

# Ideas in Context

## By Frank Cunningham

Essays in Social & Political Theory



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# **IDEAS IN CONTEXT**

Essays in Social & Political Theory

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## PREFACE

Having pursued a professional career (less grandly, having been a university employee) mainly as a political theorist for over 50 years, some colleagues urged me to follow the practice of many scholars who are getting on in years to write a memoir. I am not inclined to do this as I do not regard my life as sufficiently interesting to more than myself and perhaps a few friends and relatives to merit it. However, I presume that the political-theoretical themes addressed in my writings are of interest to some. So this book is prepared in keeping with the spirit of David Hume's comment in the preface to his own non-memoir:

It may be thought an instance of vanity that I pretend at all to write my life; but this Narrative shall contain little more than the History of my Writings; as, indeed, almost all my life has been spent in literary pursuits and occupations.  
-- *My Own Life*, 1776.

The book collects a selection of writings, some edited from previously unpublished or from obscure or hard to access publications, divided by subject matters into roughly chronologically ordered sections and embedded in narrations describing national and international circumstances as well as some relevant personal ones within which they were composed. I must allow that the conclusions reached in these papers have not enjoyed universal acclaim, but they reflect my thinking when they were prepared in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. A full list of my publications is available on my website: [www.frankcunningham.ca](http://www.frankcunningham.ca).

Since this is an open access publication it may be copied and redistributed at will, a prospect I welcome. It is a publication of the Canadian Society for Socialist Studies with which I have been associated since its beginnings in the late 1960s, and it reflects some of the diversity of the themes pursued by this Society in its publications and conferences.

Thanks are due to Sandra Reim (editor of the Society's journal, *Socialist Studies*), Joe Wong and Sean Cain (production), Nikela Schwizgebel (who designed the book's cover), and the editors of books and journals from which edited versions of the papers it comprises are taken for permission to draw from them. (Particulars are given with each paper.) Useful suggestions regarding the content and format of the collection were provided by Derek Allen, Duncan Cameron, Marjorie Cohen, Yolande Grisé, Maryka Omatsu and Philip Resnick.

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## CONTEXTUALIZING NARRATIVE

The narration below places 15 papers into the personal and political contexts in which they were originally produced. They are divided into nine overlapping themes. By clicking on a paper's abstract its full version with bibliographical particulars may be accessed.

### MARXISM

*Most Canadians of my generation and a bit younger acquainted with things I've written consider me a Marxist. This is mainly due to my having published a primer, *Understanding Marxism: A Canadian Introduction*, in 1977 which received wide Canadian circulation and was used in left-wing and trade union educational forums as well as in colleges and universities. At that time I also considered myself a Marxist, and, though I came to question some Marxist theses, I still see this perspective as vital for understanding the economic dynamics of class conflicts.*

*My embrace of a Marxist perspective beginning in the late 1960s was accompanied by political activism, first in the social movements of this period and then in the University of Toronto Club of the Communist Party of Canada. My conservative, Republican parents would have been shocked by this turn, were it not that they already thought me abnormal due to my reading habits and had largely written me off politically when in 1964 I campaigned for Lyndon Johnson against Barry Goldwater, whom I believed sincere in promising to start a nuclear war, and because in 1966 I voluntarily left the United States and became a citizen of a foreign country.*

*I stuck with the Communist Party until the early 1980s largely to participate in its democratic wing, which was akin to Eurocommunism. This wing had condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and was in a finally losing battle with the Party's pro-Soviet, orthodox centre. By the time of Communist support for military attacks on Solidarity in Poland, and having come to question key Marxist views, I had decided to resign from this Party, but there was talk in the University of Toronto Philosophy Department of my being appointed its Chair, and I wanted to oblige the University for the first (and only) time to make a public Communist chair of a department, indeed, a large and prominent one, before announcing or acting on this decision.*

*I cannot say that my political affiliations adversely affected my university professional life, where I held other administrative posts before and after my terms as Chair. In 1987 Barbara Amiel, wife of the archconservative businessman Conrad Black, and a columnist for the right-wing Toronto Sun newspaper, called in her articles for the*

*University to remove what she designated a “crypto-communist” from my departmental post. I thought of taking her to court just so I could testify that I had never been a **crypto** communist, but was told by a lawyer that making this joke would incur not insignificant court costs. The president of the University then, George Connell, asked how he could defend me but agreed that it was best to ignore Ms. Amiel, who was mainly seeking attention from the University.*

*My Marxist writings during the 1970s explicated and defended the methodologies of historical and dialectical materialism. Though I would like to think that they were not uncritically dogmatic, they were certainly within the purview of traditional Marxist thinking. The flavour of these endeavours may be seen in the paper counterposing Frederick Engels to Thomas Kuhn in the next section. By the end of this decade I had turned my attention to political theory, which both drew on and in stages departed from aspects of Marxism.*

*At the World Congress of Philosophy meetings in 1983, held in Montréal, I had been a speaker with Shlomo Avineri at a highlighted session on the centenary of Marx’s death, where he and I addressed what we saw as objectionable class-reductionist aspects of Marxism. The session was chaired by Theodore Oizerman, editor of the massive *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union*. After our interventions Professor Oizerman invited questions, and long queues of Soviet and East German philosophers instantly formed to read prepared denunciations of our papers. The next time I met Professor Oizerman was in the spring of 1990 in Varna, Bulgaria at a conference organized by the Bulgarian Institute of Philosophy where he was a speaker. Again a queue formed now to criticize his defense of Marxism. I recall recognizing some of the Russian and German philosophers in that queue from the Montréal conference, but with the collapse of Communism, and lacking Oizerman’s constancy, they had converted to anti-Marxist philosophical positions.*

*The paper below was my contribution to another panel on Marxism at the 1993 World Congress meetings, then in Moscow. There some criticized it for retaining too much of Marxism and some for jettisoning too much. In the discussion published with the paper, one of the session’s organizers described me as “the new [Georgi] Dimitrov of our age.”\* While I was not unhappy with this comparison (united fronts were and are the name of game for progressives) it was hyperbolic: the extent of the influence of Dimitrov’s works (in staking out strong, even if not always successful, global anti-sectarian political practices) was quite in excess of that of mine (which as far as I can ascertain has been slight if not nil in terms of affecting democratic-socialist politics in Canada or elsewhere).*

\*Sara Luther, John Neumaier, Howard Parsons, eds. *Diverse Perspectives on Marxist Philosophy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995) 28

### “Posthegemonic Marxism” 1995

Already strained by autocracy in Communist countries, Marxism came in for increasing criticism by social-movement supporters from the 1960s and then after the collapse of Communism. The reaction of some is to reject Marxism and of others to defend “true Marxism.” This paper instead challenges an ambition of Marxism to be hegemonic -- whether as a dominant world view, a symbol of anti-oppression struggles in general, or an organizational leader of all left movements. While recognizing important achievements of Marxism, the paper argues that Marxism's pretense to hegemony should be abandoned. [\[Click to access paper 1\]](#)

### PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

*The circumstances of my employment in the Philosophy Department at the University of Toronto beginning in 1967 dramatically contrast with those of today's graduating students. I had not yet completed my PhD thesis, but was teaching a course in the Department when, while I was walking past his office, its Chair, Thomas Goudge, invited me in to inform me that a tenure-track position in the philosophy of history had opened and asked if I wanted the job. In those times Ontario universities were greatly expanding so I accepted this offer, correctly reckoning that if I didn't like the position, there would be no dearth of other opportunities. So in the subsequent Fall I began full-time teaching in the philosophy of history and the philosophy of the social sciences generally. My thesis, on “Objectivity in Social Science,” was later published as my first book.*

*Not having formally studied any social sciences at the graduate level, I solicited advice from faculty in these disciplines in the course of which I learned something of the organization of knowledge in the University. First, there were (and largely remain) rigid boundaries between disciplines such that the faculty I consulted were quite ignorant of one another's research. But, secondly, these boundaries are not hard to overcome. I suggested to my colleagues -- from Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, Anthropology, and other disciplines -- that we form a Philosophy of the Social Sciences Discussion Group. All agreed, and over the next few years we met regularly to discuss topics from the viewpoints of our respective fields. It is fair to say that we found the exercise mutually informative and stimulating, and it spawned exchanges of guest lecturers and some collaborative research projects.*

*The book on objectivity defends the claim that it is possible and desirable for the social sciences to discover truths about the social world. This project was then considered at best naïve and at worst dangerous by many theorists, some from the political right, but most from the left, who regarded claims of objectivity to be cover for oppressive ideologies. Today, with right-wing populists like Donald Trump*

*scorning truths, left-wing theorists are less militantly anti-objectivist, and I stand by the arguments of the book. It received a large number of reviews, many highly critical, but some endorsing its positions. On its strength I was cited in the "Philosophy" entry of the first edition of the Canadian Encyclopedia for my work in the philosophy of social science. (Later editions deleted this citation, quite rightly, as this book and a few articles were my only contributions to this field.)*

*The book was written in the mode of Anglo-American Analytic philosophy, which I had been obliged to learn how to deploy at the University of Chicago where I had pursued my MA studies. Not long afterwards I tempered my use of this approach, not because I considered it, as do many of my colleagues in the rival "Continental" tradition (Hegel, Sartre, the Post Structuralists, etc.) utterly useless or pernicious (let a hundred flowers bloom), but because it lends itself to obsessive attention to fine distinctions and fierce debate over trivial matters and can lose sight of the forest for the trees. At the same time the esoteric rhetoric of many Continentalist approaches makes it hard to link their theories to what they are about. It does seem to me that philosophy can and should avoid each of these tendencies while profiting from whatever strengths the approaches possess – crudely put, to address both the trees and the forests.*

*The sample publication included here is an article on the theories of Thomas Kuhn, which are often drawn on for support by critics of scientific objectivity. This publication further illustrates my continued employment of Marxist theories. In addition to the example being relatively short and concise, I thought it heuristically useful to counterpose Frederick Engels' views to those of Kuhn. Unlike many Marxists of my generation I was attracted to Engels, and even for a time had a picture of him hanging in my office. Perhaps this attraction was due to his analysis of British culture resonating with my Anglo-Puritan background as a strict Presbyterian. In his introduction to the English publication of his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels wrote:*

[A]bout forty or fifty years ago, any cultivated foreigner settling in England was struck by what he was then bound to consider the religious bigotry and stupidity of the English respectable middle class. I am now going to prove that the respectable English middle class of that time was not quite as stupid as it looked to the intelligent foreigner. Its religious leanings can be explained. (Karl Marx & Frederick Engels Selected Works, New York: International Publishers, 1968 [1892], 387.)

*I was also attracted to the clarity of Engels' writings and, in a division of labour with Marx, to his attention to anthropology and the natural sciences.*

## Kuhn on Scientific Creativity: An Engelsian Critique" 1978

Engels' approach to the sciences is deployed against Thomas Kuhn's view that theories in the natural or the social sciences are embedded in paradigms, which themselves cannot be objectively evaluated. Engels' doctrine of "absolute and relative truth" agrees that scientific theories are relative to paradigms while seeing them as nonetheless contributing to progress in thought that overcomes a paradigm's limitations. Recognition of social and political contributors to scientific creativity challenges a picture of the history of science as abstractly self-contained. Appeal to a principle of "the transformation from quantity to quality" exposes ways that the groundwork for scientific revolutions is laid in the very paradigms of theories they displace. [\[Click to access paper 2\]](#)

### DEMOCRATIC THEORY

*One chapter of the Understanding Marxism primer departs from summarizing standard, mainstream Marxist views (sometime castigated as "orthodox Marxism"), namely the chapter on democracy. Most Marxist treatments of this theme contrast "bourgeois" and "socialist" versions of democracy. In the chapter, democracy is treated as a univocal concept not class-divided into different kinds. Its main argument is that the essential difference between socialism and capitalism with respect to democracy is that for socialism to succeed it must expand and strengthen democracy, while capitalists in a liberal-democratic state must always find ways to constrain or circumvent democracy.*

*The heterodox nature of this approach did not go unnoticed by the orthodox Marxists: I depicted democracy, including in its liberal-democratic form, as a goal of socialism, not the other way around, rejected the notion that there are radically different kinds of democracy, and recognized serious shortcomings in democracy on the part of existing socialisms. Pro-Communists at the time held either that there were no grave shortcomings in these societies (at least none that had not been discarded after the death of Stalin) or that if there are tensions between socialism and democracy, the former should take precedence. Many if not most left-wing critics of Communist countries maintained that deficiencies in democracy indicated that these countries were not actually socialist. From the early 1980s I began to develop theories about the relation between socialism and democracy that abandoned the effort to put it in a Marxist context. Chief among the elements of Marxist thinking I came to reject were vanguardism and class reductionism.*

*The linchpin of all my subsequent work on democracy was the thesis that democracy should be thought of as a matter of degree. This case is argued in the first paper reproduced below, on which the key chapter of my third book, Democratic Theory and Socialism (published in 1987), is based. It was prepared for a conference on democracy at the Academia de Humanisme Christina in Chile in the Fall of 1983, that is*

*during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Unlike most other right-wing dictatorships in the Catholic world, this was not supported by the Church which converted a building across from the offices of Pinochet in Santiago to an educational institute. Academics from the universities (those not killed or driven into exile) gave lectures there, well attended by students. The conference was organized as a protest against the regime. Alkis Kontos, Roger Frydman, a French professor of economics, and I were invited as cover. (When I recounted this to my U. of T. colleague, Father Joseph Owens, he said, "Who would have thought, Cunningham, that you would ever be travelling under Papal protection.").*

*Three years later this oppositional venture was repeated, now including Charles Taylor, Dieter Misgeld, and Renato Crisiti with myself as participants from abroad. During our stay there, Taylor and I came very close to being apprehended by machine gun wielding soldiers, whom we were able to outrun. (While dining at what was said to be Pablo Neruda's favourite restaurant, we lost track of time and were on the streets of Santiago after a brutally enforced curfew.)*

*The main theorists on whom I draw in my democratic-theoretical efforts are Marx, Gramsci, Dewey and Macpherson. The second paper below is a paper given at Nihon University in Tokyo in 2007 and published by it two years later. It explains which of the views of Marx, Gramsci, and Dewey I employ. I have written so much on Macpherson that I see no need to include anything specifically on his views in this section of the collection. His theories largely figured in my three books on democratic theory (the 1987 book, a collection of essays published in 1994, and a 2019 book devoted entirely to his thought). In the last section of this collection I include a recent interview with Macpherson's ghost on the Covid 19 pandemic.*

### **"Democracy: More or Less" 1983**

Democracy should be viewed as a matter of degree and process that might spiral upwards or downwards. As an univocal concept, it should not be divided into "kinds," e.g. bourgeois or socialist, representative or participatory, individualistic or collectivistic. Even in largely undemocratic institutions, there are at least seeds of democracy to be built on. The paper further argues against elitists or those who regard democracy as inefficient and in favour of always striving for progress in democracy. **[Click to access paper 3]**

## “Class and Democracy in American Politics” 2007

The theorists on whom this paper draws are: with respect to class, Karl Marx; regarding democracy, John Dewey; and the orientation toward politics of Antonio Gramsci. Marx’s economic-based theory of the inescapable conflict between capitalism and working-class aspirations has stood the test of time. Dewey’s conception of “publics” provides a basis for addressing problems of democracy that is superior to either individualistic or communal alternatives. The centrality for Gramsci of hegemony to any large-scale political endeavour throws into relief the importance and the complexities of leadership. Essential to successful pursuit of class-sensitive politics and leadership is that obstacles to realizing a national public be overcome. In the United States the main obstacles are nationalism and racism. [\[Click to access paper 4\]](#)

### CANADA

*I don’t know when I got the idea that philosophy and political theory should be “embedded,” that is, that they should strive to relate to social and political circumstances. Perhaps this conviction dates from my having been among the Americans who moved to Canada. These can be sorted into two categories: carpetbaggers who never try to address Canadian concerns and those who recognize unique and attractive features of Canada as well as threats to them and look to defend its positive features. I landed in the latter category and undertook to engage specifically Canadian issues in my scholarly as well as in my political-activist ventures*

*In light of my adopted country being a union (albeit an “unequal union” as the Marxist historian Stanley Ryerson put it) between Franco-Québec and Anglo- Canada, beginning in the 1970s I undertook to learn French on the supposition that to be an engaged political theorist here, one needed this facility. Only later did I discover that very few of my colleagues were current with the thought of Québec political theorists or activists, whose language they did not speak, that is, that the country really was, as in the title of Hugh MacLennan’s novel, “two solitudes.” I found, however, that my language study could be put to use as a quiet revolution in Québec started to get loud with the 1976 election in that province of the separatist Parti Québécois and its referenda in 1980 and in 1995 to authorize movement toward separation, each of which was defeated by a very small margin.*

*In 1979 I proposed to the Canadian Philosophical Association that it hold a conference on this situation bringing together Franco and Anglo philosophers from across the country. Later, as chair of my department (from 1982 to 1988 and again in 1991-92) I embarked with my counterpart at the Université de Montréal, François Duchesneau, upon a project to bring together colleagues from our respective departments on an annual basis. Our inaugural event was in Toronto, where we*

*sponsored a Québec Philosophy Day with speakers from each department. The Toronto participants were surprised that the Montréal philosophers addressed neither Thomism nor Existentialism; while the Montréal philosophers were equally surprised that none of those from Toronto was a logical positivist -- more evidence of the two solitudes.*

*This then sparked an annual exchange of lecturers, later carried on by the University's Centre for Ethics, of which I was interim director in 2011. In 1990 I and Louise Marcil-Lacoste, who sadly died shortly thereafter, taught a course together on equality, meeting in alternate weeks in Toronto and in Montréal. For its last session we brought students from both universities together. My impetus for these projects was as much political as academic, motivated as they were by the conviction that progress in breaking down mutual ignorance and promoting cooperation between Québec and Anglo-Canada requires such "micro" associations.*

*The first paper below is taken from a Canadian Forum publication of reflections on the massive defeat in 1992 of the Federal Government's attempted Charlottetown Accord to forge unity in the country. The other contributors were Duncan Cameron, Kari Levitt, Mel Watkins, Stephen Clarkson, and Philip Resnick.*

*The second paper is my Presidential Address to the 1998 annual meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association. In its preparation I pursued "field trips" in 1996/7 to places where ethno-national conflicts had turned violent. In Jerusalem, Ramallah, Karachi, Belfast, and (earlier) the former Yugoslavia I met scholars and activists concerned with this topic, and I also talked with ordinary citizens. The address was well received at the session but, still a bit to my bewilderment, it has the distinction of being the first Presidential Address of the CPA rejected for publication in the Association's journal, Dialogue. The closest I got in the way of an explanation by Dialogue's (Anglo) editor was that it was not sufficiently philosophical. This experience, plus the fact that I had found myself interacting mainly with colleagues in Political Science, led to my increasing research and teaching involvement with the Political Science Department at the University of Toronto and to my cross appointment to it.*

### **"Democracy and 3-Nation Asymmetry" 1992**

This intervention proposes a nation-centric orientation as the best focus for Constitutional debates over the distribution of rights and responsibilities in Canada. It is taken that the country is composed of three nations: predominantly Anglo, a Franco nation centred in Québec, and the ensemble of Aboriginal nations. While any constitutional arrangements should recognize the rights of all citizens and be in aid of democracy, they should also recognize that there are national differences about how rights are interpreted and protected and how democracy is pursued. **[Click to access paper 5]**

### “Could Canada turn into Bosnia?” 1998

The approaches to violent ethno/national conflicts of sociobiology, rational choice theory, and René Girard’s vengeance-based thesis serve to identify elements conducive to violence: a culture of enmity, economic distress, absence of channels for peaceful negotiation, and an occasioning spark. The paper takes account of the presence of these elements in Anglo-Canada and Franco-Québec. It concludes that resolution between the Anglo- and Franco- nations will be elusive until their complicity in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples is recognized and joint action is taken to redeem the country from this originating transgression. [\[Click to access paper 6\]](#)

### GLOBALIZATION

*My engagement with the topic of globalization was influenced by my location in the “left nationalist” camp associated with Mel Watkins, Abe Rotstein, and others. In this engagement I found myself in accord with the perspective of John Dewey:*

Like most things in the world which are effective, even for evil, nationalism is a tangled mixture of good and bad. And it is not possible to disguise its undesirable results, much less to consider ways of counteracting them, unless the desirable traits are fully acknowledged. (“The Fruits of Nationalism,” in *The Later Works*, vol. 3 (Southern Illinois Press, 1984 [1927]) 152.)

*In a chapter of Democratic Theory that applies the theories of C.B. Macpherson to globalization and in several articles I agreed with the cosmopolitan theorists of globalization who saw in it the possibility of a progressive global civil society, but I disagreed that this required shedding national loyalties and nation-based politics. Both combatting the global dominance of big capital, which is informed by the neoliberal version of globalization, and nurturing an alternative, progressive global politics and culture must, I argued, start by taking advantage of the “desirable traits” of one’s own nation.*

*The paper included here shares this perspective but addresses just one of its components, namely that inspired also by Dewey of determining the conditions for a global public. It is based on a contribution to a conference on Globalization and Social Justice at Washington and St., Louis Universities in 2005. After the conference, students and a few faculty went for drinks into the late evening. Being an early-to-bed type I did not join them, but one faculty member, Deen Chatterjee, reported to me the next morning that the main topic of energetic discussion and debate among the students was over the question thrown into relief in my paper of whether there is a U.S. Public.*

### **“The Global Public and its Problems” 2008**

This paper asks whether John Dewey’s concept of a “public” can be applied to the globe. After explicating his notion of a public, the paper identifies conditions for there to be a public aiming to address the problems of global environmental threats and inequalities. Less ambitious than the conditions proposed by cosmopolitan civic republicans but more robust than appeal to self-interest, these are: shared touchstone values, commitment to peaceful reconciliation of conflicts, awareness of itself as a public, and appropriate global institutions. The paper concludes by noting the obstacles to securing conditions for a global public posed by powerful, oppositional global actors, mainly the United States. **[Click to access paper 7]**

### **EDUCATION**

*Nearly all my adult life has been spent as a university student or teacher, and in keeping with the undertaking earlier described of embedding academic pursuits in the circumstances of one’s life, this has included persisting attention to educational matters. In 2003 I contributed to a secondary school textbook, co-edited with three high school teachers, entitled *Philosophy: The Big Questions* (available for free on the web). This was part of a long, sometimes arduous, but finally successful campaign in which I was involved beginning in the 1980s to introduce philosophy into the Ontario secondary school curriculum (see the web site of the Ontario Philosophy Teachers Association).*

*Beginning in 2003 the University of Toronto embarked on a project, initiated by Innis College, to offer courses taught by volunteer professors in Regent Park, the second-largest public housing complex in the country. I participated in its organization and taught in it. During the entire period of my tenure at the University of Toronto I intervened in campus politics and wrote articles at various levels of scholarly sophistication on aspects of post-secondary education.*

*The first paper below is based on a contribution to reflections on an initiative by the University of Toronto (the Transitional Year Program) to assist people from educationally deprived backgrounds to gain university admission and to succeed in their studies there. (In it I recount the second time in my academic career that I was subjected to red baiting, the first being that of Barbara Amiel described above.) The second paper applies one political-theoretical approach to justice-related issues and disputes in universities.*

### **“University Boundaries” 2003**

Focusing on the sometimes turbulent history of the University of Toronto’s Transitional Year Program, Disciplinary boundaries and boundaries between the university and the community outside it are addressed. These pose obstacles to providing education to the constituencies the Program is to serve, especially Black and Aboriginal communities. Confronting a tension between teaching disciplinary “canons” and relating to the life experiences of those in these communities requires that the university comport itself as an agent of compensatory justice. Overcoming a boundary between the university and Black and Indigenous communities requires reorienting university stances toward them. [\[Click to access paper 8\]](#)

### **“The University and Social Justice” 2007**

Debates in general theories of justice over what constitutes a just allocation of university resources are displaced in favour of an examination of alternative visions of the proper goal of universities -- away from technocratic goals to ones of developing students’ potentials to the fullest as urged by, among others, Aristotle and Macpherson. The paper takes as examples measures to reserve spaces for applicants from disadvantaged groups, targeted hiring, differential student fees or faculty workloads and salaries, and similarly contested matters relevant to justice in universities. [\[Click to access paper 9\]](#)

## **RACISM**

*My anti-racist sentiments date from my departure from my racially homogenous and culturally racist small town for university. The total dearth of actual contact with Blacks and other visible minority people in this town did not at all inhibit its residents from harbouring racist opinions, and I was not myself immune to them. When, in 1958, I left it to attend Indiana University I found that the contrast between the stereotypes I had grown up with and actual visible minority students there was too stark to ignore. Most influential was that I fell in with people who shared my interest in reading and in general intellectual pursuits – largely Jewish students from the U.S. East Coast – and anti-racism was a central value of theirs.*

*This is not to say that this university was free of racism. The barber shops and some of the restaurants then were segregated, and in my first year there was a campaign to remove a rope in its main dining hall separating Blacks from Whites. In my home town there would have been no need for any such divide, and if there had been it would not have prompted a campaign against it, much less one that succeeded. The University president, Herman Wells (later a U.S. delegate to the United Nations) first ordered the rope’s removal and then personally tore it down. Later I learned more*

*directly what it is to be a member of a visible minority from the experiences of my Japanese-Canadian wife, Maryka Omatsu, and from stories of her community's mass dispossession and incarceration in WWII. Beginning in my student years, especially in Chicago and Toronto, I joined anti-racist activities (and I was briefly jailed pursuant to my participation in an anti-Apartheid demonstration).*

*The first contribution below was a response to my own entreaty in the 1998 CPA Presidential address for philosophers to engage with the situations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Some reacted to this entreaty by organizing a conference on Aboriginal rights, which was held in Winnipeg in 2001 at the city's Thunderbird Friendship Centre. It was attended by prominent Canadian political philosophers plus the (very) few young Indigenous philosophers who held academic positions and by several Aboriginal Elders. I had prepared the paper below for this event, but there was insufficient time to present it, mainly because the Elders spoke at great length to explain Aboriginal world views. It became apparent that they were primarily addressing the young Aboriginal philosophers, whom they feared would be corrupted by non-aboriginal theories and lose sight of their heritage. The conference was thus an education in more ways than one as we non-Indigenous philosophers found ourselves witnesses to a drama quite beyond our own professional experiences.*

*The paper does not address the nature or causes of racism in general or in abstract terms. Instead it confronts one dimension of the most pervasive, long-standing, and widespread effect of systemic racism in Canada. This dimension is the largely understudied but reprehensible situation of Indigenous people and particularly those who live in cities. At one of the academic book fairs, I asked a publisher why there were almost no books on these urban residents, even though a majority of Aboriginal people in Canada live in large urban areas. His explanation was that it is relatively easy to get government aid for publication of works about Aboriginal land claims, territorial governance, or life on reserves, but difficult to get aid for proposals to address urban aboriginal issues. Perhaps, with (belated) attention by Canadian political theorists to things urban, this will change.*

*The second paper is an intervention at a session at the University of Toronto Centre for Ethics on racism and philosophy. The origin of it and of other attempts I made to enlist philosophy in anti-racist efforts dates from a 1992 workshop on racism in the U. of T. Philosophy Department where a student, Martha Ayim, recalled her first course in philosophy:*

In a lecture my professor said: "John Locke is perhaps the greatest philosopher that ever lived. By the way, Locke didn't have a problem with slavery." When I heard this I shrank in my chair and stared at a white man I had come to like and respect. Nothing further was said about how it was possible to be a proponent of slavery and a great philosopher. So I put my pen down and looked around. White students were busy writing. Another Black woman in the row behind me stared into the drapes.

*One outcome of the workshop for me was to mount a course on Philosophy and Racism in the subsequent academic year. The course was popular among the students, who, with me, urged the Department to make it a regular part of the curriculum, which unfortunately it never did. Another outcome was to urge my colleagues to address racism in their scholarship in part by attempting to apply theories of a favoured philosopher to this topic. In 2003 David Theo Goldberg devoted an issue of the journal he then edited, *Social Identities*, to papers by philosophers attempting to do this. My contribution applied Macpherson's views to this topic and formed part of the basis of a chapter in my later book on Macpherson's thought. The paper below suggests how elements of Edmund Husserl's philosophy can be put to anti-racist use.*

### **“Urban-Dwelling Aboriginal Peoples: Oeuvres & Homefulness” 2001**

The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is drawn on to identify criteria for addressing the plight of Aboriginal Peoples who live in cities. To the Report's criteria of enabling autonomy and meeting needs, the paper adds the norm of making cities “homeful” places for Aboriginal People, and, appealing to theories of Henri Lefebvre, the paper urges that city-dwelling Indigenous people should enjoy the right of all urban citizens fully to participate in “*oeuvres*,” that is, in the life and governance of their cities. [\[Click to access paper 10\]](#)

### **Husserl's Phenomenology and Racism” 2016**

This précis pursues Edmund Husserl's plea for philosophers to engage “the true struggles” of their times by applying his own theories to racism. Appealed to for this purpose are Husserl's theory of “intentionality” and his focus on “life worlds.” The first mandates identifying what race is conceived to be by the racist. The second suggests interpreting people's understanding of races by reference to a distinction between their own and foreign “homes” and to his treatment of an interplay between traditional “grounds” and future “horizons.” Philosophers should interpret racism in these terms and defend anti-racist horizons. [\[Click to access paper 11\]](#)

## **CITIES**

*One of the interruptions of my formal education was devoted to living for a time in New York City (in 1960 if I recall correctly). At the same time, I was coming out of a period of immersion in mystical literature and had tried to divest myself of material, earthly concerns. I can date the abandonment of this aspiration to a specific time and place, namely dusk walking one evening on the Brooklyn Bridge. Surveying the Manhattan cityscape, I was awestruck by the lights, sounds, movements, and buildings of its magnificent materiality -- all things mystics are especially counselled to avoid.*

*This sparked in me an attraction to metropolises that stuck with me in the ensuing years and finally found its way into my academic pursuits in the Spring of 1993.*

*Then chairing the Philosophy Department, I was phoned one evening by the U. of T.'s President, Rob Prichard, telling me that I would be contacted by one Joseph Rotman (after whom the University's business school was later named) and that I was to accommodate him no matter what he wanted (President Prichard energetically pursued donations). Mr. Rotman's proposal was that the Department, in which he, like nearly all Jewish U. of T. students of his generation, had taken courses with Emil Fackenheim, join in some project with his Reform synagogue, Holy Blossom Temple. The Chief Rabbi of the Temple, Dow Marmur, and I struck it off, and decided to hold a conference with keynote speakers and workshops on the topic of Cities, then little attended to either by contemporary theologians or philosophers. We entitled it "The City: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives." Enthused by the success of this event, Joseph Rotman supported and participated in planning three more cooperative conferences: "Walls Within Cities," "Race and the City," and "Virtue and the City."*

*That Innis College at the University of Toronto housed the university's undergraduate Urban Studies Program was a major incentive for me to take on the position of its Principal in 2000, and I began fully integrating urban issues into my teaching and research. In addition to Aristotle, Dewey and Jane Jacobs, I found some of the utopian and European theorists, in particular Charles Fourier, Henri Lefebvre, and Walter Benjamin, of most use in these undertakings. As well, I participated in an active downtown Toronto neighbourhood association (the Annex Residents' Association) serving for a time as chair of its Planning and Zoning Committee. This experience partly compensated for my lack of formal training in urban planning by affording me street-level understanding of my city.*

*After my Innis position, I moved to a University of Toronto research centre, which had recently been renamed the Cities Centre, as its resident Humanist. (My office overlooked the historic corner of College St. and Spadina Avenue.) I was especially attracted to the Centre's involvement with the local politics, culture, and governance of the city. However, the University administration was not enthusiastic about this involvement (unless it could identify potential big-buck donors) and precipitously closed the Centre in 2013 after its 49 years of existence. Shortly thereafter I left the University and Toronto and moved to British Columbia, where I was appointed as an Adjunct Professor of Urban Studies at Simon Fraser University. It maintains engagement with local urban issues; so I have been able to recoup the sort of scholarly life I had enjoyed in the dismantled U. of T. Cities Centre, as well as involving myself again in neighbourhood activism in the West End of Vancouver.*

*The first paper in this section was given at the 2008 World Congress of Philosophy meetings in Seoul. It is based on an introduction to my approach to cities prepared for the Bulletin of the U. of T. Centre (then called the Centre for Urban and Community Studies). Thanks to the reputation of its editor, David Hulchanski, this*

*garnered attention from the few philosophers in North America then concerning themselves with things urban. The second paper addresses the much-discussed topic of urban public spaces from a heterodox point of view.*

### **“Urban Philosophy: A Pragmatic Perspective” 2008**

Urban pragmatism focuses on persisting problems for urban governance and planning. These include: balancing planning with local initiatives; promoting urban sustainability in the face of urban flux; accommodating multicultural diversity while avoiding auto-ghettoization; promoting creative cities while avoiding “golden disneyworlds;” and recognizing urban anonymity while encouraging community spirit. Essential to addressing these problems is nurturing the civic virtues of concern, toleration, and trusteeship. [\[Click to access paper 12\]](#)

### **“Public Spaces and Subversion” 2009**

This paper joins contemporary celebrations of the potentials of urban public spaces as subversive of an oppressive *status quo* (e.g. providing for radical protest or promoting democratic deliberation), and it highlights two additional potentials: facilitating fun [play] instead of work (*homo ludens* vs. *homo faber*) and nurturing habits of trusteeship. Together these challenge a possessive-individualist culture focused on productivism and private property. The paper concludes by identifying conditions for securing these features of public spaces. [\[Click to access paper 13\]](#)

## **CRISES**

*The papers in the concluding section of this narrative address two of the three major crises confronting Canada and the rest of the world at the time of preparing it, right-wing populism and the Covid epidemic. The third crisis is, of course, the threat to the world’s environment, aspects of which I address in work not included in this collection (e.g. chapter seven of *The Political Thought of C.B. Macpherson*).*

*I and all my fellow Torontonians, including colleagues at the Cities Centre, directly experienced right-wing populism with the distressing 2010 election of a reactionary, populist buffoon (Rob Ford, described in the first paper below) as mayor. This caused us at the Centre to realize that serious thinking about the nature and challenges of our city was in order. Moreover, we wished such thinking not to be left just to professional academics, but to be a collaborative effort including as well elected city officials, students, civil servants, social movement activists, and cross sections of city citizens. Accordingly, beginning in 2011 we launched a public series, *Toronto in Question*, where people from all these constituencies convened to discuss challenges such as transportation, urban governance, gentrification, arts and culture, and other topics.*

*Each session was introduced by an academic and a non-academic animator followed by general discussion. Richard Stren and I from the Centre organized these sessions which were attended by around 100 people and were marked by stimulating cross fertilization among those in attendance. The series was terminated when the University closed our Centre. We were told by one dean then that its lecture series had a dangerous left-wing bias which could turn off potential donors. One of the animators of a recent session was former Toronto mayor David Crombie, who had been a minister in the conservative federal government of Brian Mulroney thus, contrary to the dean's apprehension, exhibiting the political as well as other diversities of the Series. (Though it should be allowed that Crombie is generally thought of as a Red Tory.)*

*When I moved to Vancouver and joined Simon Fraser University's Urban Studies program, Peter Hall from the program and I approached folk from Douglas College in neighbouring New Westminster and officials of that city's government to launch a series calling it The Urban Challenges Forum, modelled on the U. of T. venture and hosted at the College. From 2017 it has held regular such sessions (including on housing, the Fentanyl crisis, truth and reconciliation, inclusive communities, systemic racism and several other challenges). These have been met with the same enthusiasm as in Toronto.*

*While the immediate context of the second paper is the Covid epidemic, its wider and personal context is the influence of C.B. Macpherson on me. As alluded to earlier in this narrative, I did not abandon a commitment to liberal democracy as I entered the world of Marxism in the late 1960's. This made Macpherson, by then one of the leading political theorists in the University and far beyond it a welcomed source of support in an atmosphere where socialism and liberal democracy were considered by many, both from the left and the right, to be as oil and water. Macpherson's cogent exposition of liberal-democratic socialism, supported by impressive scholarship, afforded me a defensible theoretical home as an alternative to a socialism / democracy dichotomy.*

*I spent a fair amount of time with Macpherson, or Brough as he preferred to be called. In addition to learning much from him, I truly enjoyed his company and that of his activist wife Kay. He was of a generation of left-wing academics marked by their refinement and civility (notwithstanding his talent for pointed criticism of opposing theories and on occasion caustic wit.) His demeanor contrasted with the relentless acerbity of some of his critics.*

*In 2012 I participated in a conference on Macpherson's Possessive Individualism held at the University of London and dominated by Quentin Skinner, one of the noted critics of Macpherson's book, and by some of Skinner's former students. Never before or since have I felt so alone, as I presented the only paper taking a positive view of Macpherson's views. My paper was on intellectual property and became a chapter of my later book on his political thought. All the other papers began with cavalier dismissals of Macpherson's scholarship. My presentation is the only one that did not receive even polite applause. It occurred to me that it was in fact a tribute to Macpherson that he could prompt such a strong reaction some 25 years after his death.*

*On this death, in 1987, Alkis Kontos and I helped Kay to move Brough's scholarly materials to the U. of T. Library's Archives. Among them is an audio tape of his lectures in the Political Science Department's core graduate course on democratic theory. Macpherson was by no means a dramatic or rousing lecturer, but these lectures captivate by their erudition and lucidity. His department asked me to take over this course, which I taught until close to my retirement in 2009. It was my favourite course, though I did not dare to try carrying on Macpherson's erudition. (Nor did I try to rouse or excite rather leaning heavily on organized student input.) I believe that the last thing Macpherson penned was an endorsement for the back cover of my Democratic Theory and Socialism.*

*The interview below with Macpherson's ghost was remarkably easy to write. I had the impression that his actual ghost was helping me.*

### **“Combatting Right-Wing Populism” 2020**

The paper reviews measures for combatting right-wing populism, including confronting its preconditions, such as bigotry, thin citizenship, and lack of critical thinking skills. Also essential is addressing economic and other sources of anxiety and offering alternative visions to those of the populist. All these measures are endorsed, though another -- embracing *left-wing* populism -- is criticized. The paper summarizes Jürgen Habermas's theory of democratic legitimacy as an example of an anti-populist vision, and it concludes by identifying things that academics can do in addition to their scholarship and formal teaching to combat right-wing populism. [\[Click to access paper 14\]](#)

### **“Interview with C.B. Macpherson on the Covid 19 Epidemic” 2020**

In this interview, the ghost of C.B. Macpherson identifies as a positive outcome of the Covid 19 epidemic that it puts neoliberalism on the defensive. This reinforces Macpherson's attack on “possessive-individualist” celebration of the minimal state and claims about the inevitability of selfishness and greed, and it supports his alternative “developmental-democratic” co-operative perspective. The crisis highlights the possibility of proactive state measures in the public interest, the importance of enhancing the quality of work as well as its remuneration, and providing openings for participatory democracy. [\[Click to access paper 15\]](#)

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*The electronic format of this document is not one with which I am familiar. (I confess to a certain nostalgia for typewriter-produced hard copies.) But perhaps this format will help make the collection accessible as an open access publication. The selection of papers in it is dictated by how they fit into the narrative and on their being of relatively short length. This means that several of my favoured papers are not included (such as “Market*

*Economies and Market Societies” and “Twilight of the Modern Princes,” in The Journal of Social Philosophy, vols. 36 and 37, respectively, both also available through my website).*

*The Canadian and World contexts within which this narrative is itself prepared are not happy ones for someone of my social and political persuasions – a generally badly combatted world-wide epidemic, grave and immediate threats to the environment, the continuing abysmal situations of Indigenous Peoples, unresolved tensions between Québec and Anglo Canada, the rise of the ultra-right, eviscerated socialist and social-democratic political parties and movements, and other such discouraging things. Some of the papers in the collection may contribute to understanding these challenges and to suggesting courses of action. This is not a matter on which I am prepared to judge, but perhaps, dear readers, some of you may be.*