importantly, ‘that a man’s labour is a commodity, i.e. that a man’s energy and skill are his own yet regarded not as integral parts of his personality, but as possessions, the use and disposal of which he is free to hand over to others for a price’.\textsuperscript{18} Second, that ‘some individuals want a higher level of utilities or power than they have’ and thirdly, that ‘some individuals have more energy, skill, or possessions than others’.\textsuperscript{19} Under these conditions, Macpherson argues, those with insufficient means to either realise their wants with their own productive capacities or to do so by renting the labour of others will be forced to sell the use of those capacities to those who have larger wants and greater energy, skill, or possessions (and who, therefore, have

\textsuperscript{16} Macpherson 1962, pp. 232-8, 264-5.
\textsuperscript{17} Macpherson 1962, pp. 264-5. See the following section for further discussion of this postulate.
\textsuperscript{18} Macpherson 1962, p. 48, emphasis in the original.
accumulated sufficient resources to rent the labour of others).

These latter find themselves able to acquire what Macpherson calls ‘extractive power’, the ability to control the use of other people’s productive capacities for their own conscious purposes by a transfer of part of that control to themselves. Since the human essence in possessive individualist theories is realised by gratifying desires, wages provide the possibility for gratifying many of them, and control of one’s productive capacities is not considered an essential component of human dignity, individuals who sell control of these capacities can do so without compromising their humanity while enabling those enjoying extractive power to more deeply realise their own. In this way, Macpherson reasons, possessive individualism appears to legitimise extractive power and inequality in control of productive capacities.

In his later essays, Macpherson provides a progressively more sophisticated critique of this theory and the social institutions it legitimises. His argument centres on the defence of an alternative postulate of the human essence which, he thought, more clearly identified the human good and which delegitimized extractive power and possessive market society. The alternative postulate holds a version of the view now best known as the Aristotelian principle from §65 of *A Theory of Justice*, although Macpherson rightly traces its modern lineage to Mill and the British New Liberalism. This principle stipulates that human beings normally find activities which call upon our more complex or

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\item[21] Macpherson 1962, p. 56.
\item[22] E.g., he cites Mill’s endorsement of Humboldt’s description of the human essence in ch. 3 of *On Liberty* and Green’s frequent celebration of a neo-Aristotelian conception of purposive activity: ‘the end of man... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole’ (Macpherson 1977a, p. 48).
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‘higher-order’ capacities to be more interesting and preferable to those which do not, and that our enjoyment increases the more such capacities are developed and the greater their complexity.\textsuperscript{23}

We have a \textit{prima facie} reason for supporting social relations insofar as they provide for the ability to develop a greater number of higher-order capacities to a greater degree in a larger number of people. Macpherson calls this ability ‘developmental power’ and describes higher-order capacities as ‘essentially human’ since he considers their proper development to amount to the realization of the human essence. He suggests that essentially human capacities include, but are not limited to, ‘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’\textsuperscript{24}.

Developmental power has several preconditions. Firstly, the so-called postulate of the non-opposition of powers stipulates that ‘the exercise of human capacities by each member of a society... not prevent other members exercising theirs: that essentially human capacities may all be used and developed without hindering the use and development of all the rest’\textsuperscript{25}. As I discuss below, Macpherson considers the realisation of this idea and its implications to be the hallmark of any genuinely democratic society. Second, developmental power exists where the use and development of essentially human capacities are ‘... under one’s own conscious control rather than at the dictate of another. This is required’, Macpherson maintains, ‘by the concept of human essence which holds that a man’s activity is to be regarded as

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\item\textsuperscript{23} Rawls 1999 [1971], p. 372
\item\textsuperscript{24} Macpherson 1973, p. 4.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Macpherson 1973, p. 54.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
human only in so far as it is directed by his own design’. Peter Lindsay calls this idea ‘creative individualism’, following a suggestion from Alasdair MacIntyre of which Macpherson eventually approved. The name is apt since it describes ‘the view of man’s essence... as a doer, a creator, an enjoyer of his human attributes’. I will also use this terminology here. It should be noted that Macpherson is not endorsing a version of Nietzsche’s ‘value creation’ when he champions creativity. Rather, it is by ‘directing’ the development and use of various capacities that Macpherson understands human beings to be beneficially ‘creative’.

More specifically, developmental power is defined in terms of this control of capacities and measured negatively, as the absence of three types of impediments to such control. These include the lack of adequate means of life (resources necessary for physiological sustenance and reproduction), the lack of access to the means of labour (resources necessary for creative activities, including the exercise of essentially human capacities), and the lack of protection against the invasion of others. Macpherson focuses on the first two impediments since those civil liberties and provisions for the protection of the person and personal property usually upheld in liberal democratic states eliminate impediments of the third type.

Macpherson also describes developmental power as an ‘ethical’ rather than a ‘descriptive’ concept since it identifies the

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26 Macpherson 1973, p. 56.
27 Lindsay 1996, p. 34. See MacIntyre 1976, p. 178 for the suggestion and Macpherson 1976, p. 198 for his endorsement of the term.
28 In creativity Macpherson invokes a concept unfamiliar to the ancient thinkers to whom he looks for his overall vision of political philosophy. For a helpful discussion of Macpherson’s views of moral realism and creativity in contrast to those of Nietzsche, see Lindsay 1996, pp. 16-24.
means necessary for realizing essential human purposes rather than altering the behaviour of others. Unlike this so-called descriptive power, to be denied developmental power is to be denied the means to realise one’s humanity. Developmental power is therefore meant to specify the content of a fundamental right. Insofar as each individual has a right to lead a fully human life, and to the extent that doing so requires the power to develop one’s essentially human capacities, each individual has a right to developmental power.30

As mentioned, Macpherson associates this view with J. S. Mill and the liberal progressivism of the early twentieth century, describing the essentialist postulate it presupposes as the liberal democratic (as opposed to merely liberal) vision of human flourishing. Whereas the merely ‘liberal’ conception of the good is connected to the possessive individualist postulate that freedom from dependence on the wills of others can be realized even as some do not have control over the means to develop their essentially human capacities, creative individualism denies this possibility. It does so, on Macpherson’s view, because it understands freedom from dependence on the wills of others as necessary to control whether and how a person can develop her essentially human capacities, rather than for merely satisfying any individual’s otherwise arbitrary set of desires. For Macpherson, a liberal democratic theory thus values freedom for

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30 Developmental power is grounded in ‘... an assertion of the right of all to full human development’ based on ‘the freedom of the individual to realize his or her human capacities’ (Macpherson 1978, p. 207; 1977a, p. 2). Cf. Lindsay 1996, pp. 100-1. It is also worth noting that here is another of many respects in which Macpherson departs from the essentialist tradition of classical antiquity and adopts the language and ideas of the early moderns. Though I do not pursue this thought here, it might be doubted whether he was prudent in choosing to speak of human capacities in the terminology of rights.
specific, essentially human purposes whose importance, in turn, delegitimises specific types of relationships.

For instance, in *LTLD*, Macpherson contrasts various ‘models’ of democratic thought and institutions, some of which are delegitimised by creative individualism. Models 1 and 3 are singled out in particular as they rely heavily on possessive individualism for their justificatory elements. Model 1, ‘protective democracy’, describes polities with representative institutions prior to the extension of the franchise to all classes (and is therefore anachronistic from a contemporary standpoint). But model 3, ‘equilibrium democracy’ – in crucial respects a ‘reversion to and elaboration of model 1’ – describes polities roughly analogous to the liberal democracies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.\(^{31}\) Both these models allow for significant disparities in developmental power as well as the persistence of extractive power. In the case of model 3, Macpherson suggests that this creates an internal inconsistency in the model’s theoretical elements, undermining the moral authority of the institutions these elements attempt to legitimise. The institutions of societies associated with this model aspire to include all citizens within political life by treating politics as a market economy where institutions respond to voters as prices and production respond to consumers, thereby sidelining democratic deliberation or the search for political consensus.\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Macpherson 1977, p. 77; p. 83. I thank the anonymous reviewer at *JIHPT* for the suggestion to include the material of this paragraph.

\(^{32}\) Politics is thus reduced to a matter of distributing political ‘goods’ and ‘burdens’. The view of political life as a vital *koinōnia*, a common activity needed for the realization of essential human purposes beyond the allocation of goods susceptible of market-like distribution, recedes from concern. While Macpherson deploys arguments in this section of *LTLD* meant to reveal the undemocratic tendencies of markets in general and of equilibrium democracy in particular (Macpherson 1977,
But only an impoverished view of essential human purposes can comfortably coexist with this model. Since creative individualism has emerged as a viable alternative view in models 2 and 4 – developmental and participatory democracy respectively – its greater plausibility poses a threat to model 3.

The problem creative individualism poses for these models can be examined at a more concrete level of analysis. On Macpherson’s reading, possessive individualist theories allow for a person to be sufficiently free of the wills of others if she can enter and exit relations with others as she chooses. Amongst the many possible relations in which a person might partake, Macpherson is particularly concerned with those between owners of the means of labour and non-owners of these resources. Possessive market societies – such as those allowed by models 1 and 3 above – provide for some degree of choice in selecting employers for those who must sell their capacity to labour to gain access to these resources and strive to ensure monetary compensation for those in this position. Because possessive individualism holds a conative theory of value where the gratification of one’s arbitrary desires suffices for the realisation of whatever ‘essence’ she may be said to have, and since wages could theoretically supply the necessary resources for maximal gratification, control of one’s capacity to labour and realisation of one’s essential humanity are not incompatible

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33 It might be said of conative theories of value that they are incompatible with ethical essentialism insofar as they deny the reality of essential human purposes beyond the gratification of the agent’s desires. For Macpherson, this constitutes part of their (deceptive) attractiveness. See below for discussion.
goals. Yet if the human essence is conceived in terms of developing particular abilities or achieving specific purposes, and if this development depends upon retaining control over one’s capacity to labour, then abdicating this type of control will constitute a form of dehumanisation. The dependency which possessive individualism legitimises is therefore rendered illegitimate by the liberal democratic alternative Macpherson champions.

**Why are Developmental and Extractive Power Mutually Exclusive?**

Creative individualism is notorious for leaving many questions unanswered. Most obviously, readers often wonder why developmental power depends so strongly upon control of one’s capacity to labour and therefore upon the non-existence of extractive power. Is Macpherson suggesting that any form of wage labour is unavoidably dehumanising? Two considerations suggest that this position is untenable – at least insofar as

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34 It should be recalled that possessive individualism sees the creative powers of the individual as alienable in the sense that a person may lose control over them without ceasing to be her essential self. However, as Macpherson pointed out, the competition engendered by possessive market society creates significant inequalities even in this narrow definition of human essence. See n. 21 above.

35 E.g., many contemporary liberals will wonder why we should posit adequate opportunity for realising a conception of the human essence as a key desideratum of a theory of political obligation at all. While I do not address this question here, it is a concern which has been powerfully addressed elsewhere. For a general defence of this desideratum in theories of political obligation see Raz 1986. For its defence within Macpherson’s normative political thought see Lindsay 1996, pp. 10-21.
Macpherson understands dehumanisation – even if we grant that a lack of developmental power is incompatible with human flourishing.\(^{36}\)

First, we can imagine forms of wage labour which, while constituting ‘a net transfer of some of the powers of one man to another’, do not significantly rob the worker of control over her capacity to labour. Modern cooperative enterprises, for example, often guarantee employees some form of participation in firm governance, whether through provisions for managers to be elected by and held accountable to employees or by asking employees to play a direct role in management decisions. In these cases, workers can retain significant control over how their labour is used and how their creative capacities are exercised even if such decisions remain under the authority of a collective body. Moreover, such firms operate within so-called possessive market societies where labour remains a market commodity, often with marked success.\(^{37}\) If this is right, then we have reason to doubt the claim that extractive and developmental power are incompatible.

Secondly, it is difficult to see why Macpherson’s ‘essentially human capacities’ cannot be developed outside the workplace. Consider that between 1998-2009, people aged 15-64 spent an average of 33% of each day in paid and/or unpaid work across OECD countries and 20% of each day in leisure activities, apart

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\(^{36}\) As radical as this position may initially appear, it has quite the intellectual pedigree. After all, as Ryan Balot has kindly reminded me, it was the view taken by Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle, to say nothing of the many other illustrious theorists of myriad intellectual traditions who also held this perspective.

\(^{37}\) E.g., the Mondragon cooperative federation in Spain is one of the country’s largest employers and, collectively, among its most profitable enterprises.
from ‘personal care’ (including sleeping and eating).\textsuperscript{38} In absolute terms, though hours worked have increased in many OECD countries since the 1980s, workers in these countries spent an average of 34 hours per week in paid employment in 2010.\textsuperscript{39} Even if the great majority of these individuals spent this work-time without any meaningful control over their creative powers, they nevertheless appear to have sizable, regular periods of time during which it is possible to exercise such control. And regardless of what one makes of the present work-leisure time distributions in OECD countries, there are growing calls for legislated reductions in work-time per person and a burgeoning body of research suggesting that such reductions, far from being economically unfeasible, could have significant benefits to the overall health of OECD economies.\textsuperscript{40}

While Macpherson did not respond at length to these sorts of considerations, his work does leave room for thoughtful replies. Perhaps one might stress that the right the developmental

\textsuperscript{38} OECD 2011, p. 12. These data include time spent in ‘study’ within the figures for ‘paid work’. While economic considerations often play a large, even dominant role in decisions related to higher education, many students continue to be able to pursue courses of study indirectly related to ensuring maximal competitiveness in the labour market.

\textsuperscript{39} Calculated based on OECD data tracking average annual hours actually worked per worker (1749) divided by a 52 work week calendar for 2010. See \url{http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS}. It should be noted that these figures include part-time employment and in many cases OECD data for average usual weekly hours worked on the main job \url{http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS} more accurately reflects work weeks for full time workers, although these figures are missing for many OECD countries and are not averaged across countries.

\textsuperscript{40} E.g., Jackson, 2009; Schor 2010.
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concept of power is meant to underline is often discussed in terms of equality rather than sufficiency. While we might be tempted to think of developmental power as the sufficient control over the applications to which one’s creative powers are put, to do so is to misconstrue creative individualism. So long as some of a person’s creative powers are transferred to another, she is dependent on the will of that person for how her essentially human capacities are used and developed. Seen from the other side of the wage relation, so long as some individuals have a right to exclude others from the free use of the means of labour, they will be able to ‘extract’ the creative powers of others for their own conscious purposes. It is because creative individualism finds the very existence of such relationships problematic that Macpherson describes its central claim in terms of equality rather than sufficiency.

These relations are problematic because of the conception of human flourishing underlying creative individualism. If we allow the validity of such a conception, it follows that the exercise of capacities, ‘in order to be fully human, must be under one’s own

41 No doubt these considerations recall Marx’s discussion of the alienation of labour. Here and elsewhere Macpherson is deeply influenced by Marx, although I do discuss this connection here. For a helpful treatment of Macpherson’s relationship to Marx, see Lindsay 2002.

42 Macpherson also expresses the right to developmental power in terms of maximisation. This qualification could also be used as the basis of a response to the considerations discussed above insofar as the existence of extractive power is considered illegitimate since it prevents the maximization of developmental power. However, the ‘postulate of the non-opposition of the use of essentially human capacities’ remains necessary in order to provide an adequate response; developmental power may be maximized in the aggregate even as the creative powers of some are transferred to others. See Macpherson 1973, pp. 74-5.
conscious control rather than at the dictate of another’. Since extractive power compromises this conscious control (developmental power) and ‘is a function of unequal access to the means of labour and of life... [and] can only be maintained... by maintaining unequal access’, developmental power and unequal access are mutually exclusive. Creative individualism, therefore, claims that a fully human life requires not only that one have access to the means of labour (the means to develop essentially human capacities), but also that the terms of access be the same for everyone. If social relations permit a net transfer of powers from some people to others so that all may have access to the means of labour, then all do not have equal access on equal terms.

We should note that this clarification has the additional virtue of allowing for dependency on others in how one’s creative powers are used. It is hard to imagine a functional economy where each individual has total control over her creative powers. A theory which found all such dependency morally problematic would be hard pressed to win our allegiance. According to this construal, what matters for creative individualism is that each individual have equal, not total, control over how her essentially human capacities are used and developed. In this way, the developmental power of each individual can increase with

43 Macpherson 1973, p. 56.
44 Macpherson 1973, p. 56.
45 E.g., Macpherson dismisses Mill’s hopes for the salutary effects of cooperative enterprises on class relations by insisting that, so long as these enterprises operate in possessive market societies, their survival depends upon their members seeing themselves, and acting, ‘as consumers and appropriators, [giving] little scope for most of them to see themselves and to act as exerters and developers of their capacities... [or to] the equal possibility of individual self-development’ (1977a, pp. 61-3), my emphasis.
advances in technology, personal skill, or corporate governance rather than through greater extractions of the creative powers of others.

**The Problem of Indeterminacy**

For the remainder of this article, I want to focus on another objection sometimes made against the developmental concept of power. The concern from which this objection flows presses the question about the relationship between control of one’s creative abilities and the development of essentially human capacities. Rather than ask why the former is necessary for the latter, it asks why we should value the development of these capacities in terms of control or power and what it really means to do so. These questions are posed most forcefully by Steven Lukes in his essay, ‘The Real and Ideal Worlds of Democracy’. Lukes observes with consternation the indeterminacy in Macpherson’s list of the essentially human:

> To suppose that, as characterized, [essentially human capacities] are sufficiently determinate for their degree of realization...to be specified is to beg a set of crucial questions. For people widely disagree about what constitutes ‘rational understanding’, ‘moral judgment and action’, ‘aesthetic creation and contemplation’, true ‘religious experience’, and so on...To label human capacities by reference to their achievement is either to leave their nature indeterminate or to suppose such contested questions resolved in one way rather than another, which, to say the least, requires argument, and is question-begging, since alternative answers may be tied to alternative theories of human nature.46

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46 Lukes 1979, p. 147, emphasis in the original.
Furthermore, he continues, Macpherson fails to provide criteria for distinguishing those human capacities worth developing from those – equally ‘essential’ to the human being – whose development would seem problematic for creative individualism. As examples, Lukes cites our capacities ‘for consumption and acquisition, for emulation and competition, for status-ranking, for domination and subjection, for infliction and the acceptance of suffering, or indeed malevolence, cunning, degradation, destructiveness, and brutality of all conceivable kinds’.\textsuperscript{47} Macpherson does anticipate the concern in \textit{DT} and marshals an argument meant to assuage the indeterminacy objection which ought to be considered. ‘I do not think that this objection can be sustained’, he writes, ‘when the idea of capacities is being used in a democratic theory’. A democratic theory requires a ‘further assumption’ which, he argues, makes the further specification of capacities unnecessary. Here he appeals to the ‘postulate of the non-opposition of essentially human capacities’ discussed above.\textsuperscript{48} Only capacities and uses of capacities which do not require a net transfer of powers are tolerated. While Macpherson does not carefully spell out the implications of this principle in terms of concrete forms of human development which are thereby rendered illegitimate, this qualification does provide a rejoinder to the force of Lukes’s objection.

However, the issue has a further, more problematic, dimension. This is because Macpherson seeks to establish not only that creative individualism is an articulation of the human essence superior to its possessive alternative, but also that the democratic theory which makes this case can, in addition, make

\textsuperscript{47} Lukes 1979, p. 147. For a critical discussion of Lukes’s objection, see Ballingall 2010. For a more elaborate examination of the same issue, see Hurka 1996, ch. 2.

\textsuperscript{48} Macpherson 1973, p. 54.
rejecting possessive individualism more psychologically possible. The theory is meant to do this by reducing our propensity to see our good in terms of the satisfaction of the arbitrary desires we happen to have.\(^{49}\) The argument here is rather complex and I have found it helpful to state some of its components formally. The first part rehearses the argument for the scarcity of goods and services being an obstinate impediment to the human good. Let us call this the scarcity argument:

- The good is the satisfaction of desire, irrespective of the activities or objects with which desire is associated.\(^ {50}\)
- Desires are infinite in the sense that the satisfaction of one merely reveals another seeking satisfaction.
- The satisfaction of desires requires consumption of the goods and services produced by the economy which, although variable in quantity and quality, are finite.
- Therefore, the good is frustrated by scarcity in goods and services.

Macpherson’s concern is that if the good is articulated in terms of a conative theory of value, as it is in possessive individualism, then we have little reason to limit the satisfaction of desires. Instead, the satisfaction of any desire is equally valid so long as it does not unduly compromise the ability of others to

\(^{49}\) Here, ‘arbitrary’ simply refers to the conative theory presupposed by possessive individualism. The desires of the possessive individualist are arbitrary from the point of view of an essentialist theory such as creative individualism since the agent is not asked to discriminate between the desires she attempts to gratify in order to realise the good.

\(^{50}\) Excluding desires whose satisfaction is self-defeating (e.g. by failing to promote peace when possible) or frustrates the satisfaction of higher-ranked desires (those whose satisfaction is more valued).
gratify their desires and conforms to prudential rationality. Since these restrictions do not provide a principled reason to override the conative theory, and assuming the second premise that desires are infinite, the good is best promoted by allowing desires to proliferate while continually increasing the means of their satisfaction. Given the limited ability of any economy to produce the means of their satisfaction, scarcity in these means becomes the chief and perennial impediment to human flourishing. When the scarcity argument is combined with a second, let us call it the efficiency argument, it also appears to legitimise a net transfer of powers:

- An economy will produce more goods and services if the means of production are used more efficiently.
- The means of production will be used more efficiently to the extent that:
  (a) those who are more talented in producing valued goods and services or those who have a greater appetite for ‘utilities and power’ (or both) have control over the productive power of those who are less talented or less appetitive (or both); and
  (b) those who are more talented or appetitive (or both) are able to realize the benefits of greater efficiency.
- Therefore, an economy will produce more goods and services if (a) and (b) are met.

Since it is because of scarcity in goods and services that the possessive individualist conception of the good is frustrated, and because (a) describes extractive power, these two arguments appear to legitimise such power.

Macpherson endorses the efficiency argument insofar as it accurately describes a mechanism for improving the productivity of an economy. He also holds that by the mid-twentieth century
most liberal democratic societies had economies capable of producing a sufficient level of goods and services such that this mechanism was no longer necessary to satisfy the material prerequisites for creative individualism.\textsuperscript{51} Since this mechanism works by reducing the developmental power of a great many people, and because this kind of power constitutes the good according to creative individualism, creative individualism disallows improvements in efficiency by these means. Yet as long

\textsuperscript{51} In the essays of \textit{DT} and \textit{RFEJ}, Macpherson argues that possessive individualism helped realise improvements in productivity such that, by the mid-twentieth century, the means of life could be satisfied in most liberal democracies, assuming a proper distribution of economic product. (1973, pp. 3-38; 1985, p. 50). It did so by justifying unlimited appropriation of property and the productive energies of others, as well as the unlimited gratification of desires (within the bounds set by prudential rationality). This justification opened the door to institutions incentivizing the continuous exertion necessary for significant increases in productive efficiency. ‘The small and middling independent proprietors as well as the capitalist enterprises proper’, Macpherson supposes, had responded ‘to the incentive offered by the prospect of unlimited appropriation’ by organizing the labour of ever greater numbers of workers in pursuit of ever grander economies of scale (1973, p. 28). He seems to suggest that, at first, this application of ‘extractive power’ towards improving productivity ameliorated access to the means of life for those whose productive capacities were rented away and therefore provided some grounds for legitimising the concomitant transfer of powers. Eventually, the extractive power amassed by property-owners enabled a level of productivity which no longer required the old incentive system to realize an economic product sufficient for meeting basic needs. At this point, the surrender of workers’ control over their capacity to labour entailed by these incentives therefore lost whatever initial legitimacy it had had. Universal access to the means of life could be realized without the great majority of humanity having to make this sacrifice.
as reducing scarcity remains a primary social goal, the efficiency argument will remain compelling. The psychological impediment to grasping the desirability of creative individualism and feeling the force of its disallowance of extractive power, then, lies in the propensity to identify the good with infinite desire satisfaction.\footnote{This is why Macpherson maintains that ‘the difficulty to be overcome within the advanced liberal democracies is not primarily material but ideological... the most advanced problem now is not to redistribute scarcity but to see through it: to see that it is not an invariable natural phenomenon but a variable cultural one’ (1973, p. 63).}

Macpherson’s solution to this complex problem is remarkably simplistic. He takes it as self-evident that the greater development of essentially human capacities in the greatest number of people constitutes a more desirable social goal than that legitimised by possessive individualism.\footnote{In other words, Macpherson assumes the validity of Rawls’ ‘Aristotelian principle’, see above.} What is harder to grasp, in his view, is how possessive individualism is itself a conception of the human good, supported by a controversial postulate of the human essence incompatible with the superior, and now technologically feasible, alternative of creative individualism. The difficulty arises because the very act of comparing these conceptions requires seeing possessive individualism through a philosophical lens foreign to its self-conception. Creative individualism purports to identify a true construal of the human essence, but possessive individualism claims to eschew essentialism altogether, casting itself in terms of instrumental rationality. And whereas creative individualism requires distinguishing true from false needs, healthy from pathological desires, its possessive alternative does not attach desire to any particular end endowed with intrinsic value. It is a theory peculiarly resilient to challenges from essentialist theories insofar as such challenges oblige the

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52 This is why Macpherson maintains that ‘the difficulty to be overcome within the advanced liberal democracies is not primarily material but ideological... the most advanced problem now is not to redistribute scarcity but to see through it: to see that it is not an invariable natural phenomenon but a variable cultural one’ (1973, p. 63).
53 In other words, Macpherson assumes the validity of Rawls’ ‘Aristotelian principle’, see above.
individual to develop a specific set of desires for non-instrumental reasons. Once formed, desires can be extraordinarily difficult to resist, let alone sublimate. Possessive individualism has the psychological advantage of not requiring such resistance and/or sublimation. Furthermore, possessive individualism appeals to the human propensity for reducing uncertainty and complexity. By removing from ethical reflection the need to consider ultimate human purposes, it tempts the agent to believe the fundamental ethical question ‘how should I live?’ is resolvable by instrumental rationality.

Given Macpherson’s confidence concerning the manifest superiority of creative individualism, its widespread adoption is frustrated in his view only by our failure to recognise the essentialist claims presumed in the theory it is meant to supplant. If only we were able to compare the theories on essentialist grounds, Macpherson maintains, we would be hard-pressed to continue adhering to the possessive theory and the net transfer of powers it justifies. ‘Those who neglect any considerations of human essence or essentially human capacities’, he writes, ‘commonly fail to see any such diminution [in] or transfer [of powers], since they measure a man’s power after that has taken place’. Only if an ‘ethical dimension’ of power is posited (essential purposes for which power is needed) will we be moved by the argument for creative individualism. Political philosophy

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54 Theories of cognitive psychology describe this as a propensity for the use of heuristics or cognitive shortcuts necessary to process complex information and perceptions. For an accessible overview see Kahneman 2011. I discuss this predilection further below.

55 Macpherson 1973, p. 40. Alternatively, once we see that conceptions of power are inextricably tied to conceptions of the human good or essence, we recognize how differences in the latter will produce variations in how much power is ascribed to the individual. Cf. 1962, p. 56; 1965, p. 43; 1973, p. 10.
can help us see possessive individualism in this way, he suggests, through a sort of genealogy of morals and a rehabilitation of teleological rationality. The genealogical project disrupts the common-sense status of possessive individualism’s self-conception by chronicling its displacement of an earlier, essentialist mode of moral theorising.\footnote{This is the contribution initiated by PTPI and rehearsed in shorter versions in the essays of DT and LTLD.} The rehabilitation of teleology provides the basis for the broader understanding of power necessary to recognise the existence of the morally problematic net transfer of powers in possessive market societies.\footnote{See Lindsay 1996, pp. 9-48 for a discussion of this aspect of the project and for its most direct treatment in Macpherson see 1977b.} Macpherson is optimistic that this procedure will then spawn a virtuous circle, reducing the priority given to the reduction of scarcity and allowing for self-direction of essentially human capacities which will, in turn, be increasingly recognised as a more preferable public policy outcome than the ability to maximise utilities.\footnote{Macpherson 1973, p. 76.}

We can now return to the second dimension of Lukes’s indeterminacy objection. Here I argue that the same vagueness Lukes bemoans in Macpherson’s articulation of essentially human capacities undermines the claim we have just explored, that the mere recognition of possessive individualism as a theory of the human essence is sufficient for great numbers of people to reject it.\footnote{It should be noted that two other preconditions are necessary, in Macpherson’s view, for the agent to be in a position to cast off possessive individualism. She must also recognise some alternative conception of the good as morally superior and as technologically possible. Yet since both these conditions are already met in the contemporary situation of liberal democracies, the recognition of the

\footnote{This claim, I suggest, does not adequately account for...}
the two psychological predispositions which make possessive individualism attractive. If developmental power is meant to provide for control or self-direction in the exercise of essentially human capacities, and if this control is considered compromised by extractive power and the psychology by which it is legitimised, then developmental power must include some sort of ability to recognise this psychology as harmful. But Macpherson does not qualify developmental power in this way or envision institutions meant to facilitate the development of such a skill. He therefore fails to consider the possibility that, even if developmental power is maximised in the broadest possible distribution and the conception of the human essence championed by creative individualism is widely adopted, most of us will continue to be more deeply motivated by and attached to the satisfaction of arbitrary desires than to developmental power itself. The result is that developmental power becomes self-defeating.

The problem arises because the two psychological predispositions we seem to have towards adopting possessive individualism make it extraordinarily difficult to recognise the superiority of Macpherson’s alternative, even when we are in a position to compare the two. Possessive individualism encourages us both to avoid the very form of (arduous) reasoning necessary to grasp its inferiority as well as to forgo the psychologically difficult consequences of this recognition (the sublimation of many pre-developed desires). We have reason to suppose, therefore, that a person cannot weigh the two theories on an equal playing field without some sort of pre-philosophic ‘preparation’ and/or set of psychological incentives to compensate for those favouring possessive individualism.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{60} I discuss the implications of this supposition below.
The problem is compounded because developmental power itself does not obviously exclude possessive individualist psychology. As we have seen, Macpherson claims that a person’s developmental power ‘... is to be measured in terms of the absence of impediments to his using his human capacities’. These impediments are defined as ‘external’ to the agent’s psyche and include (a) the lack of adequate means of life, (b) the lack of access to the means of labour, and (c) the lack of protection against the invasion of others. Now Macpherson is clear that under modern technological conditions and liberal democratic political institutions these impediments arise only because of the existence of extractive power. Yet given that extractive power continues primarily because of our collective preoccupation with the elimination of scarcity, and that this preoccupation arises because of an ‘ideological’ difficulty (possessive individualist psychology), developmental power defined in terms of the absence of ‘external’ (i.e. non-ideological) impediments leaves the agent vulnerable to the very ‘internal’ impediments responsible for its own frustration. If developmental power is measured in terms of the absence of non-psychological impediments, there is nothing preventing those afforded such power from continuing to live as possessive individualists, reproducing the very problem developmental power is introduced to solve.

Macpherson does acknowledge the existence of internal impediments, but his solution to the problem they present is hardly satisfactory. ‘Impediments were external before they were internalized’, he points out. ‘They could only be internalized because they already existed as external impediments... [and] remain basic[, deserving] our first attention’. Furthermore, he imagines, if we somehow do manage to address the net transfer

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61 Macpherson 1973, p. 58.
of powers without eliminating the internal, ideological impediments responsible for the phenomenon,\textsuperscript{62} internal impediments may become more manageable, for the ethical superiority of developmental power over the gratification of arbitrary desires may become more recognisable.\textsuperscript{63} However we have every reason to believe that the mere removal of external impediments will be unsustainable, given the psychological predispositions responsible for the resiliency of possessive individualism. We have no reason to suppose that persons who already conceive of their happiness in terms of the gratification of the desires they happen to have will seek any other good when granted greater control over the exercise and development of their own capacities.

The objection can be put even more forcefully when we notice that we do not have to assume an aversion to uncertainty and complexity in moral reasoning and the consequent propensity towards conative theories of value in order to reach this conclusion. We may also posit a predisposition towards socially dominant ideas and passions in addition to, or in place of, this deeper psychological aversion.\textsuperscript{64} If we do so, and if we

\textsuperscript{62} As we have seen, the lack of access to the means of labour occurs because of the net transfer of powers in possessive market societies which is, in turn, the result of the overvaluation of the reduction of scarcity by means of ‘individually owned material increases’ (Macpherson 1973, p. 62).

\textsuperscript{63} Macpherson 1973, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{64} Through the operations of what cognitive psychologists call ‘associative memory’, humans display a ‘status-quo’ or ‘confirmation’ bias which disposes us to recognize evidence which confirms pre-existing opinions and habits while ignoring disconfirming evidence or considerations. See, e.g., Kahneman 2011, pp. 80-1. Also relevant here is the so-called ‘bandwagon fallacy’ which disposes a person towards
allow Macpherson’s proposition that possessive individualism remains a powerful ideology in modern liberal democracies and that adherence to its strictures promotes infinite desire, then inhabitants of these societies, *ceteris paribus*, will be predisposed to adhering to this theory and satisfying the desires it legitimises.

**The Problem of Ethical Authority**

While Macpherson did not address this aspect of the problem with the developmental concept’s indeterminacy, we might be tempted to respond on his behalf by deepening what is meant by ‘control’ or ‘self-direction’ in the concept’s definition. I mentioned above that developmental power could avoid the self-defeating consequences I have attributed to it if the concept presupposed a skill enabling the person already shaped by possessive individualist ideology not only to identify the essentialist claims implied by the theory but also to resist her psychological predispositions towards them. These predispositions, it might be argued, rob us of genuine control over the use and development of our essentially human capacities. They do so, on the one hand, by systematically pushing us to hold an erroneous conception of the good. If we agree with Socrates of the *Republic* that it is inconceivable that a person would freely perform activities or subscribe to views she knew to be out of accord with her ultimate best interests, then the psychological bias towards possessive individualism must compromise our self-control. On the other hand, this bias also pushes us to adopt a self-conception whose adherence legitimises extractive power and thus external impediments to developmental power. Developmental power should be defined, adopting views which seem to be widely held or held by a group with which she seeks (or hopes to seek) to identify. See Freeman 1995.
therefore, not only by the absence of the external impediments Macpherson discusses, but also by some ability to resist these self-defeating tendencies. In this way, we may realise the self-control the concept insufficiently identifies.

This solution, however, raises an even deeper difficulty. Developmental power appears to require that we be as skilful as possible in reasoning about the human good in order to be capable of realizing this genuine self-control. But the skill of which we are in particular need may demand a significant abdication of the very self-control we are hoping to realise. This is because self-control and ‘ethical skill’ often pull in different directions. The problem of indeterminacy then becomes a version of the problem of ethical authority I outlined in the introduction. To see this, consider the following:

Suppose a person is interested in living in accordance with the best possible conception of the good life and that it is possible to make intellectual and psychological progress towards this goal. Suppose also that she eschews conative theories of value as accurate accounts of the good. She therefore holds that the best possible life does not merely consist in gratifying her particular desires or whims but is unsure of much else besides. If she is to make any progress towards her goal or have any reassurance that the conception according to which she lives at any given time is best, she is going to have to find good reasons supporting and/or delegitimising the various possibilities open to her. Consider now the daunting nature of this task. The various candidate lives worth seriously investigating are numerous, the ethical and metaethical questions worth pondering often puzzling to say the least. Yet it is also undeniable that a good life often requires acting before satisfactory progress can be made on most of these investigations. Furthermore, it is likely that a single human lifetime, no matter how much leisure it is afforded, is insufficient to make significant progress on many fundamental ethical
questions given the cognitive limitations of the human mind. Our zetetic is therefore frequently confronted with a choice: act out of ignorance of the ethical status of her action or act on the basis of the counsel of others. Since non-action frequently carries with it ethical significance, it does not allow her to avoid this choice. The alternative to acting in ignorance presents itself to the agent for the same reasons as the intellectual division of labour presents itself to the scholar: if each were expected to cover the same ground, the complexity of the subject matter would limit epistemological progress to the intellectual capacities of the human individual. So long as a person seeks to live in accordance with some presumably knowable yet immensely complex subject such as ‘the good life’, she will either have to be satisfied with the epistemological progress she can make on her own or adopt the ‘findings’ of others in a division of ethical labour.

The developmental concept of power runs up against this issue insofar as my construal of the problem of indeterminacy is correct. If developmental power is to avoid the self-defeating uses to which it would likely be put by persons acquiring it after having developed the psychology of a possessive individualist, it matters that the agent be skillful at ethical reasoning. While she need not be so wise as to intellectually grasp (that is, grasp for good reasons) the nature of the good in itself, she must be sufficiently wise so as to avoid using developmental power as a possessive individualist. But if acquiring even this kind of wisdom is beyond the capacities of any single person and requires a division of intellectual labour, developmental power will have to be qualified yet further. In order to consistently achieve independence from the will of others with respect to the use and exercise of her essentially human capacities, the agent will be dependent on the minds of others with respect to the content of the conception according to which she uses and develops these capacities.
**Conclusion**

Before concluding that an altogether distinct conception of ‘ethical’ power is required from that offered by Macpherson, it is worth briefly considering how alternative formulations get around the problem of ethical authority. The developmental concept is defined in terms of independence from the will of others with respect to the use of one’s capacities and only comes up against the problem when we try to rescue the concept from an internal contradiction. Liberal models of autonomy, by contrast, are explicitly defined in terms of independence from the ethical authority of others. The agent is autonomous in these models insofar as she lives according to a life-plan or conception of the good or set of ‘value-commitments’ of her own choosing. Yet proponents of these models are careful to avoid the problem of ethical authority by radically reducing the scope of autonomous agency. Recognising the many psychological and cognitive limitations humans face in moral reasoning, contemporary theorists of autonomy distinguish local from global agency, ethical competence from authenticity, as well as actual from hypothetical self-appraisal.

The first distinction points to an ability to be ethically self-governing in a piecemeal or ‘local’ manner with respect only to those elements of one’s self-conception or valued ends which are available or chosen for examination at any given moment. The individual should not be required to have deeply reflected upon her entire self-conception and set of ends in a global fashion to be considered autonomous.\(^65\) Secondly, the autonomous agent is

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\(^{65}\) E.g., Kymlicka replies to the claim that liberalism is committed to a view of the self as socially unencumbered (see Sandel 1982), by arguing that autonomy merely requires that one be able to review any *particular* end dispassionately (being able to self-identity apart from any particular end), not to review all of them *in toto* (Kymlicka 1989, p. 54). Christman
often understood as competent in her ethical reasoning at a formal rather than substantive level. Instead of insisting that the agent be adequately competent in formulating a conception of the good so as to meet certain objective criteria of validity, theorists of autonomy will often limit the criteria of ethical rationality to an ability to formulate a set of desires which are complete and transitive and with which the agent can ‘authentically’ relate (i.e. affirm without ‘alienation’). \( ^{66} \) Finally, autonomy is often limited to a hypothetical ability so as not to even require actualisation. Here it is considered sufficient that a person be capable of self-evaluation and action towards the realisation of an authentically held desire or end while not actually requiring the agent to undergo such self-reflection and/or action. \( ^{67} \) In all these ways, the daunting challenge posed to the person who dares to know and who seeks to live only by her own lights is reduced to a manageable enterprise in contemporary theories of autonomous agency.

The developmental concept, however, does not have recourse to such measures. Indeed, any construal of self-government which attaches significant value to ensuring the conception of the good by which one lives is true must necessarily resist these moves. \( ^{68} \) If we allow that our lives will go better insofar as we

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\( ^{66} \) Authenticity can also refer to more robust criteria which depend upon essentialisms of various kinds which contemporary theorists of autonomy tend to avoid. See Christman 2009, pp. 134-5.

\( ^{67} \) Christman 2009, p. 155.

\( ^{68} \) In the autonomy literature, theories which identify certain choices as incompatible with autonomous agency are called ‘substantive’ or
intellectually and psychologically grasp a true account of the good, then we have a strong *prima facie* reason for ensuring our understanding of the good is as true as possible. As we have seen, Macpherson’s developmental concept requires some such principle in order to avoid self-destructive consequences. And insofar as an ‘ethical’ division of labour improves our prospects of realising a truer account, we also have a strong reason to allow this sort of dependency. But if we likewise hold that a true account of the good involves maximal ethical independence, either because it provides the individual with reassurance that the account by which she lives is true for good reasons she herself grasps or because it is valued in itself, then the problem of ethical authority seems unavoidable. And yet it is worth pondering whether avoiding this problem by abandoning the concern with ethical truth really is a more desirable strategy. If we take Macpherson’s developmental concept of power seriously and make use of a defensible, reconstructed version, this is a trade-off with which future research will have to grapple.

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