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The presence of Aristotle in the thought of Edmund Burke and Alasdair MacIntyre: Their response to the Enlightenment and modern liberal conception of community and virtue.

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THE PRESENCE OF ARISTOTLE IN THE THOUGHT OF EDMUND BURKE AND
ALASDAIR MACINTYRE: THEIR RESPONSE TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND
MODERN LIBERAL CONCEPTION OF COMMUNITY AND VIRTUE

by

David Breglia

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research Through the Department of History in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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1997

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the similar views that Edmund Burke and Alasdair MacIntyre advance concerning the relationship between the individual and society. In spite of the fact that they are products of different historical and philosophical ages, they nonetheless advocate many analogous ideas on the issue of community. Burke and MacIntyre are influenced by Aristotelian ethics and politics in shaping their attitudes on the nature of the community. Among the Aristotelian ideas they exploit include the use of prudence in political and moral decision-making, their insistence on the need for a teleology and the importance of gradual rather than revolutionary change in the institutions of society.

Burke and MacIntyre target what they believe to be the unfounded and irrational ideas of Enlightenment and modern liberal culture, which claimed that morals should be evaluated from a purely individualistic standpoint, free from any influence of communal practices. Enlightenment and modern liberal culture has, in the view of Burke and MacIntyre, undermined the notion of a virtue-centred system of ethics (the Aristotelian-Christian and Aristotelian-Thomistic conceptions of virtue in particular). It has, furthermore, put moral and political society on unstable foundations.

Burke and MacIntyre turn to Aristotle to advance arguments in defense of a virtue-centred system of ethics. Aristotle provides them with the fundamentals necessary to foster a virtue-
centred society, such as giving priority to the good of the community over the rights of individuals, respect for one's past history from both the individual and larger political perspective, and for the established habits of one's particular community. Burke and MacIntyre, ultimately, hold the necessary convictions concerning the relationship between the individual and the community for one to evaluate their moral and even political philosophy as conservative.
DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this to all those people who have given me support in this challenging undertaking, and in the spirit of the narrative, my thesis committee, Suzanne, and my immediate family in particular.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to the three professors on my Thesis Committee, without which this work could never have been undertaken. Without their support and constructive criticism, my understanding of the subject would be even more minuscule than it presently is. As such, I want to recognize them in helping me through this work. Thank you for all your help: Dr. D. Klinck (Department of History and my Thesis Advisor), Dr. L. Howsam (Department of History) and Dr. R. Nelson (Department of Political Science).
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................... iii
DEDICATION ........................................................................... v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................ vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................... vii

PREFACE

Setting the Parameters and Acknowledging the Problems ..... 1

I. The Genesis of This Project .............................................. 1

II. Aristotle as the Common Link
    Between Burke and MacIntyre ............................................ 4

III. Acknowledging the Limitations ....................................... 5

IV. The Presentation of This Thesis ...................................... 9

CHAPTER ONE

Insights into the Reality of Enlightenment Culture ............ 11

I. The Rational Moral Objectives of the
    Enlightenment and its Historical Treatment .................. 11

II. A Definition of the Enlightenment and the
    Intellectual Influences of the Movement ....................... 12

III. The Moral Philosophy of Diderot and d’Holbach:
    Two Enlightenment Thinkers Who Attempted to
    Replace the Traditional Aristotelian-Christian
    Conception of Virtue and Ethics .................................. 18

IV. Solidifying the Moral Consequences of Trying to
    Replace the Aristotelian-Christian Conception of
    Virtue: The Moral Philosophy of Rousseau and
    Kant ............................................................................... 30
V. Conclusion ................................................................. 40

CHAPTER TWO

An Examination of Some of the Relevant Aspects of
Aristotle's Ethics and Politics ........................................ 41
I. The Essential Concepts Governing Aristotle's
Ethics and Politics ....................................................... 41
II. Conclusion ............................................................... 48

CHAPTER THREE

Aristotelianism in the Thought of Burke and MacIntyre .... 49
I. The Presence of Aristotelian Ethics and Politics
   in Burke's Philosophy ................................................ 50
II. Why Understanding Burke as an Aristotelian is More
   Attractive Than as a Lockean or a Humean ................. 65
III. The Presence of Aristotelian Ethics and Politics
    in MacIntyre's Communitarian Philosophy .................. 72
IV. Conclusion ............................................................... 78

CHAPTER FOUR

Burke and MacIntyre: Rationality, Rights and
Their Critique of the Enlightenment on These Issues ...... 79
I. Burke, Rationality and the Enlightenment .................... 79
II. MacIntyre, Rationality and the Enlightenment ............. 83
III. Burke, MacIntyre, and Their Approach to Rights ........ 92
IV. Burke and Rights ....................................................... 92
V. MacIntyre and Rights ............................................... 97
VI. Conclusion and Final Remarks .................................. 101
CHAPTER FIVE
Community and Tradition in the Language of
Burke and MacIntyre: Their Alternative to
the 'Enlightenment Project' .................................. 106
I. Burke's 'Prescription' and MacIntyre's
   'Narrative-Self' .......................................... 106
II. Burke's 'Manners' and MacIntyre's 'Practices' ...... 117
III. Conclusion ................................................. 120
CONCLUSION
Final Remarks Concerning the Aristotelian Parallels
in the Thought of Burke and MacIntyre ................. 122
APPENDIX A
Further Evidence of Aristotle's Influence
in Burke's Writings, Speeches and Correspondence ...... 129
I. The Importance of Considering Immediate
   Circumstances in Moral and Political
   Decision-Making ........................................... 129
II. Prudence ..................................................... 130
III. Burke's Disdain for Abstract Reasoning
    When it is Not Embodied Within a Tradition ........ 131
IV. The Importance of Gradual Change
    in Morals and Politics .................................. 131
BIBLIOGRAPHY
I. Primary Sources ............................................ 133
II. Secondary Sources ....................................... 134
VITA AUCTORIS ................................................. 139
PREFACE

Setting the Parameters and Acknowledging the Limitations

I. The Genesis of This Project

The philosophical issues involved in the contemporary communitarian-liberal debate are, I think, not all that far removed from the debate that occurred between Edmund Burke and Enlightenment culture, especially with respect to France. The central questions in these two similar debates involve the relationship between the individual and society. Enlightenment and modern liberal thought, in general, emphasize that the individual is an asocial being whose beliefs and values are shaped independently of the community; they want no ties with tradition. Edmund Burke and contemporary communitarians, on the contrary, understand the individual as a naturally social being whose character and values are at least partially determined by the community in which one lives; they argue that our tradition and natural membership in the community play an important role in establishing who we are as human beings.

Of all modern communitarians, Alasdair MacIntyre has most frequently been compared to Burke. In Robert Wokler’s essay, "Projecting the Enlightenment," he contends that MacIntyre’s three main communitarian works - After Virtue (1981), Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (1988) and Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry (1990),

comprise an extraordinary indictment of the theoretical and practical legacy of
eighteenth-century philosophy, as comprehensive as any among the numerous criticisms produced over the last half-century, and among the most trenchant since Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*...¹

In his insightful essay "The Renewal of Tradition: Burke, Aristotle and the Humanities," Frederick S. Troy wants to "examine the moral philosophy of Aristotle as it is set forth in MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*, as well as in the thought of Edmund Burke, who is one of the last powerful exponents of the Aristotelian tradition in the modern world."²

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre claims that the rational and moral objectives of what he refers to as the 'Enlightenment Project', were destined to fail. This resulted in the destruction of a virtue-centred society. To be clear, a virtue-centred or virtue-based society denotes a rational moral system where there is a common understanding among those in a community as to what actions are considered right and wrong. Preserving an essentially Aristotelian virtue-based moral society enables individuals to distinguish between what they are and what they can be and move


from one state to the other. In a virtue-centred society, therefore, there is some sense of rational moral objectivity. Western European cultures preceding the Enlightenment Project were virtue-centred societies. Roger Paden claims that "MacIntyre, along with Burke and present day neo-conservatives, has uncritically accepted the interpretation of the Enlightenment first offered by the Enlightenment thinkers themselves."¹ In his article "The Enlightenment Project: After Virtue," David Rasmussen wants to consider MacIntyre's "neo-Burkean claim that the enlightenment project failed, with the resultant claim that the modern tradition of ethics have met their end..."² MacIntyre, like Burke, thinks that the Enlightenment Project failed in its moral aspirations. MacIntyre argues further that because of this failure, it consequently had grave repercussions on modern ethics. These are only a fraction of the available sources that have associated the ideas of Burke and MacIntyre together.

However, in spite of these comparisons between the two thinkers, MacIntyre nevertheless attempts to dissociate his own ideas from those of Burke. For instance, he criticizes Burke for theorizing shoddily about tradition.³ He attempts to put the greatest possible distance between Burke's ideas and his own.  How,


then, can one explain the affinities that scholars have found between them?

II. Aristotle as the Common Link Between Burke and MacIntyre

It is the comparisons that scholars have made between the ideas of these two thinkers, combined with MacIntyre’s own personal disdain of Burke’s theories, which have motivated me to investigate the parallels between Burke’s moral and political convictions and MacIntyre’s brand of communitarianism. This thesis will show that notwithstanding the great discrepancy in time and place, they approach the nature of the individual and society in a fundamentally similar way. Many of their principal beliefs are rooted in Aristotelian ethics and politics. Evidence for this can be found in their combination of practical and metaphysical reasoning, their use of teleology, and their emphasis on gradual rather than revolutionary moral and political change. They employ these views to attack the antithetical values of Enlightenment and modern liberal culture such as the commitment to constructing a rational morality free from historical and social contexts. In their view, these Enlightenment thinkers created a rational moral system independent of any specific comprehension of one’s nature or purpose.⁶

Burke and MacIntyre favour the Aristotelian ethical and political tradition as an alternative to the liberal-individualist

society of Enlightenment and modern liberal culture. I want to show that the similarities that exist in the philosophy of Burke and MacIntyre are based on their adoption of Aristotelian ethics and politics. A brief discussion of these aspects of Aristotle's philosophy is therefore necessary. A substantial portion of Chapter Two is devoted to these ideas of Aristotle, which Burke and MacIntyre feed upon and exploit in their thoughts regarding the relationship between the individual and the community. Particular attention is given to the Aristotle's notions regarding the importance of circumstances in making decisions, prudence, teleology, and the significance of gradual moral and political change. It will be seen that Burke and MacIntyre give expression to these Aristotelian trademarks in their own distinctive intellectual contexts.

III. Acknowledging the Limitations

There are several issues and limitations in this thesis that need to be discussed. One shortcoming of this work pertains to my usage of MacIntyre's work. Only since 1981, with the publication of After Virtue, has he been considered a communitarian and a critic of Enlightenment culture. Throughout his lengthy academic life, in fact, he has published on an array of subjects ranging from Marxism and Christianity to medical ethics. I have, therefore, concentrated primarily on his arguments from After Virtue because of its focus on Aristotelian ethics and politics, and its searing attack against Enlightenment ethical culture.

Also, his other major communitarian works are less critical of
Enlightenment culture. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre censures these Enlightenment thinkers because of their rejection of the Aristotelian ethical and political tenets that have been described above. He argues that unless we adopt a qualified Aristotelianism, we will continue to perpetuate the arbitrary moral values characteristic of modernity. Only by looking to Aristotelian ethical and political tradition, with its teleology and practical reason, can we be rescued from our disquieting contemporary moral situation.

Perhaps recognizing the difficulty of any realistic revival of the Aristotelian principles he advocates, MacIntyre turns to Thomism in his later communitarian works, where he accepts the Enlightenment as a tradition. MacIntyre is attracted to and employs Thomistic philosophy in his later communitarian works because it has what Aristotelian philosophy lacks, the potential to resolve tensions between rival traditions. MacIntyre prefers Thomism to Aristotelianism in his later communitarian writings because it possesses the cognitive and intellectual wherewithal required for the rational resolution of tensions within and between earlier traditions. He shows this to be the case in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* where he claims that the crisis between

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7 Lyle Downing and Robert Thigpen, "After Telos: The Implications of MacIntyre's Attempt to Restore the Concept in *After Virtue*," in *Social Theory and Practice* X (Spring 1984), p. 39.

8 John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After," in *After MacIntyre*, p. 3.

9 Ibid.
Aristotelianism and Augustinianism was resolved by the emergent Thomistic tradition. The hero in *After Virtue* is Aristotle, but the hero in his later major communitarian works is Aquinas. Indeed, MacIntyre's adoption of a Thomistic conception of tradition markedly changes the dynamics of the arguments he first advanced in *After Virtue*. For these reasons, I have largely limited my evaluation of MacIntyre to *After Virtue* because it contains his strongest ties to Aristotle.

Another point that must be addressed concerns Burkean scholarship. Since Burke has been written on so extensively, I am inclined to interpret Burke in a way that is most conducive to bring out the similarities between his own and MacIntyre's ideas. In fact, I have found Burke's views to be situated within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, much in the same way that Francis Canavan (*Political Reason of Edmund Burke* [1960] and *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* [1987]), and Peter Stanlis (*Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* [1958] and *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution* [1991]) have argued (although it should be noted that Stanlis understands Burke's thought as principally Thomistic). By the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, I mean that Burke's moral, political and social philosophy is shaped to a large extent by the Classical and Scholastic Natural Law and relates it to the challenges of human existence. As Francis Canavan writes, "students of Aristotle and Aquinas will

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10Ibid. pp. 3-4.

11Ibid. p. 3.
notice a marked similarity between their practical reason and his [Burke’s]."\(^{12}\) It should also be noted that there are two contemporary scholars who have also interpreted Burke in the Aristotelian-Thomistic/Aristotelian-Christian tradition, Joseph Pappin in *The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke* (1993) and Bruce Frohnen in *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism* (1993).

Burke has also been examined as a Lockean, a position held by scholars such as Frederick Dreyer (*Burke’s Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy*), and as a Humean, a position advanced by scholars like David Miller (*Philosophy and Ideology in Hume’s Political Thought*). These interpretations are given proper attention in Chapter Two. Identifying some of the significant problems in these accounts of Burke will lend further support to one of the central themes of my thesis, that many of Burke’s convictions are Aristotelian in essence.

Although I understand Burke in the Aristotelian-Thomistic fashion, I have generally avoided reference to Thomism except in cases where it cannot be ignored, such as Burke’s approach to rationality and metaphysics. Discussion of Thomism in places where it is not absolutely warranted would unnecessarily complicate matters. I am, moreover, most interested in looking only at the similarities in the thought of Burke and MacIntyre and its relation to the principles of Aristotle’s ethical and political philosophy. I want, in short, to emphasize the Aristotelian parallels rather

that the possible Thomistic or Christian links.

IV. The Presentation of This Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One shows the consequences of most Enlightenment thinkers' attempt to establish a rational morality free from the Aristotelian-Christian conception of a virtue-based society. This objective changed the traditional relationship between the individual and the community. What occurred was that these Enlightenment philosophers failed to create a rational system of morality that all could agree on to replace the traditional Aristotelian and Christian understanding of ethics. Moral arguments since this time, therefore, have become subjective and based on personal preference.

Chapter Two provides a basic insight into some of the significant qualities of Aristotle's Ethics and Politics. These characteristics are paramount to Aristotle's notion of the community. One needs to be familiar with these aspects of Aristotle's philosophy because Burke and MacIntyre, as it will later be shown, rely on them in developing their own ideas regarding the community.

Chapter Three explains the ways in which Burke and MacIntyre adopt and incorporate these Aristotelian ideas into their own distinctive understanding of the community.

Chapter Four illustrates how Burke and MacIntyre employ these Aristotelian ethical and political ideas against the views of most Enlightenment thinkers concerning the notion of the community. Two particular areas are examined: their evaluation and attack
against Enlightenment rationality; and their assessment of universal rights.

Chapter Five examines the parallel views that Burke and MacIntyre share towards the concepts of community and tradition, their alternative to the liberal-individualist mode of existence. Their similar use of language describing the community provides them with a comparable basis by which they evaluate the relationship between the individual and the community.
CHAPTER ONE

Insights into the Reality of Enlightenment Culture

I. The Rational Moral Objectives of the Enlightenment

Most Enlightenment thinkers rejected the notion of a rational moral existence being centred on virtue which was imposed on them by the tenets of Aristotelian-Christian ethics. Under this system of ethics there was an objective sense of "good" and "right" because morality was based on a higher order of values which individuals and communities could appeal to. A virtue-centred society denotes a moral system where there is a common understanding of the excellences of character, thought, action, and production among the members of a community. Under this system of ethics, these qualities were sanctioned by God. With this sense of rational moral objectivity, individuals and the community as a whole can distinguish between what they are and what they can be and move from one state to the other. Teleology, therefore, is an important part of any virtue-based society.

This chapter argues that the majority of Enlightenment thinkers wanted to replace the Aristotelian-Christian concept of a virtue-based society with a conception of rational morality independent of any historical or social context.¹ These thinkers believed that human life could improve and even be perfected by attacking conventional institutions and by shifting the foundations

of moral and rational beliefs from the practices of the Aristotelian-Christian community to the conscience of the secular individual. By consistently attacking the Aristotelian-Christian conception of virtue, the traditional understanding of virtue during the period of Medieval Europe was greatly undermined. As a result, moral arguments since the Enlightenment have become confused.

II. A Definition of the Enlightenment and the Intellectual Influences of the Movement

Before going any further, we need to generally define what most Enlightenment thinkers essentially represented. It can be claimed that they represented a group of writers and intellectuals who worked self-consciously for over a century to enlighten people, using critical reason to emancipate minds from Aristotelian tradition and social practice.² Included within this agenda, moreover, was their attempt to correct the flaws of social institutions and society.³

In order to understand the passion with which many of these Enlightenment thinkers wanted to change the Aristotelian-Christian notion of virtue and ethics, we briefly need to consider their moral and intellectual influences. In spite of their respect for the philosophy of classical Greece and Rome, it was the intellectual ventures of what we call the Renaissance which most

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³Ibid.
attracted eighteenth-century thinkers. It provided these thinkers with a combination of critical rationalism and naturalism. The introduction of such controversial traits led to the questioning of traditional beliefs and values. It is well-known, for example, that Machiavelli's provocative political works contain ideas that challenged the customary nexus between church and state. Machiavelli's work influenced many eighteenth-century thinkers because they found such rebellion against traditional authority appealing.

Scientific discoveries in the Renaissance also influenced Enlightenment philosophy. The Copernican revolution in astronomy profoundly changed the way in which humans saw themselves in the order of the cosmos. His discovery of the heliocentric model of the universe caused people to become confused about their proper place within it. What people eventually realized was that instead of existing within a closed cosmological system, they became captive to an infinite one.

While some found these discoveries to be liberating, others found them terrifying. Religious scientists such as Pascal understood that because of these findings in astronomy, one's purpose within the universe could have become displaced. However, he maintained that faith in God was still the most important factor of life irrespective of these scientific innovations. He argued in Pensées that

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*Ibid. p. 4.

*Ibid.
The immortality of the soul is something of such vital importance to us, affecting us so deeply, that one must have lost all feeling not to care about knowing the facts of the matter.... There is no surer sign of extreme weakness of mind than the failure to recognize the unhappy state of a man without God;...  

Discoveries in astronomy and other sciences posed important questions for people regarding the purpose and nature of their existence. Most Enlightenment thinkers, consequently, found these discoveries to be useful in developing their philosophy.

Science in the seventeenth century was also significant for Enlightenment philosophy. Emerging from these innovations was the attempt by many eighteenth-century thinkers to challenge the practical and metaphysical aspects of Aristotelian and Scholastic rationality with its newly developed universalism.

The development of Cartesian rationalism and Baconian empiricism provided the Enlightenment with the means to create new systems of thought. These systems fostered science, but they also affected the rational basis of moral belief. Cartesian rationality, as represented in Discourse on Method (1637), encouraged eighteenth-century thinkers like Voltaire to question all rules in society.  

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In *Novum Organum* (1620), Bacon established a foundation of scientific classification based upon the observation of the external world. The rationalist and empiricist schools of philosophy in the seventeenth century flourished largely from these treatises.

The work of one other seventeenth-century philosopher needs to be considered, namely Locke's empirical psychology and theory of natural rights. Many Enlightenment thinkers were attracted to Locke's idea of individual rights because they found that entitlement free from the oppressive forces of moral and social custom endowed the individual with greater agency. His empirical psychology is fully developed in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). This work reduced the origin of all ideas to sensations. These sensations inscribed their messages in the minds of individuals starting from birth. Thus, we acquire knowledge from a clean slate, or a *tabula rasa*. Philosophically, Locke was an empiricist, but with the assertion of natural rights, his political thought can be understood as a form of political rationalism. In fact, his advocacy of natural rights endowed the individual with an unprecedented sense of power over nature and the environment. The seeds of Enlightenment culture had now been sown.

Thinkers like Descartes continued to emphasize the virtues in moral philosophy. However, he was clearly an exception to the rule. New discoveries in epistemology and science directly challenged the virtue-centred basis of existence in Western Europe in that they endowed people with the belief that they could reason
and exist independently from the influence of the community. Since Copernicus, science continued to provide humans with a greater sense of power over nature, which resulted in a change of attitude with respect to their existence in society. By the time the eighteenth century began, there was a clear change in the rational basis of moral and social convictions. Traditional virtue-based Aristotelian-Christian ethical practices were jettisoned by most Enlightenment philosophers and replaced by philosophies of materialism, naturalism and individual autonomy.

In fact, what transpired was a revolutionary transformation in the rational basis of moral existence. The Enlightenment turned to metaphysics to construct a conception of the individual as the sovereign chooser of his or her own moral beliefs. The Aristotelian-Christian community no longer played a role in fostering one’s values. Using the French Enlightenment as an example, Lester Crocker maintains that the use of metaphysics was unavoidable because of their aim to free the individual from the trammels of moral custom. He states that

Despite their professed scorn for metaphysics, eighteenth-century French writers... could not limit themselves to a mere empirical code of obedience to law and custom, for the individual would assuredly ask, "why their rules, and not mine?" and endeavour to elude
the shackles of such tyranny.⁸

Enlightenment thinkers could not restrict themselves to the mere conventions of society because it would have resulted in the complacent acceptance of institutions and impede their search for truth, the improvement and even perfectibility of human nature. Their conception of the individual and human nature was not limited to the laws of the community. Consequently, they could not strictly comply with the empirical laws of society because that would constrict their understanding of the free individual. This was the fountainhead of the metamorphosis of moral values. Attitudes of the individual’s relationship to society changed from one that was virtue-centred, where it was believed that the individual’s values were shaped partly by his or her Christian community, to one where the individual’s values were determined by secular factors or by one’s own conscience.

This shift caused a cultural and intellectual crisis by the middle of the eighteenth century. One of the effects of morality becoming self-prescribed was that theories of nihilism and the amoral individual began to appear. The Enlightenment’s adoption of this new understanding of relationship between the individual and society resulted in losing a once agreed upon rational basis of moral belief. With the onset of the Enlightenment, moral values were now chosen arbitrarily. Lester Crocker stresses how

The deepest intellectual crisis of the

eighteenth century concerned moral values. Their rejection of their authoritarian, supernatural basis made necessary a new validation of restrictions on the egoistic propensities of the individual. The profound study of human nature, which the seventeenth century had begun and the eighteenth century carried forward, increasingly laid bare the potential for evil in human nature.⁹

Since moral values became relegated to the self-prescribed reason of the individual, one could now decide independently of everything else whether an action was right or wrong.

III. The Moral Philosophy of Diderot and D’Holbach: Two Enlightenment Thinkers Who Attempted to Replace the Traditional Aristotelian-Christian Conception of Virtue

For almost all Enlightenment thinkers, the struggle for the realization of individual autonomy meant challenging traditional communal norms. This was a major factor in the transformation of the rational basis of moral values in Enlightenment thought from one that was virtue-centred to one that was individualized. One of the manifestations of this new rational morality was the elimination of the notion of God and the Christian religion. Faith was seen as superstition, and according to thinkers like Voltaire, it was a hindrance to human freedom. Most Enlightenment philosophers thought that religion consisted of rigid and

⁹Lester Crocker, editor, The Age of Enlightenment, p. 25.
irrational rules. These thinkers wanted to eliminate this superstition which was led by Voltaire's mission to écrasez l'infâme. God's existence was eventually questioned. The naturalism and materialism in the thought of Diderot and d'Holbach are good examples of this collective onslaught against organized religion.

Diderot did not have a fixed religious philosophy.\(^{10}\) His views concerning religion changed frequently. Diderot's *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* (1745) is a materialistic work.\(^ {11}\) In it, he defines virtue as a constraint of passions so that they conspire to the general good, but should never be contrary to one's personal interests.\(^ {12}\) Four years after this work, Diderot turned to atheism. However, his attitude towards God's existence was one of indifference and not of fanaticism. According to Lester Crocker, it was not until the "Calais Affair" and other highly publicized examples of religious persecution that Diderot became outspoken against God and organized religion.\(^ {13}\)

Corresponding with Diderot's disdain towards orthodox religion was his notion of morality. Diderot's philosophy contains many ethical theories, but there are two in particular that require

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\(^{12}\)Ibid.

brief examination, his concept of "enlightened self-interest," and his affinity for naturalism and materialism. In effect, "enlightened self-interest" is essentially "an attempt to unify nature and culture, through reason conceived of as culture's weapon rather than as 'the slave of the passions.'" It will be seen that Diderot's theory of "enlightened self-interest" is basically teleological, with happiness as its end. It will also became apparent, however, that his ethical theory of "enlightened self-interest" becomes problematic as a result of his atheism, naturalism and materialism. Scrutinizing this problem is important because it will show how Diderot came to challenge the moral values of the traditional Aristotelian-Christian community. It will also enable us to note the paradoxes, contradictions and dilemmas in his ethical thought.

Earlier in his life, Diderot found that the passions, self-interest, the desire for happiness, and the need for social living are the components of human nature. In Éssai sur le mérite et la vertu, Diderot argues that happiness can be achieved, but no individual's happiness can be dissociated from the rest of the community of which he or she is a part. This is the basis by which Diderot defines virtue as self-constraint for the general

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16Ibid. p. 7.

17Ibid.
benefit but which is not contrary to one’s particular benefit.\textsuperscript{18}
In his early writings, then, Diderot thought that a compromise could be established between the happiness of the individual and the community.

Diderot’s earlier notion of human nature has a utilitarian essence. He attempts to replace the traditional values of Aristotelian-Christian ethics and virtue with an ethics of society. Prior to 1748, Diderot clearly held that social experience, not religious doctrine, makes us moral beings.\textsuperscript{19} In Rêve d’Alembert (1769), Diderot’s spokesperson, Bordeau, contends that the idea of virtue must be changed from a notion associated with Christian conceptions of good into one that is determined strictly by society.\textsuperscript{20} In Diderot’s view, “good” and “right” are determined by the general community, which surpasses the immediate natural demand of the individual’s happiness.\textsuperscript{21} As Diderot makes explicit in his Lettre à Landois (1756), vice and virtue do not exist, except as constructed by and understood by secular society only.

Diderot’s definition of virtue is problematic, especially after 1748, when his atheism became firm and his philosophy was influenced by the domination of scientific enquiry.\textsuperscript{22} Lester

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Lester Crocker "A Critique of Diderot’s Ethics," in \textit{Two Diderot Studies}, p. 17.
Crocker tells us that by advancing a doctrine of rational intelligent selfishness, Diderot thought it would be possible to appease the struggle in man, to assuage the conflict between one's social and selfish nature.

After Diderot became an atheist, however, his concept of the universe and the individual's place within it, changed radically. His moral views also changed in correspondence with his atheism. He argued that our struggles, our instincts, our anatomy, our physiology and our molecular structure, are identical with those of all nature. Diderot now conceived the universe as a machine in which matter undergoes constant change, evolving into more complicated forms of life in a creative process governed by trial and error. Nature is indifferent to good and evil. Nature cannot distinguish between right and wrong because everything that is, is necessary and natural. In Diderot's conception of the cosmic order, therefore, there is no purposeful activity for humans. The reduction of human beings to terms of non-human forms of life was a result of the enthusiasm that Diderot and other Enlightenment philosophers showed in trying to undermine the exceptional status that individuals enjoyed under the Aristotelian-Christian scheme of ethics.

At the root of Diderot's ethics of naturalism is the denial

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of any moral plan or force in the universe.\textsuperscript{26} He states explicitly in \textit{Introduction aux grandes principes} (1763) and in \textit{Rêve d’Alembert} that good and evil do not exist in any moral sense, but only in the purely organic sense of survival, adaptation and evolutionary purpose.\textsuperscript{27} This rejection of a 'higher' moral plan denies the existence of God, free will, and any sense of purpose for human beings. Without God, or any notion of meaning or purpose, morality is on weak foundations.\textsuperscript{28} When free will is rejected in the moral choices of human beings, only determinism and moral nihilism can remain. Good and evil have no meaning in Nature, but their meaning for human beings is an unavoidable part of our nature.\textsuperscript{29} If there is faith in God, then purpose, plan and choice exist, and the responsibility for right choice is created, and for the determination of what is right.

What impact did Diderot's later philosophy have on the idea of the community? He concedes in "Droit Naturel," and in \textit{Apologie de l'abbé de Prêdes} (1752) that the individual instincts are stronger than the social. As a result, Diderot's ethical theory of "enlightened self-interest" conflicts with his belief in naturalism and materialism. His naturalistic and materialistic writings undermine his own theory of "enlightened self-interest" because all actions in nature are predetermined and natural. He finds no

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p. 17.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p. 23.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. p. 18.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. p. 24.
logical reason for following a concept of virtue that implies a higher order of values, a concept that in parallel fashion to Nietzsche, determined to be unnatural if we consider humans only in the light of nature. With no higher order of values for humans to appeal to, morality itself becomes arbitrary and self-prescribed, or purely determined. Diderot was one of the first Enlightenment thinkers to lead this campaign against traditional Aristotelian-Christian conception of ethics and virtue.

The moral philosophy of Baron d'Holbach attacked the Aristotelian-Christian conception of virtue and ethics even more aggressively than Diderot. D'Holbach was a devout atheist, although according to the writer D.J. Garat, it was only after he met and discussed the subject of religion with Diderot. Of all Enlightenment thinkers, d'Holbach probably mounted the most overt assault against religion. In his view, every religious doctrine posed a threat to human happiness. As a result, d'Holbach's work, particularly from the 1750s and beyond, aimed at destroying not just Catholicism, but all religions. He censured every

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conceivable religious practice, from the origin of the priesthood, to miracles and the sacraments. He went further than just criticizing religious practices, but denied God's existence, arguing that to believe in God is logically ridiculous. "Ask anyone if he believes in God," he says, "and he will be surprised that you can doubt it. Then ask him what he means by the word God; you will notice immediately how unable he is to attach any concrete idea to the word which he repeats continuously."\textsuperscript{35} By the eighteenth century, religious morality and the life it advocated was diametrically opposed to the interests of the individual and society.\textsuperscript{36} The Christian religion and its moral doctrine failed to keep pace with the shift in emphasis from the divine to the human, with the insistence of the Enlightenment belief that humans alone are the measure of all things.\textsuperscript{37}

Like Diderot, d'Holbach's notion of human nature has a utilitarian angle. D'Holbach looked to secular society rather than religion as an ethical guide. He attempted to replace the traditional values of Christian morality with an ethics of society. He argued that morality is the act of living happily in society.\textsuperscript{38} Virtue, in d'Holbach's view, could be measured only by the degree to which one's actions contributed to the happiness of the


\textsuperscript{36}Ibid. p. 133.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid. p. 134.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid. p. 136.
community. 39 D’Holbach found that

Ethics has only one virtue put before men. The one and only duty of a social being is to be just. It can be defined as a will or habitual and permanent disposition to uphold men in the enjoyment of their rights.... The rights of a man in society consist of a use of his freedom consistent with the justice he owes to his advocates. 40

To act on d’Holbach’s notion of virtue, it required one to recognize the logical flaws in religiously-inspired morality and arrive at an understanding of the moral responsibilities shaped by secular society. 41 Christian ethics conflicted with d’Holbach’s definition of virtue because religion encouraged one to despise himself or herself, to hate pleasure, to cherish suffering, to have contempt for learning, and to prefer a self-imposed ignorance. 42

Like Diderot, d’Holbach’s utilitarian conception of ethics was problematic because it contradicted his notion that humans are a part of nature. As with Diderot, understanding human actions as part of nature resulted in denying people the special status

39Ibid. p. 141.

40W.H. Wickwar, Baron D’Holbach: A Prelude to the French Revolution, p. 183. (Quoted from d’Holbach’s La morale universelle où Les devoirs de l’homme fondés sur la nature (1776).


42Ibid. p. 134.
enjoyed under an Aristotelian-Christian system of ethics. This aspect of his moral philosophy eliminated the divine spark which had traditionally defined the difference between humans and other animals.\textsuperscript{43} Instead, he was of the belief that all creatures, including human beings, are manifestations of nature. Denial that there was any order in nature planned by God meant that humans were no longer free, which meant that actions were determined according to the laws of nature.\textsuperscript{44} He asserted this idea in his \textit{Système de la nature} (1770), stating that

\begin{quote}
Men have completely failed to see that this nature, lacking both good and evil intentions, merely acts in accordance with necessary and immutable laws when it creates and destroys living things, from time to time making those suffer whom it created sentient, as it distributed good and evil among them.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

D’Holbach’s conception of human nature in his later writings is based on the predetermined laws of physical science. As such, his view that human actions are determined by nature and not one’s own free will, is at odds with his utilitarian ethics because it denied any conception of good and evil.

What were the results of d’Holbach’s utilitarian ethical

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid. p. 130.

\textsuperscript{44}W.H. Wickwar, \textit{Baron D’Holbach: A Prelude to the French Revolution}, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid. p. 94.
philosophy on the idea of community? In one respect, it was becoming more evident that the foundations of morality were changing from the Aristotelian-Christian conception of good and evil to that of the social conscience of the individual.\textsuperscript{46} In his essay "Les idées morales aux XVIIIe siècle," Gustave Lanson wrote that "It became increasingly more evident that a difference of opinion existed between what the church considered virtue and what society termed integrity. That which the church judged sinful was no longer vicious in the eyes of the people."\textsuperscript{47} D’Holbach’s moral views reflected and influenced this trend.

However, as with Diderot, d’Holbach’s moral philosophy had difficulty in handling the problematic relationship between the interest of the individual and society as a whole. Is it possible for one to subjugate their own interests to conform with those of society? D’Holbach’s moral philosophy, like Diderot’s, is problematic because there is contradiction in his ethical theories of secular society and an ethics based on nature, where all actions are determined. As far as his ethics of secular society is concerned, there is conflict between the moral norms of society and the passions of the individual. Eventually, d’Holbach conceded that satisfying the passions of the individual is difficult to ignore. In \textit{La politique naturelle} (1773), d’Holbach states that

\textsuperscript{46}Virgil W. Topazio, \textit{D’Holbach’s Moral Philosophy: Its Background and Development}, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid. Quoted from Gustave Lanson's "Les idées morales aux XVIIIe siècle," in \textit{Revue des cours et conférences} (1909), pp. 713-720.
"Men are unhappy, unsociable, and wicked only through neglect to enlighten them concerning their true interests." 48 In the view of d’Holbach, measures had to be taken to deal with those who had difficulty in keeping their passions under control. He acknowledged that there would be occasions when one’s individual passions would override reason and conscience. 49 Like Diderot, d’Holbach knew that there would be times when a person would be incapable of resisting a passion, in anticipation of the resultant pleasure derived from pursuing such a passion. 50 D’Holbach concluded that one’s actions are motivated by passions and desires, but are governed by one’s reasoning powers in evaluating the true measure of happiness resulting from these acts. 51 The objective nature of moral language under an Aristotelian-Christian system of ethics, therefore, was undermined by a self-prescribed morality. D’Holbach’s attempt to dispose of traditional Aristotelian-Christian ethics, as in Diderot’s case, resulted in an ethical philosophy that was subjective in essence because there was no higher end that one could base his or her actions on. Morality, then, became arbitrary.

The ethical philosophy of Diderot and d’Holbach provide two examples of how the relationship between the individual and the community changed during the Enlightenment. There was a movement

48 Ibid. p. 125.
49 Ibid. p. 156.
50 Ibid. p. 156-57.
51 Ibid. p. 157.
away from the traditional Aristotelian-Christian system of ethics and an attraction to moral norms established by secular society. But, realizing that the individual passions were stronger than the goods and interests of the community as a whole, morality lost its objective nature and became self-prescribed.

The fact that most Enlightenment thinkers also had faith in physical science undermined the traditional Aristotelian-Christian precepts of natural law. As a result, ideas like the existence of God and the immortality of the soul were often questioned or dismissed. This was an example of how the relationship between the individual and the community changed.

IV. Solidifying the Rational Moral Consequences of Trying to Replace the Aristotelian-Christian Conception of Virtue: The Moral Philosophy of Rousseau and Kant

The moral philosophy of Rousseau and Kant is simply too extensive for a sufficient analysis of it here, and goes far beyond the scope of this work. However, by outlining some of their central moral themes, it can be shown how they developed rational moral theories that, like Diderot and d’Holbach, altered the traditional Aristotelian-Christian conception of virtue and ethics. They created ethical theories that severed the individual’s relationship from society. However, their theories differed markedly with those of the materialists and naturalists.

Rousseau was critical of the philosophy of materialism.\(^{52}\)

The most superficial examination of the physical world shows that matter is in a state of movement. However, Rousseau believed that rest rather than motion is matter's natural state.\(^{53}\) According to Rousseau, if matter is going to have movement, it must be generated from a source outside itself.\(^{54}\) Consequently, Rousseau thought that matter was incapable of spontaneous motion, and expressed no support for the kind of dynamic materialism developed by thinkers like Diderot and d'Holbach.\(^{55}\)

Rousseau, therefore, maintained a belief in God. It should be noted that Rousseau's conception of God differed from the traditional Christian interpretation. In the orthodox Christian view, God was a vengeful Being who demanded self-denial, personal suffering and an ascetic lifestyle to qualify as a candidate for eternal life. Rousseau was critical of organized religion. He believed that it promoted a cruelly repressive morality, one that condemns any spontaneous action as sinful.\(^{56}\) Rousseau was particularly antagonistic towards the Christian doctrine of original sin. Rousseau, much like Nietzsche and Freud, thought that the fanaticism inherent some interpretations of original sin actually weakened rather than strengthened the moral fabric of

\(^{53}\)Ibid.

\(^{54}\)Ibid.

\(^{55}\)Ibid.

human beings. In asking too much from human beings and opposing our natural sentiments, Christian ethics does not create moral individuals, but only a few guilt-ridden believers.

In opposition to what he considered the orthodox Christian view, Rousseau thought that God was benevolent. Rousseau did not think that the alleged presence of 'physical evil' such as natural disasters could challenge the notion of divine goodness. In Rousseau's opinion, nature could not be held accountable for disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake in 1756. It was the mistaken decision of people to live together in urban centres instead of isolated, scattered existence prescribed for them by nature. Individuals may question God's goodness by considering his or her own selfish needs, but in Rousseau's view, a 'particular evil' may turn out to be a 'good' when seen in relation to the universe as a complete system. The supposed existence of 'physical evil' is thus no valid argument against the 'goodness' of God. Although there are several theories concerning Rousseau's religious convictions, the most significant point to know for the purposes of this work is that Rousseau's understanding of human nature was firmly rooted in the existence of a Supreme Being.

Rousseau's belief in a benevolent God resonated in his theories of human nature. Rousseau affirmed that human nature was

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57 Ibid.

58 Ibid. p. 19.


60 Ibid. p. 57.
essentially good. He re-defined the moral relationship between the individual and society by placing moral decisions explicitly in the jurisdiction of one’s own conscience and personal feelings rather than in the vested rational power of the community. He gives expression to this sentiment in Émile (1762), where he states

Whatever I feel to be right is right.
Whatever I feel to be wrong is wrong. The conscience is the best of all casuists.... Reason deceives us only too often and we have acquired the right to reject it only too well, but conscience never deceives.61

Rousseau’s conception of human goodness as natural was established largely on intuition.

A good example of Rousseau’s attitude that moral actions are rooted in one’s conscience and natural passions can be found in La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761). The first part of the novel is dominated by intense passion.62 Julie d’Étange and her tutor Saint-Preux fall in love and exchange letters which are testaments of their love.63 One is led to believe that they are a perfect match from such unequivocal statements of love like ‘Heaven has made us for each other’, ‘Never before was there such a perfect union: our

61Lester Crocker, Nature and Culture, p. 172. Crocker obtained this passage from Rousseau’s Émile, but does not cite the editor or edition of the source.


63Ibid.
souls, too closely intermingled, can no longer be separated'. Julie's father, Baron d'Étange - and a judge by profession, refuses their relationship because of his obsession with social status and rejects Saint-Preux as a suitor for his daughter. Instead, Baron d'Étange wants his daughter to marry Monsieur de Wolmar, an aristocrat and thus a qualified suitor for his daughter. By inhibiting the love between Julie and Saint-Preux, Baron d'Étange seems to be profaning 'eternal love' with the crudeness of a social prejudice that shuns the true voice of nature.64 Julie sends Saint-Preux away for a short time in the mountains of Valais, fearing her father's rejection of Saint-Preux.65 Saint-Preux eventually realizes that without Julie, his world is empty.66 Upon Saint-Preux's return, Julie decides to give herself to him as an act of desperation from her father's refusal of Saint-Preux.67 Saint-Preux remarks that it is Julie who gives him definition and substance - "but I, Julie alas! a wanderer, without family and almost without a fatherland, I have only you on earth and love alone takes the place of everything."68 Saint-Preux feels that his relationship with Julie has helped him achieve personal fulfilment.69 Although Rousseau addresses many subjects in La

64Ibid. p. 74-75.
65Ibid. p. 75.
66Ibid.
67Ibid.
68Ibid. pp. 75-76.
69Ibid. p. 76.
**Nouvelle Héloïse** it is perhaps Rousseau’s most seminal work on demonstrating that morality is established in one’s passions.

Rousseau re-defined the essence of human beings. Instead of understanding one as dependent on the moral reason of the community, he insisted that the individual was morally independent of society. One’s actions were to be governed by his or her conscience and passions. This notion of humans as morally autonomous from the community, as demonstrated in **La Nouvelle Héloïse**, undermined the traditional Aristotelian-Christian conception of virtue.

While Kant opposed an ethics based on sentiment, he nevertheless looked to an ‘inner voice’ in constructing a basis for moral action. The essence of moral action in Kant’s ethics is duty. An action, according to Kant, can have moral value only if it is performed out of a sense of duty.\(^7^0\) Kant uses the example of preserving one’s life, stating that "To preserve one’s life is a duty, and further, everyone has an immediate inclination to do so."\(^7^1\) Using Kant’s ethical rationality, if one decides to preserve his or her life only because of a moral inclination to do so, then the action has no moral value.\(^7^2\) To possess such moral worth, the action must be performed from an understanding that it


\(^{72}\)Ibid.
is one’s duty to preserve his or her life.\textsuperscript{73} A good moral will, therefore, is manifested for the sake of duty.

What, specifically, does Kant mean by acting for the sake of duty? Kant tells us that it means acting out of respect for law, the moral law in particular.\textsuperscript{74} In the \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals} (1785), Kant states that "duty is the necessity of acting out of reverence for the law."\textsuperscript{75} The essential characteristic of moral law is that it is universal.\textsuperscript{76} Morality, as Kant conceives it, consists of laws that do not admit of exception.\textsuperscript{77} Physical laws, like moral laws, are universal. The difference between physical and moral laws is that all physical entities conform unconsciously and necessarily to physical law. Rational beings, on the contrary, have the ability to act in accordance with the idea of law.\textsuperscript{78} In Kant’s view, if one’s actions are to have moral worth, they must be performed in accordance with the universal laws of morality.\textsuperscript{79}

How does Kant translate this into concrete moral life? He does so by employing formal \textit{a priori} maxims, which makes them

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid. p. 318.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid.
universal.\textsuperscript{80} The moral worth of an individual is not derived from the results of the action, but rather from the moral maxim of the agent.\textsuperscript{81} If this maxim is to confer moral value on actions, it must abide by the universal moral law. Kant explains the idea of formal \textit{a priori} maxims in his theory of the 'categorical imperative'. He articulates this aspect of his moral philosophy in \textit{The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals}, asserting that the categorical imperative is

an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This imperative is \textit{categorical}. It concerns not the matter of action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what it may. This imperative may be called that of \textit{morality}.\textsuperscript{82}

For Kant, therefore, the essential fact about morality is that its commands are direct.\textsuperscript{83} Morality should not be pursued for the sake

\textsuperscript{80}Ralph C.S. Walker, \textit{Kant: The Arguments of the Philosophers}, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{81}Frederick Copleston, \textit{A History of Philosophy}, Vol. 6, p. 318.


\textsuperscript{83}Ralph C.S. Walker, \textit{Kant: The Arguments of the Philosophers}, p. 151.
of anything else; it does not owe its value to anything outside itself.\textsuperscript{84} It is not a skill that is worth nurturing only if one desires the end that it subserves.\textsuperscript{85} 'Hypothetical imperatives', as Kant calls them, tell us how to attain an end that we can accept or reject. His 'categorical imperative', however, leaves us with no such latitude and commands us unconditionally.\textsuperscript{86} Its commands are direct and can never be ignored. The 'categorical imperative' is obligatory regardless of what desires one may have.\textsuperscript{87} The 'categorical imperative', according to Kant, underlies our ordinary moral beliefs and is also a feature of our ordinary moral thinking.\textsuperscript{88}

How does the concept of God fit into Kant's theory of ethics? The two most important factors to note are that Kant thinks that humans are endowed with free will, and that the soul of an individual is immortal. Kant, therefore, does believe in God. These factors (humans as free noumenal agents, that the soul is immortal and that God exists) are his three postulates of pure practical reason.\textsuperscript{89} There are many contradictions that arise in Kant's ethical theory as a result of his belief in God. For instance, if an action can have moral worth only if it is done out

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid. p. 152.
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89}Ibid. p. 136.
of a respect for moral law and not for the sake of achieving an end, then the belief in God may be an actual danger, for the believer may allow himself or herself to be guided by the prospects of eternal life. An instance like this, according to Kant, would be tantamount to the abandonment of morality. In spite of this possibility, Kant continues to assert that we must all believe in God and in the immortality of the soul, and it is important for our purposes to keep this fact in mind.

Kant was a harbinger in ushering in the values of modern moral culture because he advocated that they are self-legislated. Unlike Rousseau, furthermore, Kant favoured the concept of individual rights over the good of the community at large. Kant thought that the moral decisions of an individual were made independently and prioritized over the moral norms of the community.

Kant's emphasis on the notion of rights has been controversial in the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate. It has heavily influenced modern liberal thinkers, most notably the philosophy of Ronald Dworkin (Taking Rights Seriously [1976]) and especially John Rawls (A Theory of Justice [1971]). On the other hand, Kant's preference of individual rights over the common good has also been criticized by contemporary communitarians, Michael Sandel (Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, [1982]), Alasdair MacIntyre (After Virtue, [1981]), and Stuart Hampshire (Morality

\[90\] Ibid. p. 138.

\[91\] Ibid.
and Conflict [1983]) are three examples.

V. Conclusion

Most Enlightenment thinkers attempted to undermine the traditional Aristotelian-Christian notion of virtue and ethics, and thus searched for an alternative system of rational morality. These philosophers tried to develop a moral system that had no ties with their Aristotelian-Christian traditions. Regrettably, they failed to create a moral system that all could agree on. Consequently, morality could only have become subjective in essence. This has been shown by our examination of the basic moral philosophy of Diderot, d’Holbach, Rousseau and Kant, all of whom offered original moral theories to replace the Aristotelian-Christian virtue-centred community. Lamentably, we have been unwilling to make the appropriate changes to solve the problem that Enlightenment culture has passed down to us.
CHAPTER TWO

A Brief Examination of Some of the Relevant Aspects of
Aristotle's Ethics and Politics

To set up the argument of this thesis more fully and effectively, it will be necessary to examine some of the prominent features of Aristotle's ethical and political philosophy. This is required because Burke and MacIntyre, as it will be shown in the subsequent chapters, incorporate many of Aristotle's ideas concerning the community, and which emanate from these two particular areas of his thought. Thus, we need to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of Aristotle's philosophy of ethics and politics, and specifically those which Burke and MacIntyre employ in some capacity in their own philosophy.

I. The Essential Concepts Governing Aristotle's Ethics and Politics

What, specifically, are these important principles of Aristotle's ethics and politics? As alluded to in the Preface, these principles include the importance of immediate circumstances in making moral and political decisions, prudence, teleology, and a moderate view of moral and political change. A fuller inquiry can now be given to these issues.

Aristotle organized his ethical and political philosophy on the principles of practical wisdom (phronesis). That is, ethical and political decisions should be made only according to the circumstances at one's disposal. In her book The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue, Nancy Sherman recognizes
the importance of considering one's circumstances in order to achieve Aristotelian virtue. She states that pursuing the ends of virtue begins with "recognizing the circumstances relevant to specific ends... character is expressed in what one sees as much as what one does. Knowing how to discern the particulars, Aristotle stresses, is a mark of virtue."\(^1\)

In order to properly perform this task of recognizing what decisions will most effectively foster one's own well-being, the individual must exercise prudence. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle remarks that "it is thought to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous for himself..."\(^2\) Prudence is the disposition that allows one to judge how to rightly respond to specific situations.\(^3\) Since prudence is capable of producing action in regard to human goods, it is a virtue and not an art.\(^4\)

Teleology is also an important issue in Aristotle's ethical and political thought. Teleology is the doctrine of final causes, the view that developments are due to the purpose or design that is served by them. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines teleology as "the doctrine or study of final causes, especially as related to


\(^3\)Ibid. p. 26.

the evidence of design or purpose in nature." In Aristotelian ethics, this end is defined by the quest for the good life. Aristotle notes in *Nicomachean Ethics* that "if there is only one final end, this will be the good of which we are in search; and if there are more than one, it will be the most final of these." Ethics, for Aristotle, is practical. He claims that the end is not knowledge, but action. We seek to know what the good life is in order to live better. What does Aristotle consider to be this ultimate end? In his view, happiness (*eudaimonia*) is this end. He argues that happiness is an activity performed and experienced in accordance with virtue.

In what ways does Aristotle believe that humans can attain happiness? According to Aristotle, we can obtain a better understanding of happiness as an end by examining one's function or purpose (*ergon*) in society. By understanding happiness as an end, we can distinguish the means that are required to achieve happiness. He constructs an analogy between an artist and a person to explain this point:

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7Ibid. p. 65.


If we take a flautist... or in general any class of men who have a specific function... his goodness and proficiency is considered to lie in the performance of that function; and the same will be true of man, assuming that man has a function.... Now if the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with, or implying a rational principle; and if we hold that the function of an individual and of a good individual of the same kind - e.g. of a harpist and a good harpist, and so on generally - is generically the same, the latter's distinctive excellence being attached to the name of the function (because the function of the harpist is to play the harp, but that of the good harpist is to play it well); and if we assume that the function of man is a kind of life, viz., an activity or series of actions of the soul, implying a rational principle; and if the function of a good man is to perform there well and rightly; and if every function is performed well when performed in accordance with its proper excellence: and if all this is so, the conclusion is that the good for man is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue, or
if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect kind.\textsuperscript{10}

Hence, just as a good musician plays his or her instrument in accordance with the virtue of action and character, so too does the good person fulfil his or her function in accordance with the virtue of action and character. By considering the purpose of humans, Aristotle concludes that happiness is a virtuous activity of the soul.\textsuperscript{11} Aristotelian teleology, then, involves several factors: it is concerned with the gap between the actual and the potential, what is and what can be, the continual advancement of one’s intellect and character, and the challenge of developing a deeper sense of self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{12}

An important factor in ensuring the good life, from the Aristotelian perspective, is the existence of a stable political order. The maintenance of traditional institutions, in Aristotle’s view, helps secure the political community because it fosters the virtue of habit.\textsuperscript{13} Even if certain laws are flawed, according to Aristotle, it is still better to tolerate these mistakes rather

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid. p. 75-76.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid. p. 75.


than quickly change the law.\textsuperscript{14} This principle is noted in Book 2, Chapter 7 of The Politics, where Aristotle asserts that in a particular case we may have to weigh a very small improvement against the danger of getting accustomed to casual abrogation of the laws; in such a case, obviously, we must tolerate a few errors on the part of lawmakers and rulers.... The law has no power to secure obedience save the power of habit, and that takes a long time to become effective. Hence easy change from the established laws to new laws means weakening the power of the law.\textsuperscript{15}

Since habit entails obedience and requires extensive time to produce, the security of the political community may depend on accepting ineffective but long-established laws to foster the good life.

Aristotle evaluates the political community as a natural progression from the most local institution, the family, to the most important and extensive entity, the polis.\textsuperscript{16} For Aristotle, the telos of the polis is the greatest good because it has the most difficult function - to enact laws which foster citizens to become virtuous. He evokes this point in Nicomachean Ethics by asserting

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid. p. 138.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid. pp. 138-39.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. p. 54. Aristotle accurately notes the natural progression from the family to the polis in Book One of The Politics.
that political science has a most significant role to fulfil because "the chief concern of this science is to endue the citizens with certain qualities, namely the virtue and the readiness to do fine deeds."\textsuperscript{17} Politics has the greatest task to fulfil. Political science determines the appropriate institutions in society, the proper relations among citizens, and the suitable way to habituate men to proper dispositions, the dispositions which promote moral virtue.\textsuperscript{18} A political order functioning in such a manner, Aristotle claims, maximizes the chances of preserving a peaceful, harmonious and meaningful moral existence.

Central to Aristotle's conception of a stable political community is the idea that change ought to occur gradually. For Aristotle, society is extremely fragile. He advocates that a long-established system of government which follows its traditional laws and customs will help to prevent anarchy.\textsuperscript{19} In Book 2, Chapter 7 of \textit{The Politics}, Aristotle advances an argument that has conservative implications. He claims that

\begin{quote}
there are some occasions that call for change and that there are some laws which need to be changed. But looking at it in another way we must say that there will be need of the very
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17}Hugh Tredennick, revisor, \textit{The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid. p. 64.
\end{flushright}
greatest caution.\textsuperscript{20} This slow process of change needs to be done in accordance with the other institutions in society.\textsuperscript{21} Aristotle makes other references to slow change. "A man will receive less benefit from changing the law," he says, "than damage from becoming accustomed to disobey authority."\textsuperscript{22} Untested laws can be hazardous to the stability of any social order because obedience to laws, according to Aristotle, only become secure by habit, which take extended periods of time to create. So, while revolutionary ideas may appear to be attractive prima facie, they are still potentially dangerous because they have never been practically applied. Indeed, Aristotle argues that new political ideas have the capability to uproot any stable society.

II. Conclusion

These central notions of Aristotle's ethics and politics, such as using the immediate circumstances when making moral or political judgements, the importance of a teleology to guide the virtues, the exercise of prudence and the value of gradual rather than revolutionary or violent moral and political change are, in Aristotle's view, keystones to any stable political order. These ideas have endured a long history and have attracted individuals from political and scholastic life since their inception. Burke and MacIntyre, as it will be shown, are no exceptions.


CHAPTER THREE

Aristotelianism in the Thought of Burke and MacIntyre

Thus far, it has been shown how most Enlightenment thinkers rejected the traditional Aristotelian-Christian conception of virtue and natural law. The difficulty for these thinkers was that in their objective of finding an alternative secular basis for morality, they could not produce an agreed upon method of rationality. Diderot and d’Holbach thought the answer could be found in the laws of science, in the moral norms established by the secular community, or by the conscience of the individual. Rousseau believed the solution could be found by allowing one’s own passions to dictate his or her actions. Kant perceived morality as categorical laws which were always true, irrespective of whether one acted properly in regard to these a priori moral truths. This set the stage for the moral essence of modernity, where moral convictions have become rooted in personal preference rather than on any common understanding of the issues at hand. This, indeed, was a rift from the tenets of Aristotelian-Christian moral philosophy. The idea of one fulfilling his or her telos, in the Aristotelian-Christian sense, had been lost.

Contrary to the Enlightenment, Burke and MacIntyre venerate virtue-based societies. They rely on Aristotelian principles of ethics and politics to describe their ideas concerning virtue-based societies. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to show how Aristotle’s ethics and politics are manifested in the thought of Burke and MacIntyre.
I. The Presence of Aristotelian Ethics and Politics in Burke's Philosophy

Since we have already elucidated on Aristotle's ethical and political philosophy, we can now concentrate on the Aristotelian aspects of Burke's philosophy and determine why classifying Burke in the Aristotelian tradition is more compelling than other interpretations. First, in his writings, speeches and correspondence, many of his political views are analogous to the principles advanced in Aristotle's works like The Politics. Burke, under the influence of Aristotle, found politics to be the most significant phenomenon in society because it was the keystone for a virtuous and secure society. In addition, morality in the tradition of the natural law, was customarily connected with politics. As such, it was the job of the statesman to try to persuade the citizens of his or her community to act morally well. In trying to fulfil the task of the good statesman, Burke frequently referred to Aristotelian political tenets such as prudence, the moral and political aspects of teleology, and gradual rather than extreme moral and political change. These are only a few ethical and political ideas of Aristotle that Burke consistently made reference to in his work.

Several scholars have associated Aristotle's ethical and political views with Burke's position on society. Arthur L. Woehl found this to be the case in his doctoral dissertation entitled
"Burke's Reading."¹ Woehl notes that in Burke's writings, "direct evidence of a wide reading in Aristotle... are frequent."² "The Ethics and Politics," he also affirms, "appear directly in quotations and indirectly in Burke's theory of the character of men and governments."³ One can peruse almost any of his speeches or writings and find an idea that is expressed in Aristotelian terms. Peter J. Stanlis, for instance, makes the distinction that if a reader were to gather all that he wrote about revolutions, rebellions, dissent from established authority, reforms, innovations, and radical changes in the form of government in a society and to compare his observations with those of Aristotle... he would discover that practically every descriptive account or normative judgement about revolutions made by Aristotle is found somewhere in Burke's writings.⁴

Aristotle, therefore, was surely no stranger to Burke.

Burke was in accord with Aristotle regarding the importance of a legislator giving due consideration to the immediate circumstances of the political community. He asserted that

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
Man acts from adequate motives relative to his interest, and not on metaphysical speculations. Aristotle, the great master of reasoning, cautions us, and with great weight and propriety against this species of delusive geometrical accuracy in moral arguments, as the most fallacious of all sophistry.  

This concept often arises in Burke's work. He was suspicious of politicians who failed to take into account their particular circumstances when making decisions. Political ideas not particular to the institutions of his or her society are, in Burke's view, politically dangerous. He believed it was his duty to maintain the fundamental institutions and practices of his own inherited political order. By doing this, the virtuous politician preserves the proper character of his people. Giving due consideration to one's immediate circumstances allows one to focus exclusively on the issues at hand and discourages radical and potentially subversive alternatives.

Burke adhered to Aristotelian ethical and political ideas to

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6Bruce Frohnen, "Burkean Virtue and the Conservative Good Life," in *Perspectives on Political Science* XXIII, 1994, p. 4.

7Ibid.

try and promote citizens to act virtuously. It is not surprising, then, that he was attracted to the Aristotelian principle of prudence. Although there was an ambiguity in the use of the term in Burke's era, some general meaning can still be found because he used it in the Aristotelian sense. "Prudence," Bruce Frohnen remarks, "is the guiding principle of Burkean as well as Aristotelian politics. This is so because, for Burke, prudence is the ability to discern what the natural law dictates - what is fitting." Burke contends that "Prudence is not only the first in rank of the virtues political and moral, but she is the director, the regulator, the standard of all..." Burke further states that

Prudence (in all things a virtue, in politics the first of virtues,) will lead us rather to acquiesce in some qualified plan that does not come up to the full perfection of the abstract Idea, than to push for the more perfect, which cannot be attained without tearing to pieces the whole contexture of the Commonwealth, and creating an heart-ache in a thousand worthy bosoms.11

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9Bruce Frohnen, "Burkean Virtue and the Conservative Good Life," in Perspectives on Political Science XXIII, 1994, p. 4.

10Edmund Burke, Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), in The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 4, p. 81.

Prudence is disposition of a power which provides the legislator with the potential to be or not to be virtuous. It is the rational faculty that enables one to judge what is necessary for the maintenance of existing society and virtue.\textsuperscript{12} An important part of a society's circumstances include the general opinions of the people to be governed.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, a statesman who conclusively decides to act against public opinion fails the test of prudence because by acting contrary to the prejudices of the people, one questions the authority of the legislator and even the foundation of society itself.\textsuperscript{14} Burke, therefore, believed that prudence in the Aristotelian tradition will assist the legislator in making acceptable decisions.

A certain state of mind is also required to act prudently. Moderation is, in Burke's view, the state of mind necessary for a politician to act reasonably. He declares that "In all changes in the state, moderation is a virtue, not only amiable, but powerful It is a disposing, arranging, conciliating, cementing, virtue."\textsuperscript{15} One of Burke's central objectives in Reflections was to protect the moderate, virtuous life of the British, those people who lived according to the precepts of nature (and are therefore moderate),

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Bruce Frohnen, "Burkean Virtue and the Conservative Good Life," in Perspectives on Political Science, Vol 23, 1994, p. 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{13}Bruce Frohnen, Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), p. 77.
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Edmund Burke, Letter to Charles-Jean-François Deport, in Correspondence of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6 (November 1789), p. 49.
\end{itemize}
against the radical, unnatural Jacobin system and its allies in Britain. Burke thought that the agitated mind, distracted by utopian and metaphysical conceptions of political society, cannot understand the precepts of natural law, and so cannot act prudently.

There is, then, a metaphysical essence in Burke's philosophy. How, one may ask, can Burke both endorse a natural law theory and argue against metaphysics and ethical universals? Burke was not against theory per se, but rather the misapplication of it. "I do not vilify theory and speculation," he argues, "because that would be to vilify reason itself... when ever I speak against theory, I mean always a weak, erroneous... or imperfect theory; and one of the ways of discovering that it is a false theory is by comparing it with practice." The metaphysics that Burke speaks against was represented by Enlightenment and Jacobin thought. In his opinion, this moral and political propaganda was purely utopian; it had absolutely no ties to any moral or political traditions. The ideas of the Enlightenment and Jacobins were, according to Burke, unprecedented and contrary to the natural law. For Burke, the Jacobins tried to "destroy the whole frame and fabric of the old societies of the world and to regenerate them after their

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16Bruce Frohnen, *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism*, p. 79.

fashion."^18 The Enlightenment and Jacobins moved away from a virtue-based society and conceived the individual in a new way: as an entity independent from the community itself. "The radical ideology against which Burke fought so vigorously," Francis Canavan states, "was abstract, rationalistic, and individualistic."^19 It was this form of metaphysical reasoning, characterized by excessive individualism, the belief that man is essentially asocial and the rejection of ties to the particular Aristotelian-Christian conventions of the community that Burke condemned.

What, then, are the defining characteristics of Burke's metaphysics and how does it differ from the metaphysics of the French Enlightenment? While there are many factors involved in Burke's metaphysics, two main and issues must be addressed: the related concepts of order and change.

Burke's understanding of order set him apart from most of the French Enlightenment. Burke warns against excessive inquiry into the ultimate foundations of reality, and especially of society.^20 He notes that "The foundations on which obedience to government is founded, are not to be constantly discussed. That we are and here, supposes the discussion already made and the dispute

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^20Joseph Pappin, The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke, p. 73.
settled."21 In Burke's view, those who consistently endeavoured to inquire into the ultimate principles of morality and society - as most French Enlightenment thinkers did, too often undermined those principles that helped secure the moral and political order.22 Burke attacked those Enlightenment thinkers who sought to prioritize the reason of the individual over the wisdom of the community and time itself, especially if the individual tried to search for previously undiscovered principles.23 Burke's assumption here is that the principles which guide reason have already been discovered, and he notes this in several places. He tells the French in the Reflections that in the English order, "We know that we have made no discoveries... in morality, - nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born..."24 Burke takes the point further by stating that

Those whose principle it is to despise the ancient, permanent sense of mankind, and to set up a scheme of society on new principles must naturally expect that such of us who think better of the judgement of the human

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21 Edmund Burke, Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), in The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 7, p. 49.


23 Ibid.

race than of theirs should consider both them
and their devices as men and schemes upon
their trial.\textsuperscript{25}

From Burke's perspective, to search for new principles governing
society, morality and human reason, which the French Enlightenment
tried to do, is to be ignorant of the basic reason upon which all
societies rest.

The humility of human beings, according to Burke, is
increased through the recognition that wisdom brings, namely that
the ultimate nature of reality exceeds the limits of the human
mind.\textsuperscript{26} This understanding is not designed to stifle knowledge,
but rather to evoke an awe and sense of piety over the infinite
range of reality.\textsuperscript{27} Burke argues that "We fear God; we look up
with awe to kings, with affection to Parliaments, with duty to
magistrates.... Why? Because, when such ideas are brought before
our minds, it is natural to be so affected."\textsuperscript{28} There is an element
of mystery that surrounds Burke's inquiry concerning the ultimate
principles of reality, a sense that tells him that in his quest for
knowledge, he approaches not only the essential principles of
society, but to God.\textsuperscript{29} Burke asserts this point in \textit{Appeal from the

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid. p. 450.

\textsuperscript{26}Joseph Pappin, \textit{The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke}, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28}Edmund Burke, \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France} (1790),

\textsuperscript{29}Joseph Pappin, \textit{The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke}, p. 74.
New to the Old Whigs (1791), contending that "We have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special or voluntary pact. They arise from the relation of man to man, and the relation of man to God, which relations are not matters of choice." He also notes "the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race." Burke clearly advocated that God's Providence is beyond our understanding, and is shrouded in mystery, thus evoking faith. This is a good example of the basis of Burke's attack against Enlightenment rationalism, which sought to undermine religion.

As is evident in his discussion of Providence in Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), Burke does not lack a concern for the fundamental nature of reality. Aristotle understands metaphysics as dealing with the first principles of all reality, and Burke's philosophy consistently reflects the use of knowledge of some of these principles. These principles or causes for the realist philosopher, according to Frederick Copleston, are derived from an understanding of human experience. Copleston states that the

30Edmund Burke, Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), in The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 4, p. 166.


33Ibid. p. 76.

34Ibid.
metaphysician first considers the intelligible structure of things, and the fundamental relationships between them.  

Copleston's definition of the metaphysician's task leads us to the second aspect of Burke's metaphysics that must be analyzed, his notion of change. Burke's metaphysics, in accordance with Copleston's definition, is structured on gradual change, and is parallel to Aristotle's conception of change. There is, in Burke's opinion, a structure to reality, a structure which accommodates change and allows the intelligibility and reasonableness of things to manifest themselves to the human intellect. Order, for Burke, does not mean a static order, but structured change, in which some principles retain their essential characteristics yet accommodate the indispensable changes of reality.

Burke's emphasis on order does not, as many people seem to think, mean that Burke was against change. The old is not to be preserved merely for its own sake. Burke welcomed change when the essence of reality made it necessary. In his Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792), Burke states that "We must all obey the great law of change. It is the most powerful law of Nature, and the means perhaps of its conservation." While discussing the English establishment, Burke also notes that "A state without the

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36 Joseph Pappin, The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke, p. 76.

37 Ibid. p. 77.

38 Edmund Burke, Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792), in The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 4, p. 296.
means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the Constitution which it wished most religiously to preserve." Burke emphasizes change, yet grounds it in the enduring essence of things. Clearly, Burke thought that necessary change in the moral and political order was paramount to the well-being of any community. Burke does not support the notion of a purely static moral or political order.

For Burke, as for Aristotle, change should not be radical or promote violence, as it was in the case of the French Enlightenment. "Development" is a key term that helps us clarify Burke's understanding of change. Development implies that there is or ought to be an orderliness to change, not an arbitrary series of events succeeding one another in chaotic form. For Burke, change and "development" are not a result of chance. Consequently, Burke claimed that "whatever has its origin in caprice is sure not to improve in is progress, nor to end in reason." Burke's "law of change," suggests the creation of possibilities through growth. Change, if it is going to be useful, must be used with

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41 Ibid. p. 78.

42 Ibid.


the intentions of improvement and preservation, as dictated by the natural law.

Burke's notion of change and stability relates to concepts of essences, substances and natures. If we probe a little deeper into Burke's metaphysics, it will be shown that something can be altered without being essentially changed. A good example can be found in the description that Burke gives on the essence of a nation. In describing the French nation, he concludes that

The body politic of France existed in the majority of its throne, in the dignity of its nobility, in the honour of its gentry, in the sanctity of its clergy, in the reverence of its magistracy... in the respect due to its movable substance represented by the corporations of the kingdom... All these particular moleculeae united form the great mass of what is truly the body politics in all countries.

The essence of a nation is more than the identifiable parts. There is a unity that grafts parts together, that remains intact beyond the separate existence of the parts themselves. "The nation," Burke affirms, "is a moral essence, not a geographical arrangement

\[45\text{Ibid.}\]

\[46\text{Edmund Burke, First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), in The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 5, p. 326.}\]

\[47\text{Joseph Pappin, The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke, p. 81.}\]
or a denomination of the nomenclature." 48 France, as a state, exceeded her boundaries established by space and time during the Revolution. As a result, Burke declares that "France is out of her bounds, but the kingdom is the same." 49 To Burke, nevertheless, the essence of a nation is not different from but includes all the social classes, property, duties, stations, beliefs and other aspects which give the nation its identity. These characteristics, which have been too briefly described, are the essential components of Burke's metaphysics.

Burke's metaphysical concepts of order and change is in accordance with Aristotle's notion of order and change. In Book 2 Chapter 8 of The Politics, Aristotle objected to the proposal by Hippodamus which stated that citizens should be rewarded for creating innovative social and political ideas. 50 Aristotle maintained that a long-established system of government, which adhered to traditional constitutional laws and customs and avoided arbitrary and tyrannical actions, deserved endorsement for its stability in maintaining good order and reasonable standards of justice. 51 If any problems arise from such a regime, they can be properly modified through a series of timely reforms - necessary


51 Ibid.
changes made in accordance with the religion, manners, customs, and laws of the community.\textsuperscript{52} Aristotle claimed that the introduction of new social and political ideas, which claimed to improve society but were untested, appeared attractive compared to the existing order because their weaknesses had not been exposed in practice.\textsuperscript{53} He argued that obedience to laws comes from custom, and thus requires a period of time to gain acceptance. Burke, as we have seen, advances these sorts of arguments against the French revolutionaries. Aristotle and Burke, in short, have similar metaphysical conceptions of order and change.

Burke, like Aristotle, also employs the concept of teleology. Burke was in search of a final end which moral action could produce. As a statesman, his final end was that of the common good of his people. Burke believed that this was the key to virtue and happiness in political society. Joseph Pappin claims that for Burke, "The end to be sought for society is that of the common good, wherein man finds his fulfilment of his personal good."\textsuperscript{54} He supports this moral and political end in his work. In "Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll" (1774), for instance, he declares that Parliament is "a deliberate assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole, where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54}Joseph Pappin, \textit{The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke}, p. 144.
from the general reason of the whole."  

From Burke’s perspective, the common good, which is an end both individually and corporately, is a reasonable end. Burke’s concept of society was teleological as the social contract theory was not.  

II. Why Understanding Burke as an Aristotelian is More Attractive Than as a Lockean or Humean

We must now consider why comprehending Burke as an Aristotelian is more appealing than Burke as a Lockean or Humean. Scholars like Frederick Dreyer and Alfred Cobban have understood Burke as essentially Lockean. Perhaps the most important affinity in the views of Burke and Locke was the notion of the right to private ownership of property. There are, however, some glaring discrepancies in this ostensible similarity. Locke was an advocate of universal rights, which included the right to own property. Burke, on the other hand, believed that rights which are not socially constituted, are legal fictions. He was very critical of the abstract nature of natural rights, and indicates this in his writings. In commenting on the idealistic nature of natural rights advocated by the French revolutionaries, he indicates that

Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it, and exist in much greater clearness, and in a much greater degree if

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56Francis Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke*, p. 87.
abstract perfection: but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to everything they want everything. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom.\textsuperscript{57}

Burke further condemns the abstract essence of natural rights, arguing that "as the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they cannot be settled upon any abstract rule."\textsuperscript{58} Rights, according to Burke, must be governed according to the historical circumstances at hand. He defended the view that the private ownership of property in England was part of a prescriptive, traditional right, not a universal right. Although Burke and Locke were in agreement about the private ownership of property in England, their rational justification for it differed.

Burke's moral and political language is more Aristotelian than Lockean. Frederick Dreyer contends that Burke could, on occasion, cite the opinions of Aristotle and other political thinkers to support his arguments.\textsuperscript{59} He maintains, however, that Burke's periodical references to Aristotle are insufficient indices

\textsuperscript{57}Edmund Burke, \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France} (1790), in \textit{The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke}, Vol. 3, p. 310.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid. pp. 310-11.

\textsuperscript{59}Frederick Dreyer, \textit{Burke's Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy} (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1979), p. 68.
for avowed discipleship. Dreyer, however, does not provide the requisite care in evaluating Burke's language. Burke consistently alludes to Aristotelian principles in his works. For instance, Aristotle argues in Book 5, Chapter 4 of The Politics that those who are superior in virtue hardly ever start a revolution. In Reflections, Burke similarly states that "A revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good." Burke also employs Aristotelian language in A Vindication of Natural Society (1756), an early writing. In the work, Burke follows Aristotle's description of the three basic types of government: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Like Aristotle, he shows the various abuses or degeneration of each into tyranny, oligarchy, and popular despotism. Similarly, Burke was convinced that people are, by nature, social and political animals. He rejected the social contract theory that traces the social origins of man back to the state of nature. Indeed, Burke's writings and speeches abound in Aristotelian, not Lockean political language.

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62 Ibid.


64 Ibid.

65 * In Appendix A at the end of this thesis, I have listed by subject more evidence of the Aristotelian nature of Burke's ethics and politics.
Dreyer is right in asserting that an examination of Burke’s arguments can only show us what the principles were that he understood and chose to defend. A careful inspection of Burke’s writings, speeches and correspondence, however, reveal that his ethical and political ideas are more consistent with Aristotle than Locke.

Burke’s views have also been evaluated as Humean. Scholars such as David Miller (Philosophy and Ideology in Hume’s Political Thought) represent this position. For instance, Hume and Burke both give attention to the classical philosophers on the nature of ethics and politics. They do this by consistently quoting passages in their work. In Burke’s case, it is to a greater extent Aristotle and Cicero, and to a lesser extent Horace, Virgil, Terence and other classical Roman thinkers. Hume refers to an even greater panoply of classical writers. For example, Aristotle, Cicero, Demosthenes, Euclid, Herodutus, Hippocrates, Tacitus, Caesar and Marcus Aurelius are only a few of the classical historical figures that he alludes to in his writings. They both respect history, and it could be argued that it was Hume’s primary philosophical concern, as is shown by his consistent reference to history in his philosophy. They argue for conventional rights. Hume and Burke are in agreement regarding the genesis of moral virtue, as Aristotle describes it in Nicomachean Ethics: that it is

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66Frederick Dreyer, Burke’s Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy, p. 5.
derived from social custom in the community. Aristotle states, "is the result of habit, from which it has actually got its name, being a slight modification of the word ethos (custom)." Aristotle goes on to conclude that "The moral virtues, then, are engendered in us neither by nor contrary to nature; we are constituted by nature to receive them, but their full development in us is due to habit." Burke and Hume contend that the individual learns and knows not by relying on his or her own private stock of reason, but by practising a morality that is the established outcome of social experience. Hume and Burke are alike in that they have a conservative approach with respect to the relationship between the individual and the community. They make explicit references to Aristotelian principles such as prudence, habit, and virtue. Clearly, there are several parallels between the two thinkers.

One issue that divides Burke and Hume, and which most scholars recognize, is the issue of religion. Hume's position with respect to religion is not altogether clear. For example, in his essay "Of the Original Contract," he argues that "the Deity is the


69 Ibid.

70 Charles Hendel, editor, Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p. XX.
ultimate author of all government will never be denied by any, who admit a general providence and allow that all events in the universe are conducted by an uniform plan, and directed to wise purposes." He also says in the introduction of *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) that "The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author, and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion." These comments by Hume bear a resemblance to the views of Burke concerning the existence of a higher Being. Yet, in many of his other works, he doubts the existence of God. In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1776), the most carefully developed of his writings, he expresses scepticism towards the argument from design. Demea and Philo, two of the main characters, both conclude that the idea of God as the Universal Watchmaker is faulty and inconclusive. Richard Popkin, a Hume scholar, asserts that "The thrust of the *Dialogues* seems to be to question and deny the claims to religious knowledge, especially those based on the argument from design." Other essays of Hume, such as "Of the Immortality of the Soul," and

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74Ibid. p. XI.

75Ibid. p. XIII.
"On Suicide," show even more explicitly than the Dialogues his rational rejection of the central doctrines of religious belief.

While the general consensus in Hume scholarship is that he was sceptical of God's existence, Burke's case is more certain. In his view, religion was one of the most important institutions in society. In Reflections, he claimed that religion was the basis of civil society. He was a devout Christian, as his ancestors had been. This discrepancy between Hume and Burke is generally conceded by scholars. David Miller, who understands Hume as a conservative, states that "the gulf that divides Hume from his conservative successors may be seen in their contrasting attitudes toward religion." Thomas Copeland observes that although Burke vehemently disagreed with Hume's apparent unbelief, he nonetheless kept the lines of communication with him open. Copeland remarks that "even the philosophical foes of religion, he did not cast off." Burke, furthermore, informed Boswell that "I doubt keeping company with David Hume, in a strict light, is hardly defensible. But in the present state of society, I see all men." So, in the estimation of many scholars, there was, in fact, a difference of opinion in Hume's and Burke's attitude towards religion.

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79 Ibid.
Burke, like Hume, emphasized experience, in part to counter the deductionist theorists of the rights of man, who hypothesized a state of nature and a list of abstract rights to fit this state. For Hume and Burke rejected the abstract natural rights thesis. They possessed a strong reliance on experience. As we saw earlier, however, Burke endorsed the effects of nature which revealed the principle of causality. For Burke, this is the principle that leads the human mind to assent to God. It is here that Hume and Burke part company in the philosophical sense. In Hume’s philosophical writings he does not incorporate abstract knowledge. Burke, on the other hand, allowed for reasoning from principles on the condition that it was an established tradition in the community. Burke was an advocate of the Aristotelian rational method of combining the practical and theoretical.

III. The Presence of Aristotelian Ethics and Politics in MacIntyre’s Communitarian Philosophy

Like Burke’s philosophy, much of MacIntyre’s communitarian thought, is filled with the tenets of Aristotelian ethics and politics. This is especially the case with his book After Virtue. "What is remarkable about this book," Frederick S. Troy notes, "is its wholly unapologetic approach to Aristotle and what MacIntyre


81Ibid.


calls the Aristotelian tradition as a source of living and relevant truth." He further explains how
MacIntyre sees Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as a basic source of Western moral philosophy, though his appeal is not merely to Aristotle but to what he calls the Aristotelian tradition, that long period of Western culture that sums up not only the Greek experience but that of Rome, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance through the seventeenth century. Aristotle's ethical and political views are clearly not foreign to MacIntyre. Like Burke, he employs Aristotelian ethical and political principles to attack the Enlightenment and its effects on modern liberal moral culture.

MacIntyre's beliefs are centred around his use of Aristotelian teleology. MacIntyre, like Burke, has a final end in mind, the attainment of the good life. MacIntyre understands Aristotle's notion of the good life as one lived in accordance with virtue (*arete*). Virtue, for MacIntyre, is conceived in conjunction with a teleological understanding of individuals, according to which human beings have a particular nature which determines their

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Ibid. p. 619.
proper goals.\textsuperscript{66} Ethics, according to MacIntyre, ought to be understood as a science which guides us in attaining our true end through the evaluation of the virtues.\textsuperscript{67}

MacIntyre contends that since the Enlightenment, this Aristotelian conception of morality has been undermined by the rejection of teleology and the denial of the individual having any purpose beyond that which he or she chooses.\textsuperscript{68} Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume and Kant rejected the notion of an individual having a purpose which defines his or her telos.\textsuperscript{69} Where Aristotle understood the individual as an entity with a definite function which could be fulfilled or denied, Enlightenment culture and its successors conceived the individual as a being with no definable purpose beyond that of his or her own will.\textsuperscript{90}

Why, then, does MacIntyre stress the need to adopt an Aristotelian teleology? He maintains in \textit{After Virtue} that ever since the Enlightenment rejected teleology, morality has been in a state of disarray.\textsuperscript{92} He describes our modern moral predicament


\textsuperscript{68}John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: \textit{After Virtue} and After," in \textit{After MacIntyre}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{69}Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{90}John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: \textit{After Virtue} and After," in \textit{After MacIntyre}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{91}Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, p. 5.
when he affirms that

What we possess... are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts of which now lack those contexts from which their significance is derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.  

As a result, MacIntyre argues that our modern moral arguments are interminable and incommensurable by nature. He believes that our moral language is an insufficient source for moral debate because it has been reduced to emotive jargon.

Emotivism, according to MacIntyre, has been prevalent in debates concerning morality since the inception of the Enlightenment. He defines emotivism as "the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, in so far as they are moral or evaluative in character."  

Moral arguments that are rooted in personal preference rather than on moral fact are emotive in character. This has been the moral situation since the Enlightenment. As a result, MacIntyre claims that we need to re-establish some form of Aristotelian teleology and the virtues in order to rescue it.

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92Ibid. p. 2.

93Ibid. p. 11.
He develops two ideas which were designed to cast doubt on the notion of the individual as the essential chooser and to foster Aristotelian teleology in moral discourse. His explanation of these factors will show why it is necessary that we return to an Aristotelian basis of rational ethics. The first idea that will be discussed is his concept of a 'practice'. He defines a practice as any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.\textsuperscript{94}

In MacIntyre's view, we should understand morality in general, and the virtues in particular, as practice-based.\textsuperscript{95} Morality ought to be construed primarily in terms of a life embodying the virtues; and we understand morality from the practices of the community where we know what the virtues are and how they are defined.\textsuperscript{96}

MacIntyre's second idea that supports an Aristotelian

\textsuperscript{94}Ibid. p. 175.

\textsuperscript{95}John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After," in After MacIntyre, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{96}Ibid.
teleology is the concept of the narrative-self. In After Virtue, he argues against the liberal-individualist conception of the self which states that 'I am what I myself choose to be'. Against this conception of the self, which denies an individual a genuine understanding of his or her own choices, is MacIntyre's idea of the narrative-self. He describes his alternative conception of the self by contending that

man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal... the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters - roles into which we have been drafted - and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed.  

MacIntyre, then, favours a conception of the self where an individual understands who one is only in relation to others. That is, where Enlightenment and modern liberal culture stress the power an individual has to make his or her own choices, MacIntyre

97 Ibid.

98 Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 201.
emphasizes the significance of one's particular circumstances and moral context which make these choices intelligible to us. These conditions, moreover, are unchosen because they are a product of social circumstances and not strictly selected by an individual. The narrative-self, in MacIntyre's view, endows us with the capacity to understand who we are in relation to others, and the power to move from where we are to where we should be.

IV. Conclusion

Burke and MacIntyre, therefore, both look to Aristotle in shaping their views concerning ethics and politics. They are particularly attracted to the concept of Aristotelian teleology, the importance of considering immediate circumstances when making moral or political decisions, and a moderate position towards moral and political change. Clearly, in response to the moral and political developments of Enlightenment and modern liberal culture, with its rejection of teleology and virtue-based systems of morality, Burke and MacIntyre turn to Aristotle to re-assert the need for a virtue-centred society.
CHAPTER FOUR

Burke and MacIntyre: Rationality, Rights and Their Critique of the Enlightenment on These Issues

The last chapter described the common core of ideas that Burke and MacIntyre share, namely an Aristotelian approach to the relationship between the individual and society, and the advocacy of the virtues. The aim of this chapter is to show how Burke and MacIntyre employ their Aristotelian convictions to repudiate the moral and political arguments of the Enlightenment and modern liberalism. Their critique involves two fundamental issues: rationality and rights. Evaluating their arguments against those of the Enlightenment and of modern liberalism, moreover, will further implant them within their own unique intellectual contexts.

I. Burke, Rationality and the Enlightenment

It was explained in the previous chapter how it was possible for Burke to endorse the natural law on the one hand, and deny universal moral statements on the other. The universal moral statements which he attacked were typical of Enlightenment thought, which possessed no historical context and were utopian in essence. The universal statements that Burke refers to were located within a historical context and were part of his community’s traditional beliefs. Burke, as we saw earlier, is not wholly opposed to theory. Burke acknowledged the capacity of metaphysics to make use of particular principles and attitudes which were not contrary to natural law, such as his affirmation of God’s existence, and in the
principles of order and change. However, they should virtually never be used in the area of morals and politics. It was Burke’s view that those who relied exclusively on speculative reason in their application to ethics and politics, as he claimed the French revolutionaries did, will necessarily perish in the contingencies of particular circumstances. Burke, therefore, did not categorically reject speculative reason. He simply thought that it had no constructive role to play in the realm of politics. Reason, according to Burke, is properly used when one attempts to improve the already existing structure of society. In addressing the character of morals and politics, he claims that

Pure metaphysical abstraction does not belong to these matters. The lines of morality are not like the ideal lines of mathematics. They are broad and deep as well as long. They admit of exceptions; they demand modifications. These exceptions and modifications are not made by the process of logic but by the rules of prudence.

Metaphysical reasoning alone, which the Enlightenment thinkers and French revolutionaries employed in their theories, was insufficient

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2Ibid. p. 21.

to properly guide individuals and legislators. Burke feared, furthermore, that one who exclusively used speculative reasoning in morals and politics had the potential to undermine virtue-based societies that had flourished in medieval Western Europe.

The revolutionaries, under the influence of the Enlightenment, tried to strictly apply metaphysical reasoning to its moral and political affairs, without considering its own inherited historical circumstances. For Burke, this was tantamount to a utopian conception of society. He maintained, as Aristotle did, that it is the consideration of one's circumstances, and the use of prudence that are of the utmost importance in guiding statesmen in creating laws and policies which will foster the citizens of the community to act virtuously. In a letter he wrote to a French nobleman on June 1, 1791, Burke explained that it was imperative for the revolutionaries to forget about the Encyclopédie and the French economists. Rather, he informed the nobleman that it was imperative for the French nation to "revert to those old rules and principles which have hitherto made princes great and nations happy." He goes on to say that "a wise prince... will preserve them in their privileges, he will act upon the circumstances of his states as he finds them, and whilst acting upon the practical policy, he is the happy prince of a happy

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people. Burke concluded that the decisions politicians need to make must be done in accordance with society's given and 'natural' circumstances. Some examples of this include the Anglican Church and constitutional monarchy of England, the Roman Catholic Church and absolute monarchy of France, and other customary institutions peculiar to these nations. Unlike the French Enlightenment, Burke advocated the idea that it is requisite for lawmakers to consider all the particular circumstances exclusive to one's society when drafting policies.

Burke's understanding of the malleable essence of moral and political matters was not rooted in purely systematic rational methods such as rationalism or empiricism. Rather, Burke advocated that lawmakers simply work with what they are given. Bruce Frohnen states that at the crux of Burke's moral and political reasoning was the attitude that any attempt to study men without reference to their particular historical and cultural positions is idealized; it is to argue that universal truths may be found that do not rely upon and act themselves out through circumstance; it is to deny not only that man is fallible, but that he is a creature of circumstance and convention.\(^5\)

\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)Bruce Frohnen, *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), p. 46.
circumstance and convention.⁶ Burke believed that it was absolutely necessary for the French legislators to use their own specific conditions to reform the sacred and secular institutions.

II. MacIntyre, Rationality and the Enlightenment

MacIntyre criticizes the Enlightenment's understanding of rationality with respect to ethics. He argues that they failed to achieve its ideal end, to create a universally rational basis for moral beliefs, which every reasonable person would find impossible to prove wrong. This failure, according to MacIntyre, has caused the moral subjectivity that we now find our contemporary moral culture mired in. He asserts that the aim of the 'Enlightenment Project' was to

provide for debate in the public realm standard methods of rational justification by which alternative courses of action in every sphere of life could be adjudged just or unjust, rational or irrational, enlightened or unenlightened. So, it was hoped, reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the

⁶Bruce Frohnen, Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), p. 46.
justification could be nothing other than what
the thinkers of the Enlightenment had said
that it was came to be accepted, at least by
the vast majority of educated people, in post-
Enlightenment culture and social orders. 7
Like Burke, MacIntyre argues that the 'Enlightenment Project'
attempted to incorporate abstract laws of rationality without any
reference to their own specific historical context. From the
Enlightenment's perspective, as we have already observed, it hoped
that this new form of rationality would liberate itself from its
inherited traditions.

Thus, MacIntyre concludes that thinkers such as Hume, Kant,
Diderot and other participants in the 'Enlightenment Project'
failed in their rational and moral objectives. He boldly asserts,
moreover, that it could only have failed "because of an
inerasicable discrepancy between their shared conception of moral
rules and precepts on the one hand and what was shared... in their
conception of human nature on the other." 8 In order to understand
the Enlightenment's conception of rationality, in MacIntyre's
opinion, we need to briefly look at the rational and moral
foundations prior to the 'Age of Reason'.

Since the Middle Ages, MacIntyre affirms, Europe had been
dominated by a rational moral scheme that contained three


components: untutored human nature, the prescriptive habits of action entailed in rational ethics, and 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos' - or the ability of an individual to pass from what he or she is to what he or she ought to be. MacIntyre, as we have seen, subscribes to this Aristotelian-based system of ethics. "Ethics," he says, "presupposes some account of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human telos." Each of the three components, moreover, requires comparison to the other two if the function of each is to be kept intact.

When Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism emerged in Europe, they embodied a new conception of reason. Unlike the medieval Christian, Jewish or Islamic approach to reason, which had as its objective a true end for the individual, Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism embodied a new conception of reason which asserted that there was no comprehension of one's true end because it was destroyed by the fall of humans. Pascal, according to MacIntyre, was an important figure in this change in rationality because he understood that this form of reasoning was parallel to that used in seventeenth-century science. This form of rationality, it was found, could not comprehend essences from potentiality to actuality because it was not teleological in nature. As a result, it could not relate means to ultimate ends.

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9Ibid. p. 52.
10Ibid. p. 50.
11Ibid. p. 51.
12Ibid.
The advocates of this new rationality believed that teleological reasoning belonged to the outmoded and despised school of Aristotelianism and Scholasticism. Anti-Aristotelian science, MacIntyre concludes, set strict limits to the powers of reason. For MacIntyre, this new rationality was calculative and argues that it "can assess the truths of fact, but nothing more. In the realm of practice, therefore, it can only speak about means. About ends it must be silent." This type of theistic and scientific reasoning, then, can only practically distinguish "man-as-he-happens-to-be" and "human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be". MacIntyre thinks that it was this transition from a teleological to a non-teleological rationality that the Enlightenment found attractive and helped to form the basis of its rational morality.

The Enlightenment's rejection of Protestant and Catholic theology combined with its dismissal of Aristotelianism, eradicated all notions of "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos". Since the purpose of ethics for MacIntyre is to empower the individual to move from his present state to his true end, the abolition of essential human nature and of all notions of a telos radically changed the moral scheme of Western European communities. He notes that there were two remaining elements in the moral scheme: a set of moral orders completely stripped of their

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13Ibid. p. 52.
14Ibid.
15Ibid.
teleological nature, and "untutored-human-nature-as-it-is".\textsuperscript{16} These remaining factors were in constant conflict with each other because there was no longer any true end to be achieved from practical reason, experience and moral habit. MacIntyre claims that

Since the moral injunctions were originally at home in a scheme in which their purpose was to correct, improve and educate that human nature, they are clearly not going to be such as could be reduced from true statements about human nature or justified in some other way by appealing to its characteristics. The injunctions of morality, thus understood, are likely to be ones that human nature, thus understood, has strong tendencies to disobey.\textsuperscript{17}

MacIntyre emphasizes that the Enlightenment's rejection of teleology completely altered the rational basis of morality.\textsuperscript{18}

MacIntyre argues that Kant tried to rescue the Enlightenment Project from sinking into the depths of failure. Kant suggested that the \textit{a priori} elements in one's moral judgements was critical to one's moral choices. MacIntyre, however, identifies several problems with this approach. First, and most importantly, such an

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid. p. 52-53.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
approach ignores the notion of the virtues and teleology, and thus no clear moral criteria can be established.\textsuperscript{19} Since Kant prioritized \textit{a priori} reasoning in morality, MacIntyre states that Kant’s moral philosophy represents an ethic of rules rather than an ethics of virtue. "In Kant’s moral writings," he indicates, we have reached a point at which the notion that morality is anything other than obedience to rules has almost, if not quite, disappeared from sight.\textsuperscript{22} Kant’s rejection of Aristotelian functional teleology presents a scenario where no basis in the facts can give meaning to such rules, as these rules are based on necessity and universality.\textsuperscript{22}

Secondly, coupled with Kant’s subjective ethic of rules, is MacIntyre’s criticism of his reasoning. He thinks that Kant’s ethical theory is based on an impoverished conception of reason.\textsuperscript{22} Modern philosophy too frequently sees reason as only a calculative phenomenon, and thus is an insufficient resource for debating about ends.\textsuperscript{23} It therefore eliminates the possibility of an ethic which is both substantive and universal.\textsuperscript{24} He believes, furthermore, that reason needs to account for particular circumstances,

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid. p. 219.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid. pp. 52-53.


\textsuperscript{23}Ibid. p. 391.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
something which he says Kant's conception of reason failed to do.

Thirdly, Kant attempted to fit an ethic of rules into a universal conception of human nature. This, in MacIntyre's view, leads to the ideal objective of determining a unique set of moral rules for all people and all time. MacIntyre, consequently, charges Kant with rigorism. Rigorism arises in Kant's ethics because he holds the problematic point of view that reason... lays down principles which are universal, categorical and internally consistent. Hence a rational morality will lay down principles which both can and ought to be held by all men, independent of circumstances and conditions, and which could consistently be obeyed by every rational agent on every occasion.\(^\text{25}\)

The difficulty with rigorism is best shown by applying any plausible moral rule which cannot be universally acted on, or to any morally trivial rule which can be universally acted on. Thus, the rule of "do not steal" can only be acted on where private property as an institution has been introduced, but everyone can obey the rule of "walk West at noon".\(^\text{26}\) Universality fails to provide plausible necessary or sufficient conditions for rules to

\(^{25}\)Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 43.

be moral rules.\textsuperscript{27}

A fourth problem of Kantian ethics that MacIntyre addresses is \textit{formalism}. This is the claim that Kant's theory of ethics is devoid of substantive moral implications.\textsuperscript{28} If the only plausible moral rules must consider varied circumstances, as MacIntyre maintains, they must have a determinate content and so cannot be derived by purely rational or formal considerations. MacIntyre understands Kant's ethics as formal and not as an ethics which directs and guides action. As he states in \textit{After Virtue}, "The project of providing a rational vindication of morality had decisively failed, and from henceforward the morality of our predecessor culture - and subsequently of our own - lacked any public, shared rationale or justification."\textsuperscript{29} He thinks that because Kant's ethics failed to take account of factors other than the \textit{a priori} elements involved in one's moral judgements, that it formed the backbone of our emotive moral culture.

The Enlightenment's rejection of a virtue-based society, combined with its newly created set of moral beliefs, could only lead MacIntyre to conclude that the 'Enlightenment Project' was bound to fail. It bequeathed unintelligible segments of a once intelligible moral scheme of thought and action.\textsuperscript{30} Consequently, it failed to fulfil the idealistic character of its self-appointed

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29}Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.
task. As a result, MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment did try to find a rational basis for its moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, but had problems doing so because it inherited a set of moral injunctions which were expressly designed to be discrepant with each other. MacIntyre, like Burke, appraises the rational and moral objectives of the Enlightenment as exceedingly idealistic and impractical.

Emanating from the failure of the 'Enlightenment Project', as observed earlier, was the notion that moral arguments simply consisted of an increasing number of incompatible premises. What does MacIntyre propose as a solution to the problem of emotivism? He explains his remedy by contending that

What the Enlightenment made us for the most part blind to and what we now need to recover is... a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are a part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.\(^\text{33}\)

\(^{31}\)Ibid.

\(^{32}\)Ibid. p. 53.

MacIntyre, then, proposes that the necessary cure for the moral subjectivity that has existed since the Enlightenment is to realize that all modes of rational enquiry are embodied within a tradition. These modes of rational enquiry, furthermore, must be dynamic and flexible so that reform can occur peacefully when crises emerge.

III. Burke, MacIntyre and Their Approach to Rights

The issue which most closely links Burke and MacIntyre with respect to their critique of Enlightenment and modern liberal culture is their view concerning rights. Ultimately, they both agree that rights that are tradition-independent are nonexistent. Burke and MacIntyre, that is, accept the notion of rights only when they are a product of a community's historical tradition. They acknowledge rights only when they are expressions of social purpose and not expressions of bourgeois individualism.

IV. Burke and Rights

Burke accepted rights, as advocated by the Classical and Scholastic Natural Law tradition. He agreed, for instance, with his predecessors in the Natural Law tradition that the protection of life, liberty and property (through the doctrine of prescription) were the most basic and fundamental of rights. Burke consistently emphasized the concrete realization of one's natural rights in civil society through the incorporation of basic moral tenets in constitutional law. Thus, Burke rejected the

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35Ibid.
Hobbesian and Lockean hypothesis of a pre-civil state of nature, and suggested that "men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil and civil state together."\textsuperscript{35}

Burke notes in the \textit{Reflections} that people's natural and corresponding civil rights include

a right to justice... the right to the fruits of their industry, and to the means of making their industry fruitful... In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership has as good a right to it as he that has five hundred pounds has to his larger proportion; but he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock. And as to their share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I must deny to be amongst the direction in the original rights of man in civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention.\textsuperscript{37}

Burke's notion of rights, therefore, is contingent on established


\textsuperscript{37}Ibid. pp. 308-09.
British traditions which allowed for more equality in civil society.

In fact, Burke criticized the French revolutionaries for adapting a "false" conception of natural rights. For instance, Burke was appalled by the National Assembly’s decision to confiscate property in France. In Burke’s view, this was wholly inconsistent with the law of prescription. He stated that

With the National Assembly of France, possession is nothing, law and usage are nothing. I see the National Assembly openly reprobate the doctrine of prescription, which one of the greatest of their own lawyers [Domat] tells us, with great truth, is a part of the ascertainment of its limits, and its security from invasion, were among the causes for which civil society itself has been instituted. If prescription be once shaken, no species of property is secure, when it once becomes an object large enough to tempt the cupidity of indigent power. I see a practice perfectly correspondent to their contempt of this great fundamental part of natural law.\(^{38}\)

As a result, Burke concluded that the National Assembly left nothing except their own arbitrary pleasure to determine what

\(^{38}\)Ibid. pp. 432-33.
property was to be protected and what was to be subverted.\(^{39}\) According to Burke, one of the great means of fulfilling the Natural Law was through the right of prescription, which the French revolutionaries undermined as of August 4, 1789, with the termination of feudalism in France.

Burke, in addition, refused to treat the moral and political aspects of natural rights on an abstract basis. Burke advocated that rights are to be determined by political prudence, as set by the limits of the fallible nature of human beings and the plethora of circumstances extant in every civil society.\(^{40}\) Burke criticizes the French revolutionaries for ignoring such a critical distinction concerning rights, asserting that

> These metaphysic rights entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of Nature, refracted from their straight line. Indeed, in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns, the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction.\(^{41}\)

\(^{39}\)Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution*, p. 44.

\(^{40}\)Ibid. p. 46.

There are too many circumstances to consider regarding the issue of rights for it to be governed according to abstract principles or that were contrary to the dictates of Natural Law. In Burke's estimation, since every person in every state is a moral and political animal by nature, the legitimate rights are a matter of practical moral and political prudence, and are to be found only within the objectives and conventions of civil society. Burke's understanding of rights, therefore, is to see them as a product of the historical process. Natural rights, according to Burke, must be morally and socially constituted, and not a matter of abstraction.

Burke's account of rights continued to accept gradations in class, status and all other aspects of society. He did not try to invent ideas that would make society equal in every respect, as the French revolutionaries attempted to do. Burke knew that this was an idealized and utopian concept. He understood that society is, by nature, hierarchical. One should not be surprised, therefore, that he censured the revolutionaries for trying to escape the inevitable essence of social existence. "Believe me," Burke insisted, "those who attempt to level, never equalize. In all societies consisting of various descriptions of citizens, some descriptions must be uppermost, the levellers, therefore, only change and pervert the natural order of things." The

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revolutionaries’ attempt to create citizens who were equal in all aspects of society by dismantling the traditional institutions and replacing them with new ones would not, in Burke’s view, change the structure of French society; it would still, to some degree, be hierarchical in nature. The revolutionaries, Burke believed, also unnecessarily jeopardized the security of the French people by trying to incorporate untested innovations which had no certainty of being effective in practice.

V. MacIntyre and Rights

MacIntyre, like Burke, dismisses the Enlightenment’s conception of individual rights. To be sure, MacIntyre defines the notion of a right as

those rights which are alleged to belong to human beings as such and which are cited as a reason for holding that people ought not to be interfered with in the pursuit of their life, liberty and happiness. They are the rights which were spoken of in the eighteenth century as natural rights or as the rights of man." He argues that these rights are, by nature, supposed to apply equally to all individuals, irrespective of gender, religion, race, talents and deserts.45

One of the main areas of debate in the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate is whether rights by nature are universal or

"Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 66.

45Ibid.
particular. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre scrutinizes Alan Gewirth's book *Reason and Morality* (1978), a modern liberal and analytical endeavour to justify the existence of universal rights. MacIntyre tells us that the most significant sentence in the book is "Since the agent regards as necessary goods the freedom and well-being that constitute the generic features of his successful action, he logically must also hold that he has rights to these generic features and he implicitly makes a corresponding rights claim."\(^{46}\) In essence, Gewirth is advancing the notion that one who holds that the freedom required for the exercise of his or her rational agency is a necessary good is also logically committed to maintaining that he or she has a corresponding right to the possession of this good.

However, MacIntyre shows that the reason why claims about goods necessary for rational agency are so different from claims to the possession of a right, is that they presuppose - as claims for goods necessary for rational agency do not, the existence of a socially established set of rules.\(^{47}\) This is to say, claims to the possession of rights necessarily occur within a historical context. MacIntyre affirms this when he remarks that

> Such sets of rules only come into existence at particular historical periods under particular social circumstances. They are in no way universal features of the human condition...

But the objection that Gewirth has to meet is

\(^{46}\)Ibid. pp. 64-5.

\(^{47}\)Ibid. p. 65.
precisely that these forms of human behaviour which presuppose notions of some ground to entitlement, such as the notion of a right, always have a highly specific and socially local character, and that the existence of a particular types of social institution or practice is a necessary condition for the notion of a claim to the possession of a right being an intelligible type of human performance.48

MacIntyre concludes, then, that claims to the possession of rights arise from within a communal context, where there is intelligible meaning to such a claim because of its particular value to the community.

MacIntyre goes even further with this point. Like Burke, he maintains that rights are non-existent unless they are established in a particular tradition. Using language, he shows this to be the case. He claims that no language in the world had properly translated our notion of "a right" until nearly the middle ages; the concept of "a right" was devoid of expression in languages such as Greek, Arabic and Hebrew until the 1400s; in the Japanese language, the expression of "a right" did not become manifest until as late as the 1850s.49 "From this," MacIntyre reasons, "it does not of course follow that there are no natural or human rights; it

48 Ibid. p. 65.
49 Ibid. p. 67.
only follows that no one could have known that there were." In a more elaborate statement, he says explicitly that

The best reason for asserting so bluntly that there are no such rights is indeed precisely the same type as the best reason for which we possess for asserting that there are no witches and the best reason for asserting that there are no unicorns: every attempt to give good reasons for believing that there are such rights has failed. The eighteenth-century philosophical defenders of natural rights sometimes suggest that the assertions which state that men possess them are self-evident truths; but we know that there are no self-evident truths. Twentieth-century moral philosophers have sometimes appealed to their and to our intuitions; but one of the things we ought to have learned from the history of moral philosophy is that the word 'intuition' by a moral philosopher is always a signal that something has gone badly wrong with an argument... And the latest defender of such rights, Ronald Dworkin (Taking Rights Seriously, 1976) concedes that the existence of such rights cannot be demonstrated, but

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50 Ibid.
remarks on this point simply on that it does not follow from the fact that a statement cannot be demonstrated that it is not true.\textsuperscript{51}

MacIntyre, therefore, asserts that rights can only originate within a social context according to the community’s particular historical circumstances - the very concept which was rejected by the Enlightenment and their heirs.

VI. Conclusion and Final Remarks

In his essay, "Human Rights and the Corruption of Governments 1789-1989," Michael Freeman traces the similarities that exist between Burke’s and MacIntyre’s rejection of rights that are not socially constituted or derived as a result of the natural historical process. He makes parallels in the arguments that Burke and MacIntyre employ against Enlightenment and modern liberal culture:

1. Human rights do not exist; they are fictions.\textsuperscript{52}

Burke and MacIntyre, as we have seen, hold this view when rights are not embodied in a traditional context. They criticize Enlightenment and modern liberal culture for its tradition-independent approaches to the issue of rights.

2. The idea of human rights is too abstract: human rights claims depend upon an account of human beings and/or

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid. p. 67.

prescribe their supposed entitlements without regard for the real, complex social relations, experiences, and problems of human life.\textsuperscript{53}

Burke and MacIntyre also advance this idea. They believe that rights must be the product of historical development, and not of abstraction. They think that rights cannot be quantified because they are a product of convention and not, as the Enlightenment implied, of a calculus.

3. The human rights doctrine endorses individual egoism: it constitutes a set of selfish demands subversive of human community.\textsuperscript{54}

Burke and MacIntyre are in agreement with this point and advance similar claims. They think that the way in which the Enlightenment and subsequent cultures in the Western world have construed rights is selfish and indifferent with respect to other members of the community.

4. Human rights are anarchic: they are derived from non-social sources and consequently have anti-social implications.\textsuperscript{55}

Burke and MacIntyre, again, are in accord with this statement. Rights without a social context makes individuals completely autonomous from the rest of the community. Since Burke and MacIntyre understand the individual as socially embedded in his or her community, such anti-social rights cannot exist. They

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid. pp. 166-67.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid. p. 167.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid.
believe that people conceive their identity to a large extent from the community because they are inescapable members of it.\textsuperscript{56}

5. Human rights are supposedly universal and human rights claims presuppose universal moral truths. In fact, morality can exist only as part of the fabric of particular social forms of life. Rights, therefore, if they exist at all, are social and relative to particular cultures.\textsuperscript{57}

Burke and MacIntyre argue this as well. Rights, in order to exist, must be determined by specific circumstances and must have a special meaning in the particular society that recognizes them as such.

Burke and MacIntyre approach rights from a practical moral and political perspective. They evaluate rights in terms of the common good over that of individual right. What, exactly does this mean? It means that they prioritize the moral interests and goods of the community over the rights of the individual. Michael Freeman notes this point when he says that

6. The human rights doctrine is too individualistic: it accords moral priority to the value of the individual over that of the social, whereas the latter is the founder of the former and should therefore have


Contrary to Enlightenment and modern liberal culture, Burke and MacIntyre stress that the good of the community must take precedence over the rights of individuals because they believe that one inherits a portion of their character from the community itself. As such, the key ingredients of a virtuous society are extant.

7. Human rights should be subject to the common good; to give priority to the rights of individuals over the interests of the majority of society is morally perverse.\textsuperscript{59}

Burke and MacIntyre contend that once moral priority is given to the rights of individuals rather than that of the community, the basis of a virtuous society is undermined because the individual conscience becomes the moral legislator rather than the collective wisdom of the community. As a result, they argue that there can be no common agreement as to what actions are right or wrong.

Although the intellectual discourses of Burke and MacIntyre are exceedingly different, what remains is their condemnation of the Enlightenment and modern liberal approach to rationality and rights. These criticisms are a testament to their firm commitment to an Aristotelian-Christian virtue-centred society. They are highly critical of the idea of rationality and rights being rooted in an asocial individualism. Rather, they contend in almost parallel fashion that if rationality and rights are to be

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
meaningful and foster order in society, they must be socially-based, established in some sort of tradition, and inherent in the habits of the community.
CHAPTER FIVE

Community and Tradition in the Language of Burke and MacIntyre: Their Alternative to the 'Enlightenment Project'

This final chapter evaluates the way in which community and tradition are manifested in the language of Burke and MacIntyre, their alternative to the liberal-individualist society. Their language is similar in describing their views on community and tradition. Burke's description of prescription and manners are parallel to MacIntyre's conception of narrative and practices. They use this language to express their own particular commitment to a virtue-centred society.

I. Burke's 'Prescription' and MacIntyre's 'Narrative-Self'

Burke argues that a moral and political order ought to be based on the doctrine of prescription. In the legal sense, prescription means "to assert a right or title to the enjoyment of a thing, on the ground of having hitherto had the uninterrupted and immemorial enjoyment of it."¹ Sir Leslie Stephen correspondingly defined Burke's doctrine of prescription as "but a legal phrase for that continuity of past and present, and all that is solitary between all parts of the political order, the perception of which is the essential condition of sound political reasoning."² Burke employs the doctrine not just to entities like property, but to all


institutions in society. "Prescription," he says, is the most solid of all titles, not only to property, but, to secure that property, to government."^3 He states further that "A prescriptive government, such as ours, never was the work of any legislator, never was made up of any foregone theory."^4 Inherent in Burke's understanding of prescription is the idea that an orderly society can be established when it is built up over time in which the most significant parts have been preserved. History allows institutions to be tested through circumstances, which produce the wisdom of time.^5 Inherent in Burke's doctrine of prescription is the idea that one is born with a historical past and should respect it. There are many passages in Burke's writings, such as Reflections (1790), Speech on the Reform of Representation of the Commons in Parliament (1782), and also in his personal correspondence such as the Letter to Captain Mercier (February 26, 1790) and Letter to the Comte de Mercy (August, 1793).

Burke understood and defended the doctrine of prescription as a product of the Natural Law. For instance, in Burke's Tract on the Popery Laws (1765), he attacked the economic restrictions and civil disabilities England forced upon Ireland.^5 In Burke's view,


^4Ibid. p. 94.

^5Bruce Frohnen, Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), p. 51.

the right of holding private property in Ireland did not depend on
the will of any legislator, but was secured by
the solid rock of prescription, the soundest,
the most general, and the most recognized
title between man and man... a title in which
not arbitrary institutions, but the eternal
order of things gives judgement, a title which
is not the creature, but the master of
positive law; a title which... is rooted in
the law of nature itself, and is, indeed, the
original ground of all known property; for all
property in soil will always be traced to that
source, and will rest there.\textsuperscript{7}
Burke also attacked the Irish penal laws, which excluded three-
fourths of the inhabitants from procuring any inheritance, which
banned Irish Catholics from military service and all public office,
and prohibited them from access to education.\textsuperscript{8} Burke defined these
restrictions as a "total deprivation of society," and his arguments
for their repeal are established according to the eternal laws of
reason and justice, or the moral Natural Law as Peter Stanlis
asserts.

Another instance where Burke understands prescription as a

\textsuperscript{7}Peter J. Stanlis, \textit{Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and
Revolution}, p. 17. Stanlis quoted this from \textit{Letter to Richard
Burke}, p. 80, \textit{The Correspondence of Edmund Burke 1744-1797}.

\textsuperscript{8}Peter J. Stanlis, \textit{Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and
Revolution}, p. 17.
product of the Natural Law is in his *Letter to Captain Thomas Mercer* (February 26, 1790), where he affirms to the officer that

> It is not calling the landed estates, possessed by old *prescriptive rights*, the ‘accumulation of ignorance and superstition’, that can support me in shaking that grand title... But these are donations made in ‘ages of ignorance and superstition’. Be it so. It proves that these donations were made long ago; and this is *prescription*; and this gives right and title. It is possible that many estates about you were obtained by... violence... but it is *old violence*; and that which might be wrong in the beginning, is consecrated by time, and becomes lawful. This may be superstition in me, and ignorance; but I had rather remain in ignorance and superstition than be enlightened and purified out of the first principles of law and natural justice.⁹

In this passage, Burke maintains that it is better to adhere to the natural doctrine of prescription, even if it means being unenlightened. This is because Burke thinks that it is better not

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to innovate or inquire too deeply into the foundations of society, but to let the principles of the Natural Law dictate what is right and true. Burke’s conception of the doctrine of prescription, therefore, was intimately linked with the Natural Law.

The principle of inheritance was a consequence of Burke’s notion of prescription. It is a necessary and indispensable factor in a community’s historical continuity and identity. He argues that

People will never look forward to posterity who never look back to their ancestors... the people of England well know that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation and a sure principle of transmission, without at all excluding a principle of improvement.\(^\text{10}\)

For Burke, then, the nature of society was "a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection.\(^\text{11}\) This partnership, moreover, cannot be obtained in only one generation, but must be an association between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.\(^\text{12}\) The idea of respecting the circumstances that one is born into and of one’s historical past is a key point in Burke’s


\(^{11}\)Ibid. p. 359.

\(^{12}\)Ibid.
understanding of prescription.

Burke consistently criticized the French revolutionaries because they neglected the conditions into which they were born. In his opinion, the only thing that the legislators needed to do in order to remedy the crisis in France, was to look to their own inherited institutions and make the changes that were absolutely necessary. However, they exterminated their inherited institutions and created new and untested ones, and as Burke predicted, the Jacobins proved to be a menace to and an enemy of the established order in France. He urged the French legislators to look to England as an example of how to build on their old foundations rather than to start from the beginning again. When French society went awry, he informed them that

You began ill, because you began by despising everything that belonged to you... Respecting your forefathers, you would have been taught to respect yourselves. You would not have chosen to consider the French... as a notion of low-born wretches until the emancipating year of 1789...  

Burke was emphatic about the principle of respecting one's own moral and political past because, as he learned from Aristotle, such radical innovations introduced into society could easily lead to anarchy.

Emanating from the respect that one should give to his

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13Ibid. pp. 276-78.
or her past, and of the history of the community, is the notion that one does not simply choose independently of the community what he or she is. In Burke’s view, one’s moral and political decisions are determined in part by the traditions of his or her community. Burke, for instance, venerates the history of English institutions, and used them as guides in making decisions. He affirms his adulation for them when he says that "From Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our Constitution to claim and assert our liberties as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity...."\(^{14}\) For Burke, heeding the institutions of England’s past was indispensable. He conveys this by stating that "We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors."\(^{15}\) He believed that one’s moral and political decisions should be influenced by the community rather than the false wisdom of the isolated individual.

Burke dismisses the idea of the individual as the exclusive chooser. Instead, he asserts that it is the community that plays a major role in shaping who we our as human beings. The conception of the good, according to Burke, can be better understood in a social context than when left to the solitary and isolated realm of the individual conscience.

\(^{14}\)Ibid. p. 274.

\(^{15}\)Ibid.
MacIntyre's concept of the narrative-self similarly describes the fact that one is born with a historical past which shapes the character of individuals in the community and ought to be considered when making moral choices. In his essay "Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative, Community and the Moral Life," L. Gregory Jones says that "there are two principles which underlie MacIntyre's use of narrative: historicity and human action."\textsuperscript{16} Action, MacIntyre has said, has an essentially historical character.\textsuperscript{17} He is interested in establishing the historical character of the narrative.\textsuperscript{18} It is because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is proper for making sense of the actions of others.\textsuperscript{19} That is to say that in order for human action to be intelligible, it requires an account of a context that only a narrative can produce.\textsuperscript{20}

In MacIntyre's view, to recognize what it is that one should do, a person needs to be aware of the fact that the story of his or


\textsuperscript{17}Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 212.


her life possesses a unique narrative structure in which what they presently are is a historical extension of what they were in the past. Consequently, the search for what one is and what one should be is not merely a set of individualized decisions. Rather, it is determining and understanding who one is and what values he or she should adopt. This can only be done by relating one's experiences with others. It is precisely this 'quest', as MacIntyre refers to it, that is paramount to the unity of an individual life. He ponders this search for the unity of an individual life when he claims that

In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask 'What is the good for me?' is to ask how best might I live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask 'what is the good for man?' is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common. But now it is important to emphasize that it is the systematic asking of these two questions and the attempt to answer them in deed as well as in word which provide the moral life with its unity. The unity of a human life is the

unity of a narrative quest.\textsuperscript{22}

This unity must always exist within a social context. So, a social context is the only phenomenon that can give meaning to a life; it is not something that one chooses, but is an inherent quality of human existence itself.

The narrative-self is so-called because it suggests that answers to questions about what we ought to do entails not merely choosing what we do as individuals, but discovering our social identity, which can only be understood by communicating our experiences and opinions with others.\textsuperscript{23} In MacIntyre's opinion, individuals cannot be properly understood unless reference is made to one's social constitution.\textsuperscript{24} Only by realizing that one's character is partially determined by his or her past circumstances can the actions of an individual and others have meaning. This fact has implications for the way in which people conduct themselves in daily life.

MacIntyre believes that one's \textit{telos} is socially embedded. He claims that people partly gain their social identity and an understanding of the good as a result of what they inherit socially. This is the role that the narrative-self plays. We approach our daily lives as bearers of a particular social

\textsuperscript{22}Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, p. 203.

\textsuperscript{23}John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: \textit{After Virtue} and After," in \textit{After MacIntyre}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
identity.\textsuperscript{25} I am someone's father, mother, son or daughter; I am someone else's niece, nephew, aunt or uncle.\textsuperscript{26} What is good for me, therefore, has to be good for one who inhabits those roles.\textsuperscript{27} He concludes by arguing that:

\begin{quote}
I inherit from the past of my family... a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Our individual lives can have meaning, therefore, only by comparing who we are in relation to other people. His description of one's historical past, as embraced by his conception of the narrative-self, demonstrates that humans are essentially social beings, and it is this that aligns Burke and MacIntyre in their understanding of community and tradition.

However, one general difference must be observed in evaluating the way in which Burke and MacIntyre give emphasis to the historical past. It stems essentially from their own unique experiences. As a parliamentarian, Burke stressed that society as a whole ought to revere the historical institutions into which they are born. Although there are subtle implications in his views for

\textsuperscript{25}Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, pp. 204-05.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid. pp. 204-05.
the way that individuals should act, he does not make frequent or explicit references concerning the moral individual. As an academic, on the other hand, MacIntyre focuses particularly on the individual acknowledging his or her own circumstances, so that he or she can acquire a better understanding of who they are by relating to others. Although the way in which individuals act in society have ramifications on the political level, MacIntyre hardly ever directly refers to the collective actions and wisdom of the community. It is latent within his communitarian ideas. This discrepancy can be attributed their own distinctive experiences rather than a deep division in philosophy.

II. Burke’s ‘Manners’ and MacIntyre’s ‘Practices’

Burke’s discussion of manners can also be paralleled with MacIntyre’s understanding of practices. What, specifically, are manners? In Burke’s usage of the word, he meant not just etiquette, but also a large social heritage, a way of life, which included modes of behaviour, feelings, opinions, customs, and values - *mores* in essence.²⁹ He argues that

Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure, the laws depend. The law touches us here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify... barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform,

insensible operation, like the that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.\textsuperscript{12}

People in a given society always act in relation to the established set of manners.\textsuperscript{11} They are habituated according to a prescribed set of rules.\textsuperscript{12} The behaviour of the people in a community is guided by a set of precepts which correspond to, but are not the same as, religious and political principles.

Manners, for Burke, were of crucial importance because they had a huge impact on the actions of people, and were correspondent to morals and politics. Manners, in the way that Burke applied the word, were clearly socially-based and involved the whole community.

On similar linguistic lines, MacIntyre used the concept of a 'practice' in a parallel fashion as Burke did with manners. Remember that for MacIntyre, a practice is any coherent form of socially established and cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the process of trying to attain those goods which are appropriate to that form of activity.\textsuperscript{13} For MacIntyre, a practice entails standards of

\textsuperscript{11}Edmund Burke, \textit{First Letter on a Regicide Peace}, (1796) in \textit{The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke}, Vol. 5, pp. 311-12.

\textsuperscript{12}Bruce Frohnen, \textit{Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism}, p. 62.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, p. 175.
excellence and obedience to rules as well as to the achievement of goods.

MacIntyre's reference to external and internal goods needs to be distinguished. External goods, when achieved, always involve a person's material possessions. The more material possessions one has, the less there is for other people. This is, as MacIntyre points out, necessarily the case with phenomena like power and fame. External goods, then, are objects of competition where there are losers as well as winners. Internal goods, on the other hand, are also outcomes of the competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community. He asserts that chess is a practice because one is unable to play the game without recognizing the goods of the game which are internal to it such as the plethora of technical strategies. One plays chess well, therefore, as it is defined by the practice itself. Playing the game well is not a matter of exclusive decisions on the part of the individual. Farming, football, music and architecture are other examples that MacIntyre denotes as practices.

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34Ibid. p. 177.
35Ibid.
36Ibid.
37Ibid.
38Ibid.
Why does MacIntyre believe that practices are so significant? He thinks that practices can be applied to morals, and the virtues in particular. Acting morally well is like playing chess well; neither practice is determined solely by individual preference, but by the standards of the practice itself. The virtues are essential to practices because they not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the good internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.⁴⁰

According to MacIntyre, the virtues must be situated within a communal or social context if they are to possess some sort of objectivity.

III. Conclusion

Burke and MacIntyre, therefore, employ similar language in describing their ideas concerning community and tradition, and the individual's relationship to society. Perhaps the most significant factor to be understood from this similarity is the way in which they evaluate society as a whole. They express an affinity for a virtue-centred society, but have unique reasons for doing so. For Burke, politics in a virtue-oriented society were more meaningful

⁴⁰Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 204.
than any alternative system, as their historical institutions were respected and their cores preserved. The existence of such conditions, in Burke's view, were keystones for moral goodness and political stability. For MacIntyre, a virtue-centred society promotes moral goodness and an objective system of ethics, which, in his view, has dissipated since the Enlightenment. For both of them, however, the Enlightenment and modern liberal cultures have sabotaged their particular reasons for maintaining a virtue-based society.
CONCLUSION

Final Remarks Concerning the Aristotelian Parallels in the Thought of Burke and MacIntyre

It is well-known that MacIntyre does not want his ideas to be affiliated with Burke in any way. This thesis, however, has revealed something which few scholars in the history of political and ethical theory have observed since After Virtue was first published: the striking parallels between Burke’s and MacIntyre’s understanding of the nature of the community. At the root of their similar conception of the community is the influence of Aristotelian ideas which are inextricably linked to the notion of community such as prudence, teleology and gradual rather than radical change in the institutions of the community. They derive from Aristotle the idea that the individual procures some of his or her values from the community in which they live. Since one observes the customs and daily routines of their own community, habit is an underlying assumption in Burke’s and MacIntyre’s presentation of this point. They are opposed, similarly, to the Enlightenment and modern liberal conception of the individual, which understands the self as not only completely detached from their community, but as the sovereign decider of his or her values.

There are, though, some major differences in the philosophy of Burke and MacIntyre that must also be accounted for. Most importantly, is that although they employ similar aspects of Aristotelian philosophy, they use it to suit their own unique intellectual context. As a statesman, Burke’s primary concern was
with the world of politics. As an academic philosopher on the other hand, MacIntyre is focused on ethics as a mode of rational enquiry. This, obviously, creates distinctively different intellectual contexts and makes it challenging when one attempts to compare them. For Burke, a virtue-oriented society offered greater social stability and order, while for MacIntyre, it offered moral objectivity. Inevitably, their intellectual purposes are different. It is clear that their intellectual purposes are different. However, in spite of their varying discourses, they advocate a similar moral position. They emphatically defend the notion of a virtue-based society, characteristic of Aristotle. Their positions on the moral nature of the relationship between the individual and the community cannot be ignored.

What, ultimately, can be said about the relation between Burke's philosophy and MacIntyre's communitarianism? This work, which has scrupulously examined the arguments they advance, has discovered that they appraise society in a conservative fashion, particularly on the issue of morality. This is essentially because their views on this matter are influenced by Aristotle's ethical and political arguments. In his essay "Moral Conservatism," Evan Simpson notes that "The study of ethics has recently become influenced by a form of moral conservatism - a critique of modernity with a bias towards Aristotle."2 In the article, Simpson outlines the essential characteristics of moral conservatism which

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closely align Burke and MacIntyre on moral grounds because of their partiality towards Aristotle. He asserts the following points regarding moral conservatism:

1) It honours the integrity of communities, their customs and institutions, and prevailing values.²

Burke and MacIntyre, as we have observed, advocate this point of view. They repudiate the liberal-individualist idea that the individual is an atomistic agent capable of making moral decisions from an abstract and universal point of view.³ They maintain that the self is an untenable cultural artifact, and so one’s social relationships should be prior to the isolated individual autonomy and independence.⁴ Inherent within this position is their joint belief in an Aristotelian teleology. That is, from one’s social relationships in the community, people can distinguish between what they are and what they can be and move from one state to the other. The community and our unavoidable membership in it, according to Burke and MacIntyre, play a vital role in shaping our values and character.

2) It opposes abstract, computational morality in both its consequentialist and deontological forms.⁵

Burke and MacIntyre argue in favour of a virtue-based society. By living in a virtue-centred society, in their estimation, there can

²Ibid. p. 30.
³Ibid. p. 30-1.
⁴Ibid. p. 31.
⁵Ibid.
be some sense of objective moral language because there is an established system of actions which particular communities understand as right or wrong. It is their emphasis on shared understandings that gives strength to their view that rationalist moral theory reflects an absence of social meanings.\textsuperscript{5} The late Professor Oakeshott accurately described the attitude of Burke, MacIntyre and other moral conservatives when he argued that "To suppose a collection of people without recognized traditions of behaviour, is to suppose a people incapable of politics."\textsuperscript{7} Morality, Burke and MacIntyre realize, should not be strictly calculative and individualized. Since the Enlightenment, rational morality has become increasingly calculative and individualized, and so undermined virtue-centred societies.

3) It is pessimistic about utopian ideas of progress but sanguine about the apparent permanence of conflict among ways of life and conceptions of well-being.\textsuperscript{8}

Burke and MacIntyre also argue, as Stuart Hampshire has stated, that to understand the "indispensable and related notions of convention and ways of life," leads one to the conclusion that the plurality of values is not compatible with any specific list of

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid. p. 35.


\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
essential virtues. With the rational acceptance of the plurality of values, as Burke and MacIntyre concede, it follows that there cannot be a predictable list of virtues. While they acknowledge the significance of pluralism in moral society, they give especially strong emphasis to the particularism of moral society. They convey the notion that local attachments and historical associations permeate our desires and purposes. They assert, as Hampshire has said, that people are "in the grip of particular and distinguishable local passions; and the Aristotelian word to emphasize is 'particular'." Clearly, Burke's and MacIntyre's stress on the 'particular' aspects of moral society link them principally to Aristotle.

4) It is pluralistic and particularistic, recognizing the diversity of human groups and the internality and flexibility of the rules which define the practices in each.

Burke and MacIntyre accept the fact that there is permanent conflict in society. They understand that "there must always be moral conflicts which cannot, given the nature of morality, be resolved by any constant and generally acknowledged method of

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10Ibid. p. 32.


12Ibid. p. 30.
It is here where the Aristotelian precept of prudence and the consideration of circumstances comes into play. They are averse to the idea of introducing untested moral and political tenets into society. They are truly aware of the fragile nature of moral and political society. Consequently, they maintain that change must be done gradually and by considering the immediate circumstances rather than the rationalistic conception of ethics and politics.\textsuperscript{13}

Indeed, the morally conservative nature of Burke and MacIntyre finds its predominant basis in Aristotelian ethical and political thought. From it, they derive a similar approach to the individual's relationship to society. The community, they argue, partly determines who we are as human beings and the values that we adopt. This position presupposes some sort of virtue-based society because the common moral fabric of a community directly involves and affects every member in it. It is their favoured alternative to the liberal-individualist conception of existence, which contends that the individual is the sole chooser of his or her values.

The rational basis of the moral views of Burke and MacIntyre are testaments to their desire for a virtue-based community, as described by Aristotle. It is for this reason that their arguments concerning the moral and political nature of society are so strikingly similar in spite of the discrepancy of time and place.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid. p. 34. Quoted from \textit{Morality and Conflict}, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
Burke, as we have seen, gave expression to this virtue-based society in his views on prudence, teleology and its essentially social nature, a rationality and conception of rights that were embodied within a tradition, prescriptive principles and the importance of manners. MacIntyre, similarly, considered the innate social nature of teleology, that rationality and rights must be embodied in a tradition if they are to be intelligible, the role of narrative-self and the concept of a practice. In a broader context, furthermore, they also argued that the goods of the community must have priority over the rights of individuals in it.

While several scholars have treated the relationship between Burke and MacIntyre only superficially, I have tried to go further by discovering the fundamental parallels in their philosophy. It is clear that these parallels are derived chiefly from the Aristotelian ethical and political tradition.
APPENDIX A

Further Evidence of Aristotle's Influence in Burke's Writings,

Speeches and Correspondence

The purpose of this appendix is to provide further evidence to support my contention that Burke was greatly influenced by Aristotle in his moral and political thought. This appendix cites more examples of Burke's references to Aristotelian ethical and political principles in his writings, speeches and correspondence. Four issues that have already been addressed in the thesis can now be given further consideration: the importance of considering immediate circumstances in moral and political decision-making; prudence; Burke's rejection of reasoning that is not based on some sort of tradition and which is abstract in essence; and the importance of gradual change in ethical and political society. The appendix will proceed by subject. The works which are cited have been obtained from The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, 12 Vols. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1901 and, where indicated, from The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6, Alfred Cobban and Robert A. Smith, editors, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

I. The Importance of Considering Immediate Circumstances in

Moral and Political Decision-Making

We found that Burke was attracted to a large extent by Aristotle's belief that considering immediate circumstances is paramount for politicians and individuals alike in making decisions. Here are more examples where Burke supports this point:

Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Vol. 7, pp. 41, 42 and 45.


Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Vol. 4, pp. 79-81.

Address to the British Colonists in North America (1777), Vol. 6, pp. 193-94.

Letter to the Buckinghamshire Meeting on Parliamentary Reform (1780), Vol. 6, pp. 293-295.

Letter to the Chevalier de Rivarol (June 1, 1791), in The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6, pp. 210-11.


II. Prudence

Burke makes frequent reference to the issue of prudence in the practical Aristotelian sense in his writings, speeches and correspondence. These are further references of Burke’s appeal to prudence:

Letter to Charles-Jean-François Depont (November 1789), in The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6, p. 118.

Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Vol. 4, pp. 80-81.

Speech on Conciliation with America (1775), Vol. 2, pp. 168-70.


Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), Vol. 3, pp. 311 and
Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Vol. 7, pp. 41-42.
III. Burke's Disdain for Abstract Reasoning When it is Not Embodied Within a Tradition

Burke spoke and wrote emphatically about the dangers of employing metaphysical reasoning without having a basis in some sort of tradition. He derived his views on this principle largely from Aristotle, as these examples will show:
Speech on Conciliation with America (1775), Vol. 2, pp. 168-70.
Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Vol. 7, pp. 41-42.
Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents (1770), Vol. 1, p. 477.
IV. The Importance of Gradual Change in Morals and Politics

Burke, influenced by Aristotle's Politics, argued vigorously that change is inevitable, but it is indispensable that it proceed slowly. This is because it takes a lengthy period of time for the behaviour of a community to become habitual and ingrained in the accepted practices and goods of the community. He advanced this argument in varying fashions in these selected passages:
Letter to a Noble Lord (1796), Vol. 5, pp. 185-189.


Letter to Charles-Jean-François Depont (November 1789), in The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6, p. 117.

Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792), Vol. 4, p. 301.
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Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1993.


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