

**ON THE VERY POSSIBILITY
OF A CLASSLESS SOCIETY**
Rawls, Macpherson, and Revisionist Liberalism

KAI NIELSEN
University of Calgary

I

C. B. Macpherson, in two significant essays, discusses the views of John Rawls. One, Essay IV in *Democratic Theory*, examines Rawls' work prior to *A Theory of Justice*, the other, "Rawls' Models of Man and Society," examines *A Theory of Justice* and in particular it looks into features in Rawls' book which take up problems that troubled Macpherson earlier.¹ I shall discuss both these essays, but, keeping Macpherson's own strategy in mind, I shall first expound crucial parts from his earlier essay amplifying it, where relevant, from remarks in his second essay. I shall then consider new significant points in his second essay.

Macpherson concentrates on querying Rawls' models of man and society. He notes, apropos the latter, that Rawls has a model of a just society which is essentially that of the liberal-democratic capitalist welfare state (I 88). As one might expect of a theorist with a somewhat Marxist orientation, Macpherson subjects that model to extensive critical scrutiny.²

In developing this scrutiny of Rawls' models of man and society, Macpherson first draws our attention to an assumption Rawls makes which Macpherson believes "drastically limits the scope of his whole inquiry" (I 89). The narrowing assumption referred to is the assumption that class divisions are inevitable. As Macpherson puts it:

He proposes and defends his principles of justice as criteria for judging the moral worth of various distributions of rights and income only within a class-divided society. His explicit assumption is that institutionalized inequalities which affect

men's whole life-prospects are 'inevitable in any society'; and he is referring to inequalities between classes by income or wealth. It is with these supposedly inevitable basic inequalities that 'the two principles of justice are primarily designed to deal'. Or, as he puts it again, 'differences in life-prospects arising from the basic structure are inevitable, and it is precisely the aim of the second principle to say when these differences are just' [I 89].

How exactly is this supposed to narrow Rawls' principles severely? Because Rawls makes such an assumption, he needs in his account of justice, in addition to his first principle of justice—his equal liberty principle, enjoining that each person has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all—a second principle of justice which justifies inequalities. They are justified when, compatible with a just-savings principle, the inequalities are to "the greatest benefit of the least advantaged" and the positions of inequality are open to all "under conditions of fair equality of opportunity."³ The part in the second principle specifying that the inequalities to be justified must be to the advantage of the least advantaged is called by Rawls the difference principle. It is the key and distinctive element in Rawls' attempt to show when class inequalities in life prospects are, in certain circumstances, justified (I 89).

Macpherson grants that Rawls' principle is a reasonable one and is probably as egalitarian and fair a principle as one can expect to get, once we assume that societies, in a strict sense of 'classes', are inevitably class-divided. What essentially divides Rawls and Macpherson is the belief that class divisions are inevitable.⁴ Macpherson makes the counterclaim that a classless society, in the sense of 'class' utilized by Rawls, namely a society without classes which determine the broad life prospects of their members, is not unthinkable and not in principle impossible (I 90).

So we have a situation in which it seems at least that Macpherson is asserting *p*, and Rawls, not—*p*, and our job is to try to ascertain which is the more plausible claim or whether the issue can even be reasonably resolved in terms of plausibility. We also need to ask ourselves whether the issues concerning social justice can be resolved without taking sides on those issues.

II

It is Rawls' belief that social and economic inequalities between classes—inequalities amounting to inequalities in life prospects—

are inevitable and will persist even when existing social injustices have been removed. Macpherson challenges this:

Is a classless society unthinkable? Is it, that is to say, impossible to envisage a society in which, even if there are perceptibly different levels of income and authority, the occupancy of a higher level is neither the result nor the means of exploiting others (in the strict sense of exploitation, i.e., transferring to oneself for one's own benefit some of the powers of others)? I do not think so. But I see a possible reason why Rawls is unable to envisage it, namely that he does not see that class division in any society, not least in his free market society, is based on such continuous transfer: the transfer is the means and the result of class division [II 341-342].

The claim is that Rawls neglects the way exploitation works and how in exploitation the transfer of human powers is such as to make human equality impossible in a society with a capitalist socioeconomic system. Instead Rawls stresses, in good welfare-state-liberal—fashion, the overcoming of monopolistic restriction and the attainment of genuinely fair equality of opportunity which would mitigate the radical differences in life prospects that exist between the different classes. Marxists see the existence of classes as rooted in the existence of the division of labour and the private ownership of the means of production. And whatever we may want to say about the division of labour, there is no necessity for there being in place the institution of the private ownership of the means of production, though, it is fair enough to say that we need to be far clearer than we are at present about what “social ownership” means, entails, and involves.

Be that as it may, the crucial thing to see in Macpherson's above comment is the claim that to attain a classless society what is most essential is that there be no *exploitation*; that is to say, it must be impossible to transfer to oneself, for one's own benefit, some of the power of others. This exploitation is essential to capitalism, since surplus value must be extracted from the labourer to keep capitalist accumulation and expansion going. A system without such accumulation and expansion would not be a capitalist system. It may be, as Dahrendorf believes, that some social stratification is unavoidable in any society with resulting differences in authority, prestige, and (in some instances) wages.⁵ *Perhaps* all these things are unavoidable. But they are compatible with the existence of a classless society in a Marxist sense. What would undermine classlessness is that the differences in status, authority, and income be either the result of or the means to exploiting others. But it is not evident that anything like this is in-

evitable and unavoidable such that it is the worst sort of Quixotism or utopianism to struggle against it.

In spite of Macpherson's avowal that he is going to show that classlessness is not inevitable in the sense that Rawls talks about classes, the way that Macpherson actually talks about classes is sufficiently different to put them at cross purposes. Indeed part of their conflict may be purely verbal, for, as Macpherson has in effect shown in his first essay, Rawls seems to conceptualize classes less in Marxist terms and more in terms of institutionalized inequalities between human beings which affect their whole life prospects; these inequalities principally take the form of differences of income and wealth. But unless one construes wealth so that to have wealth means having some private ownership of the means of production—a sense which Rawls does not intend—Rawls and Macpherson are speaking at cross purposes for they do not use class in the same way.⁶ For Rawls, there would be class-divided societies, with or without exploitation, as long as there were institutionalized differences in income, wealth, status, and authority which were sufficient to affect differently the whole life prospects of groups of people. This is what he claims is inevitable and he could agree that exploitation in Macpherson's strict sense is not inevitable, and so classlessness in that strict Marxist sense is not impossible though it is impossible in his sense.

III

The state of play thus seems to be this: Macpherson, on the one hand, has brought out a very crucial sense of classlessness central to Marxist thought concerning which it appears at least not impossible to attain classlessness; Rawls, on the other hand, has another sense of classlessness in mind, which Macpherson first discusses, in which it very well may be the case that classlessness is impossible to achieve. It may well be that even in a society where the means of production are socially owned, differences in the whole life prospects of people will persist because of the differences in income, status, and authority which obtain even when capitalism has been abolished or died the death of a thousand unifying expansions. With differences in status, authority, and income remaining, different groups, differently affected, may find that their whole life prospects are still very different indeed. Consider the children

of any highly educated person in such society. (Eastern European societies would be good examples.) If she or he is a professor or a scientist or an engineer his or her knowledge, contacts, travel, and a whole host of life experiences can hardly but put the children of such a person in a far different position than someone farming or repairing autos in that society. It is not for nothing that Marx saw the division of labour as standing in the way of attaining classlessness. But in the works of his full maturity—*Capital* and *Grundrisse*, as distinct from the earlier *German Ideology*—he became aware of the difficulties inherent in the idea of breaking down this division of labour in industrial society. In his mature works, as Irving Fetscher nicely puts it, “Marx no longer pretends that the division of labour will altogether disappear.”⁷ No doubt people moving around and doing different tasks, as the Chinese have, can somewhat ameliorate the affects of the at least seeming necessity for having a division of labour in an industrial society, but whether that can do more than scratch the surface is not yet evident.

On the one hand, we seem plainly to require something very like an industrial society to feed, clothe, and so on the multitudes of people now living and who will be born in the next several decades. I speak now just of meeting subsistence needs. I do not speak of making the springs of social wealth flow freely and fully. But just meeting subsistence needs in the contemporary world seems to require a division of labour, and with that division of labour divisions of people along class lines which deeply affect their life prospects. I grant that it is by no means certain that this is inevitable—particularly if there is no longer any possibility of a private ownership of the means of production—but it is, to put it conservatively, not unreasonable to believe that it is inevitable. On the other hand, it is also not unreasonable to believe that the division of labour could be reduced—that we could and should have far more versatile, many-sided human beings doing more varied work and standing in many different social roles and that we should and could, as well develop various social devices to ameliorate the inequalities and inequities resulting from the division of labour. And it is also not unreasonable to believe that it is at least not inconceivable that a state of affairs could develop where there was a genuine social ownership of the means of production, with democratic control through workers’ councils with the gradual transformation of state power into a governmental structure which, as Marx puts it, would come to have only

simple administrative functions. In that sense it is not inconceivable that the state could wither away and that exploitation of others could end, since there then would be no *structural* means of transferring to oneself the benefits of the powers of others. Thus, in that very important sense, there would be no classes, i.e., people who are at higher and lower levels, where the higher levels are the result of or the means to exploiting others, extracting from them surplus value. It is in this way and in this sense that class divisions and the existence of classes most deeply and pervasively effect us. It is because of the existence of classes of this sort that the most appalling and extensive inequalities and injustices arise and persist in our social structures. It is vital to know whether in this sense class divisions are inevitable.

IV

Such a classlessness may never come into existence, but Rawls seems at least to be very uncritical in not entertaining it as even a possibility; and there is as well, a serious lacuna, in his moral perceptiveness is not realizing that such a possibility offers us the possibility of a far more equalitarian society than any he entertains.

I say more equalitarian for Rawls' principles of justice allow us to conclude that a distribution is just in a constitutional democracy where we have a capitalist market economy wedded to a welfare state, and where the following conditions obtain: there is equality of opportunity underwritten by education for all and government and the law "act effectively to keep markets competitive, resources fully employed, property and wealth distributed over time, and to maintain the appropriate social minimum."⁸ Where these conditions fully obtain, we have a just and fair distribution. But, as Macpherson points out, in such a society "there will still be inequality, not only as between individual incomes but between the life prospects of members of different classes" (I 91). But since that inequality squares with the *difference* principle, it is a justified and indeed a perfectly just inequality. Thus, accepting this principle is compatible with, as Rawls recognizes, accepting as a just inequality the rather considerable differences that can obtain, even in a liberal welfare state, "between the life prospects of the son of a member of the entrepreneurial class and the son of an unskilled labourer."⁹ Rawls remarks concerning this that in capitalist society where the difference principle is satisfied, such an inequality cannot justifiably be done away with. This is so even when the two men are of

equal talent and ability.¹⁰ Rawls does not deny, what is manifestly so, that there are in extant societies unjust inequalities. The claim is rather that such an inequality between classes could be perfectly just, and that the social system—in this case the capitalist system—could, where such conditions obtain, be perfectly just.¹¹

The above arguments of Macpherson clearly refute Ronald Dworkin's claim that Rawls' principles of justice are as egalitarian as principles can be.¹² That claim is mistaken for principles which rejected these inequalities in the name of a still greater equality, e.g., no one can justly start with greater life prospects than anyone else, would clearly be still more egalitarian. (Such a *radical* egalitarianism may be mistaken but that is a different matter altogether.)¹³ Dworkin can talk as much as he likes of Rawls committing one to the principle that in the design of institutions all people are to have a right to equal concern and respect; the substantive point is that with these differences in life prospects, such a right to equal respect and concern cannot be satisfied. It remains a purely formal, quite unrealizable right.¹⁴

The more important question is the substantive one, namely the question of whether Rawls' position is the right one to take. This is far more important than the verbal issues—not unimportant in themselves, given the normative and emotive force of "egalitarian"—about which position is the more egalitarian and the claim about exactly what a fully egalitarian position commits one to. Still it is the substantive issue that takes us to the heart of the matter. Are such inequalities as we have just discussed either justified or just inequalities? Rawls claims they are and Macpherson denies it. Can we sort this out? Rawls' bedrock argument here is that the inequality in question is just, if the equal liberty principle and fair opportunity principle is not violated and the existence of such inequalities between the sons or daughters of entrepreneurs and the sons or daughters of unskilled labourers is to the advantage of the most disadvantaged stratum of society. Suppose these children of unskilled labourers are part of that most disadvantaged stratum. Rawls could argue that indeed their life prospects, given their situation, are unfortunate enough and then rhetorically ask whether, given that situation, it is right or just or even humane to make them still worse off by narrowing the inequality and by doing that, however unintentionally, do something which is not to their advantage? Isn't doing that to add insult to injury? This plainly utilitarian argument has considerable force. Yet one can still be inclined to say that such inequalities remain unfair, indeed even somehow grossly unjust. We have two children of equal talent and ability and yet in virtue of their

distinct class backgrounds, their whole life prospects are very different indeed. One can see the force of the utilitarian considerations which would lead the parents of such children or the children themselves to be resigned to the inequalities, to accept them as the best thing they could get under the circumstances, but why should we think they are *just* inequalities or that the underlying pattern of distribution is just.

In a way parallel to the way Rawls himself argues against simply accepting a maximizing of average utility as the most just arrangement, it is possible to argue against Rawls here. Rawls says to the utilitarian: it is a requirement of fairness to consider the interests of everyone alike even when doing so will not produce the greatest balance of average utility. To fail to do that is to fail to be fair. I am inclined to respond to Rawls in a similar way that by saying that we should—indeed morally speaking must—just reject such acute disparities of life prospects as unfair and unjust even though they do benefit the most disadvantaged. Are not both arguments equally good or equally bad? If we are justified in rejecting utilitarian reasoning in one case why are we not justified in rejecting it in the other?

It is not, as Rawls claims, envy that is operative here, for one can have the appropriate sense of injustice even if one is not a member of the oppressed and exploited class. One might even be a part of the ruling class—as Engels was—and still feel it. The point is that it offends one's sense of justice. Or perhaps, I should say, to give fewer hostages to fortune, it offends my sense of justice and I know it offends the sense of justice of some others as well. I am inclined to say that here Rawls' principles do not match with my considered judgements and the considered judgements of at least some others. Rawls might well counter that they would if I got them and they got them into reflective equilibrium. That is, Rawls might claim if I considered all the facts, the alternative theories, and the principles of rationality, my considered judgements would not be what they are now. It is irrational *not* to accept these inequalities as just or at least as justified. (Rawls, as some have thought, seems to have confused "just inequalities" with "justified inequalities."¹⁵ It may not be just to sanction such inequalities but it may still be justified on utilitarian grounds. It may be one of those cases, *pace* Rawls, where considerations of utility outweigh considerations of justice and where what we should, everything considered, do is not identical with what justice requires. To claim this would require a rather considerable change in Rawls' system, but it would give him a rather more plausible justification for his difference principle.)

The issue raised by this example and the point about the parallelism with Rawls' critique of utilitarianism pushes us back to some basic questions in moral methodology. If there is anything to the above parallelism and both arguments are equally good or equally bad, we still, of course, want to know which they are. Here our considered judgements come into play and, speaking for my own, even when I have utilized the devices linked with what Rawls calls "reflective equilibrium," it remains the case that they are not settled on this issue.¹⁶ I am drawn by the teleological "utilitarian" considerations: why not, where we can, act in such a manner that we are likely to diminish as much as possible the occurrence of misery and maximize the attainment of happiness or at least (if that does not come to the same thing) the satisfaction of desire? What else, everything considered, could be the better, the more humane thing to do? But I am pulled in the other direction as well, for I also find myself asking: but are we to do this when it commits us to doing things which are plainly unfair, i.e., when in effect, whatever our rhetoric, either ignore the interests of certain people when considering that their interests do not contribute toward maximization or simply accept as justified, as "all right" given how things are, vast disparities of life prospects between the children—often equally talented and equally intelligent—of entrepreneurs and unskilled labourers when the difference principle and a formal equal opportunity principle are satisfied? Even on reflection with the facts and the consequences of both sets of stratagems before me vividly and fully, it still strikes me as grossly unfair to follow the difference principle here. Yet I can also see the humanity and indeed the reason in "utilitarian reasoning" here: why allow anymore misery or unhappiness than necessary? If closing the gap between the classes at some determinate time in history allows that then do not close it. Yet I am also inclined to come back, against such utilitarian reasoning concerning such a case, with something (vague as it is) about fairness, human dignity, and being in a better position to control one's own life.

I think what is happening is that very deeply embedded but, in this context, conflicting moral sentiments are being appealed to and our conflicting considered judgements are matched with these conflicting sentiments. In myself I find no clear way of resolving them; that is to say, coming up with a nonconflicting set of considered judgements reflecting clear principles with attached priority rules. And it does not seem to me that this inability of mine stems from the fact that the facts in the case are not before me with sufficient vividness, or the

principles of rationality that can be appealed to are not clear enough for the purpose at hand or that the alternative ethical theories have not been sufficiently rehearsed.¹⁷ Moreover, it is not clear to me what more I would have to know to resolve this ambivalence in myself. Now to the extent that this is just about me, such remarks are of merely a very limited psychological interest, but to the extent I am here *Jedermann* they are of very considerable interest and show something very fundamental about the nature of morality and moral philosophy.

Perhaps my hunch here is mistaken and that here I am not *Jedermann* and that in fact more people will have more settled judgements: their moral sentiments and considered judgements in such cases will cut more in one way. But, even if this is so, we will find that there are also other people with conflicting and deeply embedded considered judgements with no at least evident grounds for resolving whose considered judgements are the more *adequate* considered judgements and no evident grounds within the parameters of Rawls' theory or, as far as I can see, anyone else's theory, for resolving that issue. And it is just here where ethical skepticism again rears its ugly head.

V

Is there, after all, anything more definite that we can say here or do we have a stand-off over conflicting intuitions or considered judgements? Some further consideration of Macpherson's texts give us some leverage here, and, if it achieves nothing else, it will set more fully before us the issues between them. But before I return to his text, I want briefly to bring out an implication of Macpherson's analysis which he would find most unwelcome and would tend to reinforce Rawls' claims about having culture-non-specific principles of justice.

In a classless society—classless in Marxist terms—where there may still be differences in income, wealth, authority, and status, those differences, Macpherson claims, “need not create unequal liberties and rights since they are not necessarily either the result or means of domination” (I 90). Where this condition obtains, Macpherson goes on to aver, “Rawls' principles of justice . . . would probably make very good sense” (I 90). That is to say, they are principles it would be reasonable to adopt in a classless society. But in a capitalist society these differences support or seem to support a revisionist liberalism which in fact supports an inegalitarian and unjust society and a society in which there

remains a considerable amount of domination and exploitation. But, if they really are—as Macpherson believes—the principles of justice which should govern a classless society, and if Rawls could adequately respond to Macpherson by showing that the principles of justice in justice as fairness, and most particularly his *difference* principle, makes a capitalist order, where they are satisfied, as just as a *capitalist* order can be, though still, if Macpherson is right, not a perfectly just society or an ideal society, then Rawls would have gone some way toward achieving his purpose of establishing principles of justice which (a) are not culture-specific and (b) could be rightly used to specify the design of institutions in quite different societies. If that is so, Macpherson's central criticisms would have backfired. Macpherson's mistake—a mistake which I believe is unrelated to his other arguments—is in thinking that Rawls' two principles of justice would be appropriate for a classless society.

Let us return to Macpherson's texts, all the while keeping in mind Rawls' claim that acting in accordance with his principles of justice is the rational thing to do. Macpherson next argues that Rawls is assuming what Macpherson calls “capitalist economic rationality, and is dealing with justice only within the limits imposed by it” (I 92). What this conception is, is not very clear. Macpherson, following Chapman, refers to the *criterion* of economic rationality as the “optimum allocation of resources, including persons” (I 81). Chapman reads this as committing one to maximizing utilities (goods and services) in the proportions actually demanded by consumers in accordance with “the principle of consumer's sovereignty” (I 81). However, while Rawls does indeed say that his principles of rationality are the familiar ones utilized by economists and he does opt for *maximin*, it is also true that he regards his principles of justice, which are not pure maximizing principles, as being derivable from the principles of rationality. So in saying that Rawls' principles of rationality are the principles of economic rationality, it is not entirely clear what is being claimed.

Rawls' minimal contention must be that this “economic rationality,” including the economic rationality of the capitalist system—even when rigorously applied—is compatible with the principles of justice. Rawls believes that a capitalist society can be a well-ordered, perfectly just society. He believes, that is, that a society can be just and still be a society with a competitive market in which capital and labour are in separate hands and where rewards are distributed to both according to the marginal productivity of the units of capital and labour actually employed profitably to meet consumer demands. But now we are back

to square one, for it was just such capitalist production relations which seemed at least sharply to conflict with the reflective sense of justice of at least some people. Their considered judgements will be that if these are the principles of justice that such a conception of rationality commits us to, then we should conclude either that such a conception of rationality is inadequate or that there is not such a tight link between rationality, and justice as has traditionally been assumed. We should not conclude, however, that reason has shown us what "the true principles" of justice are. Yet, if we think, as Rawls seems to, that such principles of justice in such social conditions do not have these counterintuitive implications, we need not, at least on these grounds, be dissatisfied with the rather standard principles of rationality utilized by Rawls. People here have different intuitions: different considered judgments. And it is not clear who (if anyone) has them in reflective equilibrium. So we are brought back to our previous argument.

Macpherson claims that there is a further reason to reject such an appeal to economic rationality in justifying principles of justice. Very simply, it is the case that economic rationality, where functioning properly in a capitalist system, perpetuates *social oligopoly*. Such a control of commodities and services in our various markets by a small number of companies "offends against the claims of moral freedom" (moral autonomy) essential to justice. Moreover, even if, when linked with Rawlsian principles of justice, it provides the fairest distribution of income and meets best our consumer demands—in that way, maximally benefits even the most disadvantaged—such a socioeconomic system, with its attendant conception of rationality, undermines our moral autonomy by frustrating the realization of the distinctive powers of human beings, namely, their ability to "use and develop their human capacities," where men are viewed as exerts and developers of their capacities (I 87). Indeed it is, Macpherson claims, in the use and development of their distinctive human capacities, where the sustenance of men's moral freedom is to be found. Capitalist economic rationality deeply frustrates the development and sustenance of these powers and indeed, since modern welfare capitalism is wedded to economic rationality and its perpetuation of social oligopoly, that social system is unjust because it is destructive of the very moral freedom that is so important to Rawls and to most reflective human beings.

The system that Rawls describes with its application of the difference principle is still unjust, even if its system of the distribution of utilities (goods and services) is the optimum system, because it is destructive of

human freedom, namely the ability and opportunity for people to use and develop their human capacities (I 86-87). With the extensive and pronounced inequality of power endemic to the capitalist system, it will remain the case that in such a system one class can and will dominate another; but this is plainly incompatible with human freedom and moral autonomy. On Rawls' own grounds this should be a telling criticism of capitalist social systems.

Rawls seems not to have much of a sense of the way power and domination are endemic to such a class system.¹⁸ Capital, as Macpherson puts it, is, among other things, *extractive* power, and "the extractive power of the owners of capital diminishes the developmental powers of the non-owners" (I 92). To undermine such a claim, Rawls would have to show that such a social arrangement was an empirically necessary trade-off without which, because of the efficiency of the system and the like, a still greater diminishment of developmental powers of the nonowners would occur. This, of course, is an empirical matter, but Rawls quite properly does not regard such contingencies as irrelevant to his argument. Yet he does nothing at all to show that this empirical claim is in fact so, and the belief that it is so, is not inherently plausible. It is, that is, not the sort of claim that can be taken as a commonplace and just asserted without careful supporting argument.

To argue, as Rawls does, that as long as we have the family we must have such class divisions and relations of dominance and submission, is not to say that therefore we must simply live with these class divisions, for while it is surely not plausible to say that we could have a culture or society without the culture-category "family," it is correct to claim we must have the bourgeois nuclear family, which is what Rawls is talking about when he talks about the family.

Marxists have pointed out how such a family is tied up with certain economic relations, and even if that claim is in some way exaggerated, there is no sufficient reason to believe that such a distinctive family structure is a human necessity (I 93).

VI

We should now consider a difficulty that Macpherson finds in the difference principle itself. Rawls tells us that, where the equal liberty principle is satisfied and equality of opportunity exists, inequalities are

just if they can be expected to work out to everyone's advantage or if they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. But, Macpherson remarks, we need to ask to their benefit compared with what and to everyone's advantage compared with what? The comparison that Rawls makes is not with a state of nature or some utopian society or any past state of society other than a recent one. Rawls wants "comparisons defined by currently feasible changes."¹⁹ These comparisons are made with societies confined within the limits of Rawls' capitalist market model. It is true that in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls does allow some comparisons with socialist societies, but only when they have market orientations very much like capitalist societies. In short, Rawls rules out comparisons with any societies not run on principles of economic rationality, but that biases his comparisons from the start.

While Rawls' system, like any contemporary liberal system, stresses the value of equal citizenship, civil liberties, equal political rights, and equality of liberty, it is worth asking, as Macpherson does, whether all these advantages, "along with the advantage to men as consumers," in such a capitalist welfare state "could make up for the disadvantage to men as exerts of all their capacities which is inherent in the work situation of employees in a system of capitalist rationality" (I 94). After all, it is at work where people spend a very considerable and significant portion of their time and energy and it is extremely important that this work be meaningful. But it is hardly an exaggeration to assert that for most people in our societies this is quite plainly not the case. And it is also plain enough that while in the West we have parliamentary democracies, we do not have industrial democracy: there is no democracy in the work place.

Given this empirical background, it is (a) not at all obvious that we should answer Macpherson's question in the affirmative and (b) it is not at all obvious that it is necessary or indeed even possible that in opting for a socialist system we opt for a system which denies these rights and liberties. There is no reason why one cannot have *both* civil liberties and meaningful work rationalized around human needs rather than around profit and in the control of those who do the work.²⁰ But it appears at least that we cannot have such meaningful work, or at least not many of us, under a capitalist social system organized around profit maximization rather than around satisfying human needs.

VII

I have for the most part followed and commented on Macpherson's remarks in his first essay. I want now, over related but distinct topics in his second essay, to make briefly some further comments. Macpherson recognizes that in *A Theory of Justice* there exists, along with the consumer model of man, a model of man "as essentially a doer and enjoyer of the exercise of his capacities" (II 343). This comes out clearly enough in Rawls' discussion of the Aristotelian Principle.²¹ Moreover, while Rawls' people are conceived of as wanting more rather than less of the primary goods, i.e., the necessary means to whatever else they may want, they still may not be infinitely desirous of more and more goods.²² And indeed Rawls' principles of justice are not principles designed to sustain a world made safe for rabid possessive individualists, for Rawls rather believes that a just and good life does not require "a high material standard of life."²³ Men are not viewed as possessive individualists; rather what they "want is meaningful work in free association with others, these associations regulating their relations to one another within a framework."²⁴ Such a stress on meaningful work resembles Marx, though Marx also stressed the need for material wealth. But the important thing to see here is the impossibility under capitalism, even welfare-state capitalism, of realizing these ideals essential for a just and good society. Yet Rawls' economic frame of reference remains capitalism. Capitalism, or something very like capitalism, is the assumed background for all of his thinking about justice. But in adopting that frame of reference, Rawls utterly fails to recognize, as Macpherson points out, that a reflective interest in socialistic systems is not in their being simply modifications of capitalist market systems, but in their being systems which have as their rationale a "rejection of exploitive property institutions" (II 345). It is there, with such alterations of the social system, where it is at least arguable that socialist systems can meet the requirements of justice more adequately than the most progressive capitalist systems. "Rawls . . . does not see the exploitive relations inherent in capitalism, so it does not occur to him that there is any more difficulty arranging for justice in capitalism, however much regulated, than in socialism" (II 345). It is just here where Rawls' account is fettered by his ignoring of social and economic realities and what we can learn from political sociology, and by his

attempting to do moral and political philosophy *sub Specie Aeternitatis*.²⁵

VIII

Lastly Macpherson asks whether Rawls' model of man in *A Theory of Justice* is a bourgeois model and whether "his model of a well-ordered or just society is what it is because his model of man is a bourgeois model?" (II 345) Macpherson argues that, appearances notwithstanding, Rawls' model is thoroughly and distinctively bourgeois (II 346). What makes Rawls' model in *A Theory of Justice* superficially appear to be a nonbourgeois model is that (a) his humans are not infinite material desirers and (b) while he indeed operates within the parameters of economic rationality, he still wants people to maximize the achievement of primary goods not because he wants them to consume more fully, but because he wants them to realize their plans of life or concepts of the good in accordance with principles of justice and to develop their capacities to the fullest. But rational men, Rawls also stresses, need as well material incentives. The importance of this is not inconsiderable in his defense of maximin. There is both the consumer model and the powers model in Rawls' account in *A Theory of Justice*, and when we reflect on the considerations brought out in this essay, they appear to be in conflict. But, as Macpherson points out, there actually is no contradiction or conflict in the fact that Rawls uses at least an ostensibly nonbourgeois model part of the time and a plain bourgeois one on other occasions; the contradiction, or at least tension, is in the bourgeois model itself. Macpherson nicely brings this out when he remarks:

The ambiguity in Rawls' model of man thus goes deep. He seems to be using two contradictory models. But in fact, there is no contradiction. For his rational moral man, the man with his own plan of life and concept of the good, who is apparently so unbourgeois (and who, it may be noticed, much resembles T. H. Green's moral man) bears the very hallmark of bourgeois man: he *both* puts a high value on individual liberty *and* accepts as inevitable a class-divided society in which class determines life prospects. Surely none but bourgeois man exhibits both those characteristics [I 346].

It may be, as I have argued following Macpherson, that bourgeois man cannot have what he wants, for we cannot *both* have extensive

individual liberty and a class-divided society. But that, if correct, shows that the bourgeois model of man is incoherent and not that Rawls' model of man is not bourgeois.²⁶

NOTES

1. C. B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 77-94; and C. B. Macpherson, "Rawls' Models of Man and Society," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1973), pp. 341-347. References to these essays will be made in the text. The first will be referred to in parentheses as "I" followed by the page reference, and the second by "II" followed by the page reference.

2. The extent of his "Marxism" is perhaps most evident in the critical discussions of his work and his responses to it in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (June 1976), pp. 177-200, and in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. XX, No. 3 (September 1976), pp. 377-430.

3. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 302.

4. Though he attacks the different principle, his principle thrust is to attack it through a discussion of class rather than to launch a direct attack. For some powerful direct attacks, see Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Rawls* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 67-71; Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 50-51; 94-110; David Copp, "Justice and the Difference Principle", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1974); and the essays by R. M. Hare, David Lyons, and Benjamin Barber in *Reading Rawls*, Norman Daniels, ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

5. Rolf Dahrendorf, *Essays in the Theory of Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), pp. 151-178.

6. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 98-102; 511-512; 530-541. See also John Rawls, "Distributive Justice" in Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman, eds. *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, third series, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 66-70.

7. Irving Fetscher, "Karl Marx on Human Nature," *Social Research*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), p. 461.

8. John Rawls, "Distributive Justice," (1967), p. 69.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Wesley Cooper, "The Perfectly Just Society," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (forthcoming).

12. Ronald Dworkin, "The Original Position," *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Spring 1973), p. 533.

13. I have defended such egalitarianism in my "Class and Justice" in *Justice and Economic Distribution*, John Arthur and William H. Shaw, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978) and in my "The Indivisibility of Liberty and Equality" (forthcoming).

14. Norman Daniels, "Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty," in *Reading Rawls* (1975).

15. Brian Barry, 1973.
16. Kai Nielsen, "On Philosophic Method," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (1976), pp. 358-368.
17. Kai Nielsen, "Principles of Rationality," *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. III, No. 2 (October 1974).
18. J.E.J. Altham, "Rawls and Power," *Cambridge Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2225 (February 28, 1975), pp. 106-108.
19. John Rawls, "Distributive Justice," in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, (1967), p. 63.
20. David Schweickart, "Worker-Controlled Socialism: A Blueprint and a Defense," *Radical Philosophers' Newsjournal*, No. VIII (April 1977), pp. 1-20; and Gar Alperovitz, "Socialism as a Pluralist Commonwealth," in *The Capitalist System*, Richard C. Edwards et al. [eds.] (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 524-538.
21. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), p. 426.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
24. *Ibid.*
25. William L. McBride, "Social Theory *sub Specie Aeternitatis*," *Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 31 (1972); and Andreas Eshete, "Contractarianism and the Scope of Justice," *Ethics*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (October 1974).
26. For arguments for linking liberty with equality, see the essays referred to in notes 13 and 14; and Martin J. Sklar, "Liberty and Equality, and Socialism," *Socialist Revolution*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (July-August 1977), pp. 92-104.

Kai Nielsen, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Calgary, was educated at Duke University and has taught at New York University, Amherst College, University of Ottawa, and Brooklyn College, and has lectured in Europe and Africa. He is an editor of the Canadian Journal of Philosophy. His books include: Reason and Practice (1971); Scepticism (1973); and Ethics Without God (1973). He has written extensively on a variety of subjects in professional journals and encyclopedias.