The Politics of Decline and Retrieval: Bernard Lonergan's Foundations for Democratic Practice

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of University of St. Michael’s College and the Theology Department of the Toronto School of Theology
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael's College

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Abstract

This dissertation’s argument proceeds in two main stages. Part I investigates a selection of authors from both sides of the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate in political philosophy and theology. Although communitarians and second-generation liberals share a common critique of classical liberalism, the two sides diagnose the legacy of modernity in different ways. Consequently, they propose constructive alternatives that differ in certain key respects. Communitarians such as Alasdair MacIntyre conceive the rise of modern politics as an irredeemable instance of civilizational decline and commend the social teleological or tradition-constituted retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. In developing post-metaphysical accounts of democratic practice, second-generation liberals such as John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout distinguish between the deficient self-understanding of classical liberalism and those ideals capable of retrieval. Although both sides in this debate are partially correct, the protagonists’ shared commitment to a collection of post-modern presuppositions hinders their capacity to defend their fundamental claims or to combine complementary insights. Drawing on the work of Bernard Lonergan, Part II is designed to respond to this impasse. On the one hand, Lonergan’s attention to the relationship between methodological presuppositions and stages in the evolution of human meaning provides a heuristic framework for developing an alternative narrative of decline. My narrative focuses on the emergence and evolution of intuitionism and voluntarism in the late medieval work of Scotus and Ockham and the early modern liberalism of
Hobbes, Locke and Kant. In my judgment, this series of methodological oversights culminates in the post-modern presuppositions that hinder rationally compelling resolution of the liberal-communitarian debate. On the other hand, I contend that Lonergan’s transpositions of Aquinas’ metaphysical conceptions of human nature and sanctifying grace provide the basis for a critical negotiation of the contemporary crisis of meaning. These transpositions provide the basis for developing an alternative account of democratic norms that harmonizes significant insights from both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate.
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Introduction

I.1 Two Prominent Responses to the Breakdown of Classical Liberalism

The origin of the so-called ‘liberal-communitarian debate’ that preoccupied some of the brightest minds in political philosophy throughout the 1980s and 1990s traces its roots to John Rawls’ publication of *A Theory of Justice*.¹ In the years following its release, political philosophy underwent a major paradigm shift as post-modern methodological presuppositions became the taken-for-granted starting-point of certain particularly influential strands of ethical and political theory. Post-modernity valorizes pluralism and historicity at the expense of premodern and modern variations of absolutism that regard the foundations of ethical and political practice as normative for all times and places. This newfound respect for a multiplicity of context-dependent and socially-mediated conceptions of human fulfillment has been adopted in different ways by authors engaged in contemporary debates surrounding the character and relative legitimacy of liberal democratic practice. Although both communitarians and second-generation liberals² share a common cognitive and evaluative critique of classical liberalism,³ the two sides differ in how they diagnose the legacy of modernity. Consequently, they propose constructive alternatives that differ in certain key respects.

² This dissertation examines two particular strands of contemporary political theory that draw on a distinctively post-modern notion of rationality as tradition-constituted. I will use the terms ‘communitarian’ and ‘second-generation’ or ‘pragmatic liberal’ to refer to these particular instantiations of the broader or more general paradigms. By no means is it my intention to imply that these options are exhaustive. It is my contention, however, that the shared methodological presuppositions that underlie their shared critique and alternative accounts of retrieval justify grouping these particular authors together.
³ The category ‘classical liberalism’ is itself contested. Rather than attempting to determine the exact range or meaning of this broad term, this dissertation focuses on two particular expressions of early modern political theory: (a) an empiricist strand found in the work of Hobbes and Locke; and (b) a rationalist strand found in Kant.
I.2 MacIntyre and the Post-Modern Retrieval of Aquinas

The communitarian\(^1\) approach is typified by authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre\(^2\) who regards the birth of liberalism as an intermediate and irredeemable stage of civilizational decline whose breakdown contributes to the rise of post-modern emotivism. MacIntyre traces the emergence of modern individualism and foundationalism to the rise of late medieval scholasticism, nominalism and voluntarism made possible by the breakdown of the Thomistic synthesis’ functional account of human nature. Welcoming certain aspects of the post-modern deconstruction of the Enlightenment project, MacIntyre commends what has come to be known as a tradition-dependent conception of rationality or a social teleological retrieval of Aristotle and Aquinas. These context-dependent collections of social practices and the cultural-linguistic frameworks that shape and inform them provide a communal horizon necessary for coherent ethical and political discourse. MacIntyre aims to avoid post-modern emotivism or relativism by developing a meta-theory of both intra-tradition and inter-tradition debate, an explication of the ‘rationality of traditions’ that is correlative with intra-Thomist presuppositions. According to MacIntyre, tradition-dependent first principles are provisional and justified relative to alternatives through a process of dialectical testing whose long-range telos is transperspectival truth, the goal of theoretical and practical inquiry.

Although I agree with MacIntyre that coherent ethical and political discourse requires the retrieval of self-transcendent conceptions of human fulfillment and also with the substance of his

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\(^1\) Although authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre, John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas do not necessarily self-identify as communitarians, I contend that this term has heuristic value insofar as it names a collection of traits that differ from ‘second-generation liberalism.’

meta-theory, there are confusions in his work that appear to undermine his best intentions. First, a fundamental tension exists between MacIntyre’s commitments to historicism and to the uniqueness of the Thomist tradition. Despite MacIntyre’s best efforts to avoid charges of relativism, his repudiation of the epistemological turn and commitment to tradition-constituted rationality tends to deflate Thomism’s transcendental aspirations by reducing it to one among many particular metaphysical schemes. Second, a tension exists between his commitment to a thin conception of the good capable of providing the framework for democratic discourse and his rejection of modern ethics and politics. In both cases, authors such as Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank appear to dissolve these tensions by siding with historicist variations of Christian particularism that sanction disengagement from democratic practice. The resulting interpretation of the relationship between church and world appears to restrict the presence of sanctifying grace to the institutional or visible confines of the Christian communion. Both of these resolutions may be read in ways that stand in tension with Vatican II’s embrace of constitutional democracy and the Council’s related emphasis on the universality of God’s love.

I.3 Second-Generation Liberalism in the Work of John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout

A second approach, typified by the later work of John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout, takes seriously the communitarian critique of the Enlightenment project’s commitment to

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3 The distinction between thin and thick conceptions of the human good or fulfillment is central to this dissertation. The relationship between thin and thick appears, for example, in the work of MacIntyre, Rawls, Rorty, and Stout. Each of these authors means slightly different things by this set of categories. In chapter 10, I outline a Lonerganian alternative that is conversant with but differs from these approaches. In a very general sense, thin conceptions of the good specify the conditions of possibility for the realization of thick conceptions of human fulfillment in a context of cultural and religious diversity.

4 See for example, Vatican II, Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae); Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), 16; and Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate), 2.

5 The starting-point for any investigation of Rawls’ mature work is his Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005).
individualism and foundationalism. Each of these authors distinguish between the deficient self-
understanding of classical liberalism and those positive ideals, such as equality, self-
determination, and critical reflection, whose recovery they regard as essential to a viable
response to the contemporary problematic. Distancing themselves from premodern and modern
forms of absolutism, all three authors develop post-metaphysical objectifications of the norms
underlying and structuring democratic practice that take seriously the rise of post-modern
historicism. Central to the work of each author is a reinterpretation of the Kantian-inspired
relationship between democratic or public norms and private conceptions of human fulfillment.
Although all three authors are to be commended for responding to the communitarian critique,
their efforts at critical retrieval are stifled, in similar albeit significantly different ways, by the
tension between post-metaphysical uniqueness and historicism. The result, in each case, is a
conventionalist or pragmatic commitment to democratic norms incompatible with Vatican II’s
principled commitment to human rights discourse and constitutional democracy.

Rawls’ later work responds to what he calls ‘the fact of pluralism’ by commending the
adoption of a freestanding or political conception of justice capable of uniting citizens divided by
alternative comprehensive doctrines or thick conceptions of the good. It is Rawls’ contention that
the political conception of justice, the political conception of the person that underlies it, and the
constructivist procedure which gives rise to the principles of justice do not presuppose
controversial positions on the nature of truth, reality and value. By prescinding from

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7 The two most relevant works are Ethics After Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); and Democracy and Tradition (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004). This dissertation focuses on the latter.
comprehensive commitments, the post-metaphysical conception of justice or thin conception of
the good functions as a ‘module’ that may be justified through appeal to rival comprehensive
doctrines. According to Rawls, the principles of justice delimit the content of ‘public reason’
distinguishable from the ‘non-public’ reasons of those associations shaped by alternative
comprehensive doctrines. Although Rawls’ revised account of the former invites citizens to
introduce the comprehensive grounds for their policy decisions, the duty of civility demands that
citizens also provide arguments grounded in public reason.

Although I am sympathetic to Rawls’ efforts to identify a public criterion compatible
with pluralism, it is my contention that Rawls’ project also suffers from a number of tensions
that render his constructive response to the contemporary problematic partial rather than
complete. Part of the problem stems from confusions concerning the unique status of political
liberalism and its relationship to the fact of pluralism. According to the pragmatic or
‘conventionalist’ reading of Rawls’ later work, the political conception of justice functions as a
tradition-specific criterion normative only for those already committed to political liberalism.
This approach would seem to suggest that political liberalism, far from being exempt from the
‘burdens of judgment,’ is itself subject to the same limitations. The result is a form of democratic
‘conventionalism’ that stands in tension with his aspirations to articulate a moral basis for
democratic practice that transcends a mere modus vivendi. At the same time, Rawls seems
committed to defending the uniqueness and priority of political liberalism’s distinctively post-
metaphysical standpoint vis-à-vis other comprehensive doctrines. Rawls’ inability to avoid at
least partially comprehensive commitments exposes the inappropriateness of his notion of public
reason and, when combined with the ‘burdens of judgment,’ collapses strong forms of the
uniqueness claim into the very pragmatism it is designed to avoid.
In recognizing the Rawlsian dilemma, Rorty develops a pragmatic account of liberalism that more consistently affirms the contingent nature of democratic culture. Rorty develops a consciously post-metaphysical form of liberalism that combines a commitment to historicism with pragmatic utilitarianism. The former reconceives truth as a function of linguistic moves internal to a multiplicity of culture-specific ‘final vocabularies’ or languages into which individuals are socialized. The latter conceives language and reason in instrumental terms as a ‘tool’ created by ‘clever animals’ to cope with environmental pressures or to satisfy their desires. The combination of these two emphases cashes out as a form of value pluralism or ‘polytheism’ that denies the possibility of rank-ordering desires against an independent standard. Rorty’s antirepresentationalism shapes a distinctive account of liberalism whose core is captured in his distinction between public and private spheres. According to Rorty, human rights and human ‘dignity’ are ‘social constructions’ – particular ‘we-intentions’ – that function as public norms for members of a democratically-minded community. These particular ‘we-intentions’ place restrictions on the nature of private self-creation or define the acceptable public limits of polytheism within a liberal democratic context.

Although Rorty is to be commended for transcending representationalist and rationalist accounts of human knowing and choosing, his position is not without its own tensions. Not only does Rorty’s appeal to pragmatic utilitarianism appear incapable of answering the charges of irrationalism and linguistic idealism he fights hard to avoid, his conception of the human subject may be interpreted in ways that stand at odds with his commitment to historicism. Rorty’s effort to transcend epistemological and metaphysical discourse is troubled, in different ways, by the problematic that beset Rawls’ freestanding conception of justice. Again one finds a restrictive form of secularism that inappropriately excludes alternative conceptions of the human good.
Again one finds an inability to provide a critical grounding for universal human rights and the democratic institutions designed to protect them.

In 2004’s *Democracy and Tradition*, Stout attempts to forge a middle-ground approach to democratic practice designed to transcend the debate between communitarians and second-generation liberals. Stout distinguishes between a narrow or hierarchical conception of tradition that sanctions political disengagement and a wider more ‘democratic’ notion in the work of authors such as MacIntyre. Retrieving communitarian emphases on historicity and virtue, he conceives democracy as a contingently-grounded tradition whose constitutive habits and dispositions modify the way in which individuals relate to their heritage and to other individuals situated differently. Similar to the more openly pluralist reading of MacIntyre’s Thomist meta-theory of rationality, Stout argues that democratic norms govern the practices of intra-tradition and inter-tradition reason-exchange. This reconception of democracy as a tradition in its own right allows him to reconceive authority and piety in ways that respect democratic concerns for individuality and self-reliance. At the same time, he also distances his account of discourse from what he regards as the rigidly secularist proposals of Rawls and Rorty. According to Stout, although secularized democratic discourse presupposes the relativization of comprehensive commitments, it nonetheless allows for unconstrained dialogue between traditions. This alternative approach allows him to reconceive public reason and the liberal notion of right in ways that better respect diversity. In line with this middle-ground approach to reason-exchange, Stout advocates a contextual approach to justification and a pragmatic conception of truth designed to avoid both representational realism and anti-realism.

Stout’s alternative succeeds in moving beyond the false dichotomization that characterizes much of the liberal-communitarian debate. His rehabilitation of the liberal emphases on self-determination, critical reflection, equality and tolerance takes seriously the
communitarian critique and its correlative commitment to virtue, diversity, and metaphysical claims. Despite its substantial accuracy, his approach appears to suffer from some of the same tensions that mark MacIntyre’s defense of Thomism as well as Rawls and Rorty’s commendation of democracy. If something like the liberal project’s search for common ground is essential to grappling with the challenges of difference and cooperation in a divided world, then democratic practice requires critically robust foundations that pragmatic versions of liberalism cannot provide.

I.4 Beyond Communitarianism and Second-Generation Liberalism

It is my contention that both sides in this increasingly stale debate between communitarian authors such as MacIntyre, Milbank and Hauerwas and second-generation liberal authors such as Rawls, Rorty and Stout are at least partially correct. On the one hand, I am convinced that the key to coherent ethical and political discourse lies in a retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition that takes cultural and religious diversity seriously. On the other hand, I am also convinced that there are redeemable features of modernity that can and ought to be retrieved and developed in ways that take seriously the communitarian critique. At the same time, it is my contention that authors on both sides’ struggle, in similar albeit significantly different ways, to critically ground their fundamental claims and to combine the complementary insights present on both sides. These limitations are at least in part the product of those shared post-modern presuppositions that underlie various forms of the tension between historicism and uniqueness hinted at above. Drawing on the work of Bernard Lonergan in Part II of this dissertation, I shall develop an alternative account of decline and retrieval that aims to elevate both parties’ best insights while avoiding their inconsistencies.
II.1  Bernard Lonergan’s Alternative Narrative of Decline\(^8\) and Retrieval

My response to the contemporary impasse will proceed in two major stages. On the one hand, Lonergan’s work provides tools for tracing a series of methodological oversights that culminate in the post-modern presuppositions that hinder rationally compelling resolution of the liberal-communitarian debate. On the other hand, Lonergan retrieves and combines essential aspects of premodern, modern and post-modern thought capable of providing a critically-grounded alternative. In what follows I will comment briefly on the subdivisions within each stage.

II.2  The Evolution of Human Meaning and the ‘Dialectic of History’

Part II of this dissertation begins with the articulation of a heuristic framework for examining the progression of stances implicated in my narrative of decline. The key to this framework lies in Lonergan’s attention to four distinct levels or stages in the evolution of human meaning, a typology common in his later work that includes but subsumes and complicates the three-level structure of the human good.\(^9\) The latter distinguishes between (a) the subject’s sensitive or vital spontaneity; (b) practical intelligence and its role in the formation of civil community or society; and (c) those meanings and values, constitutive of what Lonergan terms culture, that inform social practices. Lonergan further subdivides (c) by distinguishing between a pre-reflective or ‘everyday’ level of culture in which meanings and values remain implicit in

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\(^8\) The term decline is somewhat ambiguous. The bulk of Part II is devoted to exploring the emergence and evolution of certain methodological oversights whose successive unfolding conditions the emergence of post-modern historicism. A portion of this narrative also overlaps with what Lonergan terms ‘the longer cycle of decline.’ At the same time, it would be incorrect to argue from a Lonerganian perspective that there are no genuine achievements and/or redeemable aspects associated with each stage in this series. As I will argue in the dissertation itself, human history is always a mixture of progress and decline. Another term that perhaps better captures the dialectical character of my narrative is ‘philosophic development.’ On the latter see: Bernard Lonergan, “The Human Good as Developing Subject,” in *Topics in Education*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000).

human practices and a superstructural or reflective level whose emergence he correlates with the birth of classical culture. Lonergan’s expanded historical narrative includes two additional developments that modify the control of meaning. The early modern turn to the subject contributes to the methodological prioritization of epistemology over metaphysis and the rise of historical consciousness leads to the breakdown of classical culture and to the correlative affirmation of cultural and religious diversity.

According to Lonergan, each of the four stages that sublates sensitive spontaneity and primitive community represents a structural achievement in the evolution of human meaning. At the same time, the way in which individuals respond to or navigate these structural developments varies widely. More specifically, it is my contention that the way in which the subject or her community responds to stages in the evolution of meaning is a function, at least in part, of her basic methodological presuppositions. In other words, disagreements concerning the nature of the human good in general and democratic norms in particular are at least in part the function of mutually-exclusive accounts of human knowing, choosing and religious experiencing. Reference to this relationship between basic horizon and structural negotiation provides a heuristic framework for examining the selection of authors in my narrative of decline or philosophic development.

II.3 The Emergence and Evolution of Intuitionism and Voluntarism

My narrative of philosophic development traces the emergence and evolution of two methodological oversights in three separate stages: (a) an intuitionist account of human knowing; and (b) a voluntarist account of divine and or human freedom. The first stage of my narrative centers on the Augustinian-Aristotelian controversy, the rejection of the Thomistic synthesis in the aftermath of the condemnations of 1277, and the resulting rise of intuitionism and
voluntarism in the work of authors such as Scotus and Ockham. Intuitionism combines two
cognitional oversights, an overemphasis on propositional first principles and deductive logic with
a naïve realist or confrontational view of reality conceived as ‘already out there now.’ The
former finds expression in pejoratively ‘classicist’ forms of culture that remain constitutionally
incapable of negotiating the demands associated with the rise of probabilistic science and
historical consciousness. By distancing themselves from an Aristotelian-Thomist account of
moral knowing and choosing, voluntarist reinterpretations of the relationship between intellect
and will tend to conceive divine and or human freedom as ‘unfettered’ choice. Late medieval
voluntarism not only contributes to novel conceptions of divine sovereignty, the nature of
universals, natural law and human freedom, but also sets important conditions of possibility for
the rise of what Lonergan terms the ‘general bias of commonsense.’

The second stage in my narrative of philosophic development traces how the evolution of
intuitionist and voluntarist themes distorts negotiations of the modern turn to the subject in the
empiricism of Hobbes and Locke and the transcendental idealism of Kant. All three authors, in
similar albeit significantly different ways, combine a pejoratively classicist conception of culture
with some variation of naïve realism. At the same time, voluntarist presuppositions combine with
empiricist and idealist variations of intuitionism to condition the possibility of two different
accounts of early modern liberalism. In Hobbes, and to a lesser extent in Locke, one finds
expressions of ‘general bias,’ a truncation of the human good that prioritizes self-interest and
instrumental reason in ways that deny the higher integration of cultural values. Both authors
combine a sensitive or experiential criterion of ‘good’ with a voluntarist conception of obligation
that conceives civil laws as expressions of instrumental reason designed to serve mutual self-
interest. Kant retains the late medieval conception of categorical obligation but identifies the
source of moral commands conceived in classicist terms with a purely *a priori*, fully rational and
autonomous will. The correlative emphasis on human dignity helps shape an alternative form of liberalism that is both superior to crude forms of empiricism and yet limited by classicism, rationalism and individualism.

II.4 Intuitionism, Voluntarism and the Contemporary Crisis of Meaning

The third stage in my narrative centers on the breakdown of classical liberalism and the correlative negotiation of historical consciousness in the work of authors on both sides of the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate. The emergence of post-modernity’s concern for the historicity of human meaning has called into question classicist and naïve realist expressions of intuitionism as well as early modern empiricist and rationalist forms of individualism. Post-modern emphases on the tradition-constituted character of human knowing and choosing and its respect for cultural and religious diversity are to be commended. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the post-modern presuppositions shared by authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian divide represent the final stage in a series of methodological oversights. More specifically, post-modern historicism’s rejection of transculturality is an exaggerated response to the errors of intuitionism, an overreaction that represents, ironically, the terminal expression of voluntarism. This insufficiently critical negotiation of historical consciousness is at least partly the result of an inability to differentiate the classical control of meaning from its classicist degeneration and the validity of the epistemological turn from its classicist and individualist expression. Shared in different ways by each of the authors examined in Part I, these presuppositions tend to reduce human subjectivity to a product of socialization, a move which impugns their capacities to account for conceptual innovation and debate in critically post-conventional terms. Despite their embrace of historicism, each of these authors continues to flirt, in confused fashion, with some form of uniqueness that is exempt from deconstruction.
By contrast with partial negotiations of historical consciousness, Lonergan argues that the recognition of cultural and religious diversity precipitates what he calls the contemporary crisis of meaning, the search for transcultural standards compatible with pluralism. It is my contention that the key to a successful response to this exigency depends upon a transposition of Aquinas’ metaphysical rendering of the classical control of meaning that takes seriously both the modern turn to the subject and post-modern historicity. Unlike the variety of classicist aberrations that remain constitutionally incapable of grappling with the rise of historical consciousness, Lonergan argues that Aquinas’ metaphysical accounts of human nature and grace remain at least implicitly open to such developments. According to Lonergan, the modern turn to the subject challenges the contemporary Thomist to objectify the largely latent noetic phenomenological roots of her abstract metaphysical commitments. The successful negotiation of this challenge elicits the open-ended foundations required to avoid both classicism and post-modern historicism.

II.5 Lonergan’s Transpositions of Aquinas on Human Nature and Grace

At the heart of Lonergan’s retrieval of Aquinas stands his transposition of Aquinas’ metaphysical notion of agent intellect or ‘intellectual light.’ Lonergan articulates this notion in phenomenological terms as a three-fold transcendental intending of or desire for intelligibility, reality and value, the source and norm of cultural-linguistic frameworks and their ongoing revision. Lonergan’s attention to the subject’s orientation and the integral role that insight plays in mediating between questions that intend knowledge and value and the subsequent procession of concepts or judgments highlights the open-ended dynamism of the human spirit. By distinguishing cultural-linguistic determinations from the subject’s transcendental intending, Lonergan’s transposition of human nature provides a basis for grounding or redrawing the distinction between thin and thick conceptions of fulfillment found, for example, in MacIntyre
and Rawls. From this perspective, Lonergan reconceives epistemic and moral objectivity as the product of fidelity to the subject’s inborn desire for knowledge and value. By extension, Lonergan correlates social, cultural and personal progress with the subject’s fidelity to her inborn orientation and the source of historical decline with the variety of biases that interfere with or distort the subject’s natural orientation.

Although human development begins with the subject’s socialization into a particular tradition or communal horizon, it is Lonergan’s contention that her orientation to self-transcendence is at least methodologically prior. In responding to the natural relativization of inherited meanings and values that generally occurs in adolescence or early adulthood Lonergan commends a project of self-appropriation. The latter refers to a complex process whereby individuals advert to, objectify, verify and take explicit control of their conscious intentional striving. The movement from basic self-presence to self-knowledge culminates in what he regards as an ‘existential discovery,’ the realization that the character of social, cultural and personal development is the product of the individual’s relative authenticity. While the objectification of the orientation to knowledge and value is subject to revision or tradition-constituted, Lonergan argues that the subject’s intending is transcultural insofar as it is conscious and operative prior to any thematization. This distinction allows him to avoid the historicist reduction of subjectivity to socialization in general and the tension that exists between historicism and transcendental aspiration in, for example, MacIntyre’s and Stout’s accounts of reason-exchange in particular.

If social and cultural progress is the product of personal fidelity to the subject’s orientation to self-transcendence, Lonergan is clear that habitual authenticity is not a given. According to Lonergan, the resolution of the dialectic between progress and decline finds its proper resolution in a higher integration that elevates and perfects the subject’s desire for
knowledge and value. He articulates the meaning and effects of this ‘relatively a priori’
dimension as an experience of unrestricted being-in-love that both incipiently fulfills and
strengthens the subject’s yearning for value. Just as his historically-conditioned objectifications
of transcendental method point toward the transcultural orientation to knowledge and value
operative prior to thematization, so too a similar distinction may be drawn with respect to
religious love. Religious experience, far from being created via participation in social practices,
is a pre-verbal reality interpreted and nurtured or rejected by diverse traditions. Lonergan’s
corresponding emphasis on religious self-appropriation is thereby essential to negotiating the
reality of religious diversity in ways that take seriously the Second Vatican Council’s recognition
of the universality of grace. The result is a form of inclusivism that, by contrast with post-
modern forms of Christian exceptionalism, allows him to avoid rigid forms of the grace-sin
dialectic that restrict the offer of salvation to the visible confines of the Christian communion.
Together, these transpositions of nature and grace provide the framework for articulating an
alternative account of democratic foundations.

II.6 Lonergan and Democracy

At the center of Lonergan’s alternative lies a distinction between what I term the remote
and proximate norms of democratic practice. The former is roughly equivalent with the heuristic
account of metaphysics or fulfillment correlative with the subject’s transcendental intending.
Proximate democratic norms such as human rights are the product of reflection on self-
appropriation’s resolution of the contemporary crisis of meaning, the drawing out of self-
appropriation’s implications in the context of historical consciousness. Such norms set the
conditions of possibility for human flourishing by protecting and respecting the subject’s dignity,
her search for truth and value in freedom and dialogue. When self-appropriation is incomplete or
truncated the results are objectifications of the norms implicit in democratic practice that obscure or stand in dialectical tension with the subject’s inborn orientation. Reference to this two-level account of democratic norms shapes distinctive accounts of democratic individualism, religious freedom, public discourse, and religion’s role in civil society that integrate and sublate insights from both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate.

III. Dissertation Outline, Qualifications and Significance

This dissertation will proceed in two major stages. In chapters 1-4 I will draw on primary and a select number of secondary sources to investigate and critique the critical and constructive projects\(^\text{10}\) of four authors in the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate.\(^\text{11}\) In Chapter 1 I will exposit and evaluate Alasdair MacIntyre’s critique of modern and post-modern ethical and political practice and correlative social teleological retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition.\(^\text{12}\) I will introduce the work of Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank in my critical evaluation of certain tensions in MacIntyre’s work. Reference to the work of Hauerwas and Milbank is designed to illustrate one way in which such tensions may be resolved.\(^\text{13}\) Chapter 2 will open with a brief introduction to the second-generation liberal authors I shall examine in chapters 2-4. The focus of chapter 2 will be limited to expositing and evaluating the methodological presuppositions that inform John Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*.\(^\text{14}\) Drawing on a collection of articles from a number of volumes, chapter 3 will examine the critical and

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\(^{10}\) These critical and constructive projects function in certain key respects as narratives of decline and retrieval.

\(^{11}\) Although I do not contend that these options are exhaustive, these authors’ shared commitment to certain post-modern presuppositions do justify their selection.

\(^{12}\) This chapter is limited to articulating and assessing MacIntyre’s notion of tradition-constituted rationality and prescinds from discussing his retrieval of Aristotle’s ‘metaphysical biology’ in *Dependent Rational Animals* and the work that follows it.

\(^{13}\) By no means will I attempt or claim to offer a comprehensive account of either author’s work.

\(^{14}\) Although I will refer on occasion to Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, reference to Rawls’ earlier work will be limited to highlighting his response to the communitarian critique.
constructive work of Richard Rorty. Special attention will be given to the connection between antirepresentationalism and ‘postmodernist bourgeois liberalism.’ In chapter 4 I shall conclude my investigation of the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate by focusing on Jeffrey Stout’s attempts to forge a middle-ground between the traditionalism of MacIntyre and the secularist forms of reason-exchange found in the later Rawls and Rorty. Chapter 4 will end with a short concluding statement and introduction to Part II of the dissertation.

The second stage of this dissertation will unfold in chapters 5-10. Chapter 5 will be devoted to unpacking Lonergan’s three-level structure of the human good and to complicating this structure through reference to two additional differentiations, the modern turn to the subject and the rise of historical consciousness. My exposition will conclude by highlighting the relationship between structural achievements and the subject’s basic methodological presuppositions. Reference to the relationship between these two dimensions will provide a heuristic framework for investigating the series of positions in my subsequent narrative of decline. Drawing on schematic remarks from Lonergan as well as secondary resources that help contextualize the late medieval condemnation of Aristotelianism, the focus in chapter 6 will be on tracing the emergence of two methodological oversights: intuitionism and voluntarism. The goal is to articulate these oversights and their relationship to the classicist aberration of the classical control of meaning and the longer cycle of decline respectively.

Chapters 7-9 are not in the first instance meant to offer definitive interpretations of the various authors implicated in my narrative of decline nor are they designed to attend in detail to the broader background or context in which these authors wrote. These chapters are exercises in

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15 My interpretation of Rorty prescinds from direct engagement with his initial critique of Western epistemology and metaphysics found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.
16 I will limit the bulk of my investigation in this chapter to an analysis of Stout’s most famous work, *Democracy and Tradition*. 
what Lonergan regards as the functional specialty ‘history.’ This specialty is concerned with those trends and dynamics that help define broader intellectual movements. My contribution to this enterprise lies in tracing the emergence and evolution of intuitionism and voluntarism in certain late medieval and early modern authors.

Chapter 7 will expand upon Lonergan’s contention that the birth of these aberrations may be traced to Scotus and Ockham by investigating the role that intuitionism and voluntarism play in their work. This chapter is not meant to provide an exhaustive exposition of either author’s work but is designed to highlight the way in which certain methodological presuppositions set the context for successive stages in my narrative of decline. Chapters 8 and 9 will focus on the way in which intuitionist and voluntarist aberrations shape the early modern empiricism of Hobbes and Locke and the transcendental idealism of Kant respectively. Once again, the purpose of these two chapters is not to develop a comprehensive account of Hobbes, Locke or Kant’s philosophy but rather to illustrate the connection that exists between an author’s basic methodological stance and their particular account of the human good. These authors in particular have been selected for two broad reasons: (a) the role they play in the narratives of decline and retrieval presented by authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate; and (b) their status as representatives of hedonist and rationalist accounts of classical liberalism respectively. Drawing primarily on Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, chapter 8’s exposition will focus on the role empiricist presuppositions play in his account of human knowing, choosing and political legitimacy. My subsequent investigation of Locke will focus on two primary sources in particular – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government* – and on several influential secondary treatments. The goal again is to highlight the relationship

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between Locke’s empiricism and his account of political community. Following certain prominent interpreters I shall argue that despite Locke’s significantly different account of natural right and natural law, his position on the nature of moral knowing and politics resembles the Hobbesian position in certain key respects. In the end I shall contend that both positions represent intermediate stages in the longer cycle of decline initiated by the general bias of commonsense. Chapter 9’s exposition of Kant will draw on four primary sources in particular: the Critique of Pure Reason, the Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, the Critique of Practical Reason and The Metaphysics of Morals. Once again the focus shall be on the role that intuitionist and voluntarist presuppositions play in Kant’s account of human knowing and choosing and its relation to his understanding of politics. Although Kant’s account of ethics, human dignity and political community transcends many of the deficiencies associated with an empiricist account of the human good I shall argue that his constructive alternative is marked by certain limitations.

Chapter 10 opens with an extended examination of the role that the rise of historical consciousness plays in the deconstruction of classicist instantiations of intuitionism and classically liberal forms of individualism. The focus of this chapter’s opening section will be on tracing the relationship between historicism and the rejection of intuitionism in the authors canvassed in chapters 1-4. In responding to the contemporary crisis of meaning, I shall present Lonergan’s transposition of Aquinas’ metaphysical conceptions of human nature and sanctifying grace as a way to combine and sublate the strengths in each author’s position. Lonergan does not commend his position as the conclusion to a deductive argument but rather invites readers to test

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his objectification of human knowing and choosing against their own data of consciousness. As a result, I can do no more than invite the readers of this dissertation to a similar investigation. This chapter shall close with an extended examination of the role that cognitive, existential and religious self-appropriation can play in providing critical foundations for democratic practice that take seriously the post-modern concern for historicity. Although the groundwork for this section will have been laid by all that precedes it, this section is without a doubt the most exploratory of the entire dissertation. My account of the nature of human rights, the status of democratic norms, the character of public discourse and the role of religion in a democracy will be schematic and tentative in nature. These reflections articulate certain insights that I hope to explore in more detail in future research. This dissertation’s conclusion will provide a summary of my argument and will close with an examination of several implications.

This project aims to advance scholarship in several areas. Commentators often remark that the liberal-communitarian debate has reached a stalemate or that such divisions have been transcended by second-generation liberalism’s affirmation of the communitarian critique. In reality the impasse that exists between communitarian and second-generation liberal authors is a function of certain shared presuppositions that impugn their capacity to defend their fundamental claims and to combine the insights present on both sides. The liberal-communitarian debate is not dead insofar as it is has been transcended or won but precisely insofar as it is not susceptible to rational resolution. My critical reflections in chapters 1-4 are designed to highlight the strengths but also the tensions that exist between historicism and different variations of metaphysical or post-metaphysical uniqueness. Either such uniqueness falls afoul of these authors’ commitments to historicism or their constructive alternatives are relativized in relation to one another. The result is a series of often well-intentioned but inadequate or partial negotiations of the contemporary crisis of meaning.
Part II of this dissertation derives much of its inspiration from certain schematic remarks that Lonergan made throughout the course of his career concerning the historical emergence and evolution of certain methodological oversights. Interpreters of Lonergan often refer to these remarks but rarely have commentators developed thick narratives designed to trace the historical influence of such aberrations. Part II of this dissertation not only fills this gap in Lonergan studies, it culminates with my contention that the methodological presuppositions that hinder rationally compelling resolution of the liberal-communitarian debate represent the final stage in this cycle’s historical unfolding. Although Lonergan scholars are quite used to speaking of his retrieval of Aquinas, rarely has this sort of project been applied to discussions surrounding democratic theory in particular.\textsuperscript{21} In my reflections that open and close chapter 10 I draw on Lonergan’s work but speak in my own name as I attempt to offer an alternative account of democratic norms and practice that harmonizes significant insights from both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate. In addition, I contend that these reflections are both congruent with and have the potential to advance certain dimensions of Catholic Social Teaching. The potential real-world implications of this research agenda are also significant. In a context where the playing-field between fundamental political and economic positions has been leveled, reference to self-appropriation may provide a useful heuristic tool for citizen education in both intra- and extra-ecclesial contexts. In the end it is my contention that formation for Christian living in the twenty-first century is compatible with formation for democratic citizenship.

\textsuperscript{21} Notable exceptions are found in the work of Kenneth Melchin, Frederick Lawrence, James Marsh, and Patrick M. Brennan.
Part I: The Contemporary Liberal-Communitarian Debate

Chapter 1

Alasdair MacIntyre and the Communitarian Retrieval of Premodern Virtue

1. Introduction

Alasdair MacIntyre’s famous and controversial trilogy represents one of the most comprehensive and contested attempts to retrieve the premodern notion of virtue found in Aristotle and Aquinas. MacIntyre tends to regard the breakdown of premodern forms of perfectionism and correlative rise of modern ethical and political practice as an irredeemable instance of civilizational decline. Welcoming the post-modern deconstruction of modern foundationalism and individualism, MacIntyre develops a historicist or social teleological retrieval of Aristotle and Aquinas, a systematic account of tradition-dependent rationality that walks a middle-ground between Enlightenment pretensions to neutrality and post-modern relativism and perspectivism. According to MacIntyre, tradition-dependent first principles are provisional and justified relative to alternatives through a process of dialectical testing whose long-range telos is transperspectival truth, the goal of theoretical and practical inquiry. This meta-theory provides the rational background necessary for intra- and inter-tradition dialogue and debate.

MacIntyre is to be commended for recognizing that coherent ethical and political discourse requires the retrieval of a teleological framework attentive to social and self-transcendent dimensions of the human good. His conception of tradition-constituted rationality defines a social teleological account of human flourishing that is compatible with rational contestation and robust metaphysical claims. At the same time MacIntyre’s constructive

alternative is not without its own tensions. Although I agree with the substance of MacIntyre’s meta-theory, his explicit disavowal of tradition-independent standards appear to stand in tension with his commitment to providing transcendental norms that govern dialogue and debate within and between traditions. A related tension appears in MacIntyre’s account of liberalism. In certain instances MacIntyre appears to argue that only a thick conception of the good shared by members of a relatively homogeneous community can provide the background necessary for coherent discourse and practice. This type of approach would seem to provide warrant for sectarian withdrawal from modern political practice. At the same time, MacIntyre’s commitment to the ‘rationality of traditions’ seems to provide a thin conception of the good that would make possible coherent discourse in the face of radical diversity. These tensions and related confusions would seem threaten many of the excellent insights that MacIntyre has tried so hard to defend.

This chapter will proceed in eight stages. In section 1.1 I will outline MacIntyre’s account of modernity’s emergence by contrasting it with premodern teleological frameworks. In section 1.2 I will examine the Enlightenment project’s attempts to provide an independent justification for morality in the wake of teleology’s breakdown. In section 1.3 I discuss the final stage in MacIntyre’s narrative of historical decline, the rise of emotivism, and the deconstruction of liberal neutrality. In section 1.4 I turn to MacIntyre’s constructive project, outlining his social teleological retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition by distinguishing between social practices, the narrative unity of a human life, and the basic horizon provided by a tradition. In section 1.5 I examine tradition-constituted rationality in greater detail, focusing in particular on the challenges of relativism and perspectivism that are typically leveled against MacIntyre’s approach. In section 1.6 I articulate MacIntyre’s account of the ‘rationality of traditions.’ In section 1.7 I will investigate the two major tensions I have identified in MacIntyre’s project and will draw on the work of Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank to illustrate one particular way of
resolving such tensions. In section 1.8 I will conclude my reflections on MacIntyre by harnessing his notion of dialectic in service of an alternative capable of retrieving the good and transcending the limitations in his constructive project.

1.1 The ‘Predecessor Culture’ and the Rise of Modern Ethical Theory

MacIntyre’s work proceeds in two interrelated stages, one critical and the other constructive. In the former MacIntyre traces a process of historical decline that distinguishes between premodern, modern and post-modern variations of ethical and political reasoning and practice. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre contrasts the premodern ‘predecessor culture’ and modern ethical theory or the ‘Enlightenment project.’ At the core of the premodern approach lies a ‘functional’ or teleological account of the human species that claims human beings share an ‘essential nature’ from which a ‘corresponding notion of what is good and best for members of a specific kind’ may be derived. From this perspective, the basic ethical contrast is between the human person prior to moral formation – what MacIntyre calls ‘untutored human nature’ – and

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2 In *After Virtue*, the three-stage contrast is between the predecessor culture, the Enlightenment project, and post-modern emotivism. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, the contrast is between MacIntyre’s tradition-constituted theory of rationality, modern liberalism and post-modern perspectivism and relativism. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, the contrast is between the Thomist tradition, the encyclopedic tradition, and the genealogical tradition whose roots are traceable to the work of Nietzsche.

3 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 36; 39, The Enlightenment Project refers to those ‘attempts to provide a rational justification for morality,’ common between the years, ‘1630 to 1850.’

4 This account is shared in different ways by Aristotle and Aquinas. Ibid, 53. According to MacIntyre, Aristotle’s ethics are “complicated and added to, but not essentially altered when…placed within a framework of theistic beliefs. The precepts of ethics now have to be understood not only as teleological injunctions but also as expressions of a divinely ordained law. The table of virtues and vices has to be amended and added to and a concept of sin is added to the Aristotelian concept of error. The law of God requires a new kind of respect and awe. The true end of man can no longer be completely achieved in this world, but only in another.” Although Aristotle and Aquinas take center-stage in MacIntyre’s account of premodern ethics, he makes it clear in *After Virtue*, 58-59, that, “the use of man as a functional concept is far older than Aristotle and it does not initially derive from Aristotle’s metaphysical biology. It is rooted in the forms of social life to which the theorists of the classical tradition give expression. For according to that tradition to be a man is to fill a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose: member of a family, citizen, soldier, philosopher, servant of God.” In other words, ‘traditional societies’ define ‘purpose’ via social role and expectation.

5 MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 138-139. See also, MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 82; 53, “ethics therefore in this view presupposes some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human telos.”
the human person who has achieved the goal specified by her essential nature. Standing midway between each of these respective states lay the ‘precepts which…instruct us how to move from potentiality to act, how to realize our true nature and to reach our true end.’ Within this tripartite scheme, virtues are defined as those stable ‘dispositions’ or ‘habits’ of desiring, thinking and acting that support compliance with such precepts and that facilitate the realization of the *summum bonum.* According to MacIntyre, each of these three features ‘requires reference to the other two if its status and function are to be intelligible.’

MacIntyre traces the advent of modernity – the first stage in his account of historical decline – to the breakdown of this Aristotelian-Thomist scheme or to the disintegration of the Thomistic synthesis that occurs in the wake of the condemnations of 1277. Although MacIntyre does not develop a systematic account of this transition it is possible to synthesize and distinguish between two particular facets of this breakdown, each with its own corresponding implication for modern philosophy and ethics/politics. Although the first facet is broadly epistemological in character it has implications for modern ethical methodology. According to MacIntyre, the premodern Thomistic framework distinguished between ‘dialectical’ and ‘demonstrative’ argumentation. The former refers to the historically-extended testing or

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6 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, 24-25, “the *Posterior Analytics* is not designed to teach us how to acquire knowledge, but rather how to present knowledge already achieved….the *Physics* and the biological treatises report scientific enquiries which are still in progress, moving towards, but not yet having reached the *telos* appropriate to, and providing implicit or explicit guidance for, those specific types of activity.” See also MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 91-93, 100; and *Three Rival*, 88-89, “Certain differences between dialectic and demonstration are crucial. Demonstrative arguments state and order already known truths, vindicating the status of such truths as certain knowledge, as parts of some science. A perfected science exhibits its form as a chain of such arguments, descending from its necessary first principles to its subordinate conclusions. By contrast, dialectical argument is exploratory. Dialectic is the instrument of enquiry which is still *in via*. It is through dialectic that we construct demonstrative arguments, and thus while in demonstrative reasoning we move from first principles, in dialectic we argue to first principles.”
discrimination of fallible claims whose ultimate goal or telos is theoretical or practical truth.\textsuperscript{11}

The latter form of argument begins with those ‘substantive’ first principles\textsuperscript{12} that represent the long-range goal or stable conclusions of dialectical inquiry capable of grounding a deductive science of consequents.\textsuperscript{13} MacIntyre associates the rise of a pejorative form of ‘scholasticism’ with the neglect of inquiry’s teleological thrust and subsequent overemphasis on deductive argument.\textsuperscript{14} This shift contributes to a profusion of metaphysical systems or ‘ideological weltanschaunung’ each with its own substantive first principles conceived as irreducibly distinct

\textsuperscript{11} MacIntyre, First Principles, 8-9, 13-14, 38, 43-44; 26-27, “the telos/finis of any type of systematic activity is, on an Aristotelian and Thomistic view, that end internal to activity of that specific kind, for the sake of which and in the direction of which activity of that kind is carried forward.” See also MacIntyre, First Principles, 34-35, “we can begin, just as Aristotle did, only with a type of dialectical argument in which we set out for criticism, and then criticize in turn, each of the established and best reputed beliefs held amongst us as to the fundamental nature of whatever it is about which we are enquiring….as rival views are one by one discarded, leaving as their legacy to enquiry either something in them which withstood criticism…so an initial and tolerably coherent and direction-affording conception of the relevant first principle or principles may be constructed.” See also MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 91-93, 100.

\textsuperscript{12} MacIntyre, First Principles, 29-30. MacIntyre draws a crucial distinction between ‘substantive’ and ‘trivial’ first principles. “Examples of the former type of first principle, evident to us as to all rational persons, are, of course, the principle of noncontradiction and the first principle of practical rationality, that good is to be pursued and evil avoided.” See also MacIntyre, First Principles, 10-11, “there are on the one hand, those evident principles, the meaning of whose terms is immediately to be comprehended by every competent language-user, such as ‘every whole is greater than its part.’” And again in MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 173, “There are of course first principles concerning such basic conceptual relationships as those of parts to wholes such that any rational being must find them in some way or another undeniable. But even they are not necessarily immune to diversities of interpretation, and by themselves they cannot provide the first principles of any substantive science. The first principles which are able to provide the substance of such a science always have to include additional premises. And this is true at the most fundamental level. We do indeed, according to Aquinas, apprehend being as the most fundamental concept of theoretical inquiry and make explicit what we apprehend in the recognition which our judgments accord to the principle of noncontradiction. Similarly we apprehend good as the most fundamental concept in forming practical activity and make explicit what we apprehend in the recognition which our actions accord to the principle that good is to be done and evil to be avoided. But when each person assesses what it is good and best for him or her to do, more is needed.”

\textsuperscript{13} MacIntyre, First Principles, 13-14; 29-30, “there are a set of first principles, archai/principia, which provide premises for demonstrative arguments and which specify the ultimate causal agencies….Enquiry aspires to and is intelligible only in terms of its aspiration to finality, comprehensiveness and unity of explanation and understanding.” First Principles, 30, “what the substantive first principles which provide the initial premises of any perfected science achieve then is a statement of those necessary truths which furnish the relevant set of demonstrative arguments with their first premises, but also exhibit how if something is of a certain kind, it essentially and necessarily has certain properties.” See also, MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 91-93, 100.

\textsuperscript{14} MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 158-160; 224, “But from late medieval Aristotelianism onward they were split apart in a way that first diminished the importance of Aristotle’s discussions of the Topics, either by downgrading the importance of dialectical argument or else by assimilating the study of dialectic to the study of consequentiae.”
starting-points. The early modern epistemological quest for tradition-independent substantive first principles becomes at least partly explicable against the background of this transition.

The second facet associated with the breakdown of premodern thought is broadly ethical in character and includes both pejorative and relatively benign features that contribute to the eclipse of a teleological account of practical rationality. In After Virtue, MacIntyre names two trends that contribute to the rejection of a ‘functional’ account of human nature. First, the ‘Protestant-cum-Jansenist conception of reason’ that denies fallen human reason access to natural knowledge of humankind’s *summum bonum* and second, the ‘rejection of Aristotelianism’ prevalent in the mechanistic philosophy and scientific theory of the 17th and 18th centuries. In Whose Justice? MacIntyre develops a less negative account of modernity’s emergence, arguing that ‘Europe’s educated classes’ rejected a functional account of human nature in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion. Finally, in Three Rival Versions, MacIntyre traces the eclipse of Thomistic teleology to the emergence of voluntarism, both divine and human, in the work of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Together, these strands contribute to the emergence of ‘metaphysical nominalism’ and to a corresponding individualist notion of the subject ‘unconstrained by the externalities of divine law, natural teleology or hierarchical

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15 Ibid, 158-160.
19 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 209. “No appeal to any agreed conception of the good for human beings...was possible.” See also MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 41.
authority." This liberal conception of the autonomous ‘individual’ created or ‘invented’ by modernity was celebrated as a ‘self-congratulatory gain’ by Enlightenment authors.

The convergence of individualism and foundationalism gives rise to two interrelated features of modern ethical and political theory: a distinctive conception of the subject as self-interested and an ‘epistemological position’ focused on securing a standpoint for ethical reasoning freed from all particularity. Unconstrained by premodern social roles and an overarching good capable of providing ‘objective and impersonal’ standards for assessing the value of ‘particular actions or projects,’ the modern subject’s motivation for acting is reduced to the fulfillment of arbitrary desires. In the absence of shared goods, social interaction becomes increasingly marked by conflict as individuals, ‘motivated by a desire for power or glory,’ compete with each other to satisfy their personal preferences, primarily through the acquisition of property. Within this context ‘the ‘Enlightenment project’ arises as a series of similar albeit significantly different attempts to provide an ‘independent rational justification of morality’ or those rules capable of governing interactions between subjects who hold distinct

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22 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 68.
23 Ibid, 61.
24 Ibid, 34. See also, ibid, 61, “The self had been liberated from all those outmoded forms of social organization which had imprisoned it simultaneously within a belief in a theistic and teleological world order and within those hierarchical structures which attempted to legitimate themselves as part of such a world order.”
26 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 58-59. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 211, “individuals are held to possess their identity and their essential human capacities apart from and prior to their membership in any social or political order.”
28 Ibid, 34.
31 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 216-217, “status and power within the system depend upon the ownership of property.”
conceptions of the good. Each of these attempts aspires to the Cartesian ideal of universal, disinterested and purely objective rationality freed from ‘the particular bonds of any particular moral and religious community.’ Each of these variations of the ‘epistemological’ or foundationalist enterprise purports to begin with self-evidently certain and substantive first principles capable of providing a basis for the deductive derivation of all subsequent knowledge claims.

1.2 ‘The Enlightenment Project’ and its Successors

In his trilogy, MacIntyre contrasts two diametrically opposed responses to this distinctively modern exigency to provide new foundations for premodern moral norms by appealing to ‘some feature or features of human nature.’ Typified by the work of Hume though also by authors such as Hobbes, Locke and Machiavelli, MacIntyre associates the first strand with attempts to ground morality through appeal to passion in general and to enlightened self-interest in particular. For proponents of this approach, society is a collection of individuals whose interactions are governed by moral principles that serve long-range self-interest. From this perspective, an individual’s consent to political authority is contingent upon the state’s commitment to protecting the individual’s right to satisfy her own inclinations compatible with the rights of others. MacIntyre associates the second strand with attempts to ground the

34 MacIntyre, Three Rival, 59. See also: MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 6, 336.
35 MacIntyre, First Principles, 62-63.
37 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 39. See also MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 41, “provide a new and rationally justifiable account of their status and authority.”
39 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 230; 156, “collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection…they possess at best that inferior form of friendship which is founded on mutual advantage.” See also After Virtue, 254, “government does not express or represent the moral community of the citizens, but is instead a set of institutional arrangements for imposing a bureaucratized unity on a society which lacks genuine moral consensus.” MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 213, 338; 211, “the rulers of the modern state claimed to be able to justify their assumptions of authority and their exercise of power insofar as they supplied the ruled with benefits and protections from harms.” MacIntyre, Three Rival, 193-194.
authority of moral principles by prescinding from considerations of inclination or passion. This second strand receives its preeminent expression in Kant’s purely rational and categorical moral law whose binding authority remains independent of divine command and considerations of human fulfillment. Unlike premodern teleological accounts of moral reasoning that explain the function of moral imperatives in relation to a sought after telos or end, the Kantian conception of pure reason prescinds from any particular conception of the good. As a result, Kant’s alternative focuses on defining universally normative obligations or duties to respect other individuals’ rights to self-determination simply for their own sake.

In both instances the primary concern that motivates ethical reflection shifts from questions surrounding the nature of humankind’s telos and the virtues or dispositions necessary for achieving the former to a fixation with moral rules as prior to and determinative of character traits. Disconnected from its home in teleological schemes, the concept of virtue becomes monistic. For the tradition deriving from Hobbes and Hume, virtue is reconceptualised as a passionate ‘disposition to obey the rules of justice.’ On the other hand, MacIntyre argues that Kant’s approach to moral rules is indebted to ‘Stoic patterns of thought and action’ that tend to conceive obedience to the law as its own reward and virtue as a capacity to ‘do what is right…without any eye…to further purpose.’ The result, as Stanley Hauerwas notes, is a form

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41 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 44-45, 50-52.
44 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 257, 119, “what rules ought we to follow? And why ought we obey them?” See also MacIntyre, Three Rival, 26, 175.
45 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 119, 235.
46 Ibid, 229. See also ibid, 233.
47 Ibid, 119. See also ibid, 170, 235; 236, “Kant…saw himself as the preeminent modern heir of the Stoics.”
of ‘quandary ethics,’ that presumes it is possible to answer the question ‘what ought I do?’ in universally applicable ways without concern for questions pertaining to telos and character. At the same time, MacIntyre claims that both strands shared rejection of any ‘functional’ concept of human nature doomed their projects from the very start. In the absence of an appeal to essential human nature, proponents of the Enlightenment project are left with conceptual fragments, ‘untutored human nature as it is’ and a series of ‘moral injunctions,’ deprived of their original context, that ‘human nature…has strong tendencies to disobey.’ The breakdown of this teleological background leads to distinctive problems for empiricist and rationalist projects respectively. The former struggle with explaining ‘how anyone moved only by passion and interest could be motivated, to obey principles of justice, obedience to which would deprive them of satisfaction at the level of passion.’ On the flipside, Kant seems incapable of explaining how the ‘rational apprehension’ of moral principles can motivate individuals to comply, let alone ‘how this complete setting aside of one’s own particular goals and interests’ is possible. These difficulties at least partly explain the continued appeal to a truncated theological framework in many Enlightenment authors. By appealing to the afterlife as a benchmark for pleasure and pain, empiricists in the broad sense hope to provide additional reasons for compliance compatible with rational self-interest. Kant himself recognizes in the

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50 Ibid, 55.
51 Ibid. See also *After Virtue*, 56; *Three Rival*, 29, on the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
52 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 213.
55 Ibid, 214.
Second Critique that any attempt to provide new foundations for morality remains ‘unintelligible’ without further appeal to ‘God, freedom, and happiness.’

The initial failure of authors such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Kant to provide an independent justification for morality did not deter subsequent authors from attempting to provide a ‘new teleology’ or ‘new categorical’ foundation for the ‘transformed rules of morality.’ The former approach gave birth to the tradition of utilitarianism inaugurated by Bentham and Mill. According to utilitarians, ‘agents act rightly when they choose that course of action which results in ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number.’ However, since the ‘objects of…human desire’ are ‘irreducibly heterogeneous’ or ‘polymorphous,’ the ‘notion of summing them either for individuals or for some population has no clear sense.’ From this perspective, utility is nothing more than a ‘moral fiction,’ a ‘pseudo-concept available for a variety of ideological uses.’ Sidgwick’s entry on ‘Ethics’ in the Ninth Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica represents the culmination of these failed efforts. Recognizing the tension that exists between the maximization of personal and collective ‘preference satisfaction,’ Sidgwick argues that ‘the moral injunctions of utilitarianism could not be derived from any psychological foundations.’

The second approach includes post-Kantian appeals to the universal characteristics of practical reason in general and the notion of human rights in particular found in analytic

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56 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 56. See also Whose Justice?, 214.
57 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 62, 68.
59 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 62-65.
60 Ibid, 70.
61 Ibid, 64.
62 Ibid, 70. See also MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 49.
63 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 64.
64 Ibid, 65: MacIntyre, Three Rival, 186-189.
65 MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 43-44.
66 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 65.
philosophers such as Gewirth, Dworkin and Rawls. MacIntyre impugns these attempts on empirical grounds for failing to isolate self-evident first principles agreeable to all and for invoking the notion of human rights, a moral fiction analogous to the concept of utility. The failure of both projects gives rise to corresponding forms of intuitionism that conceive the foundations of utilitarian reasoning or the reality of human rights as taken-for-granted claims for ‘which no further reason can be given.’

1.3 The Rise of Emotivism, the Genealogical Project and the Return to Aristotle

According to MacIntyre, the breakdown of intuitionism gives way to the third and final stage in the process of historical decline that MacIntyre associates with the rise of ‘emotivism.’ Although contemporary utilitarians, post-Kantian analytic philosophers and proponents of a broad range of alternative standpoints continue to appeal to what they regard as impersonal or objective standards in their moral deliberations, such pretensions simply mask the fact that ‘moral judgments’ function as ‘expressions of attitude or feeling.’ The absence of rational grounds for resolving moral disagreements contributes to the ‘interminable’ character of contemporary moral debate and to the conclusion that agreement may only be ‘secured, if at all, by producing certain non-rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with

67 Ibid, 66.
68 Ibid, 67-68, 69-70. According to MacIntyre, the notion of a right only makes sense in contexts where there are socially-defined roles and responsibilities. See also ibid, 21, “such writers cannot agree among themselves either on what the character of moral rationality is or on the substance of the morality which is to be grounded on that rationality…prima facie evidence that the project has failed.” See also ibid, 71. Here MacIntyre contrasts an individualism which makes its claims in terms of rights and forms of bureaucratic organization which make their claims in terms of utility. This tension lies at the heart of debates between individualism and collectivism in contemporary politics.
69 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 65.
70 Ibid, 3-4.
71 Ibid, 12. See also ibid, 32, “its judgments are in the end criterionless. The specifically modern self, the self that I have called emotivist, finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgement for such limits could only derive from rational criteria for evaluation and the emotivist self lacks any such criteria.”
Emotivism thereby ‘entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations’ and finds social expression in MacIntyre’s typology of modern ‘characters’ that includes the ‘rich aesthete,’ the ‘manager’ or bureaucrat, and the ‘therapist.’

This emotivist portrait of the self and correlative account of moral discourse that arises in response to the failure of intuitionism is shared in certain key respects by Nietzsche and the genealogical project. The latter’s deconstruction of the purported objectivity of the Enlightenment project’s attempts to ‘discover rational foundations’ for morality echoes emotivist themes by concluding that ‘my morality can only be what my will creates.’ MacIntyre

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72 Ibid, 12; 24, “the sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of another with its own.” See also After Virtue, 33, “the emotivist self can have no rational history in its transitions from one state of moral commitment to another. Inner conflicts are for it necessarily au fond the confrontation of one contingent arbitrariness of another.” See also MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 343.

73 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 24.

74 Ibid, 28. Characters “are the moral representatives of their culture and they are so because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world. Characters are the masks worn by moral philosophies.” Ibid, 29-30, “a character is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them….The character morally legitimates a mode of social existence…they provided the moral focus for a whole cluster of attitudes and activities. They were able to discharge this function precisely because they incorporated moral and metaphysical theories and claims.” Ibid, 30, “characters in general are those social roles which provide a culture with its moral definitions.”

75 Ibid, 30. All three characters “share the emotivist view of the distinction between rational and non-rational discourse, but...represent the embodiment of that distinction in very different social contexts.” Non-rational discourse refers to irrational, often manipulative debate concerning arbitrarily selected ends or values. Rational discourse refers to argument concerning the effectiveness of means. On the character of the ‘rich aesthete’ see ibid, 25. The rich aesthete or consumer conceives society as a “meeting place for individual wills, each with its own set of attitudes and preferences and who understand[s] that world solely as an arena for the achievement of their own satisfaction, who interpret reality as a series of opportunities for their enjoyment and for whom the last enemy is boredom.” On the character of the ‘manager’ see ibid, 30. “The manager treats ends, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits.” On the character of the ‘therapist’ see ibid, 30. “The therapist also treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern also is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming neurotic symptoms into directed energy, maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones. Neither manager nor therapist, in their roles as manager and therapist, do or are able to engage in moral debate. They are seen by themselves and by those who see them with the same eyes as their own, as uncontested figures, who purport to restrict themselves to the realms in which rational agreement is possible – that is, of course from their point of view to the realm of fact, the realm of measurable effectiveness.”

76 MacIntyre, After Virtue, chapter 9, ‘Nietzsche or Aristotle?’ See also ibid, 21-22. See also MacIntyre, Three Rival, 4-5.

77 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 114. See also MacIntyre, Three Rival, 78-79, 189-190, “the cultural artifact of the…individual…was systematically confused with human nature as such.” MacIntyre, After Virtue, 256.
commends Nietzsche for exposing the Enlightenment’s lack of ‘self-knowledge,’
its inability to recognize the social and historical dimensions of rationality
and its related attempts to elevate ‘the culturally and morally particular to the status of what is rationally universal.’ Despite its claims to tradition-independence, liberalism is in fact a ‘contingently grounded and founded’ tradition or perspective ‘with its own broad conception of the good which it is engaged in imposing politically, legally, socially, and culturally.’ Far from remaining neutral among competing conceptions of fulfillment, liberal institutions socialize individuals to adopt a particular standpoint, one that valorizes personal preference and that illegitimately restricts the role of alternative conceptions in public debate. In other words, liberalism’s incoherent conception of moral reasoning functions in practice as an ‘ideological mechanism’ that unjustifiably legitimizes the censorship of ‘substantive conceptions’ of the good in the name of a distinctively liberal conception of ‘public’ discourse.

At the same time, MacIntyre is clear that not all in Nietzsche’s project is praiseworthy or sustainable. Whereas Nietzsche and contemporary emotivists regard the irrational character of fundamental moral commitment and discourse as a fact about the nature of moral knowing and choosing in general, MacIntyre regards it as a ‘contingent feature of our culture.’ In other words, emotivism is a symptom of historical decline that requires an alternative explanation or

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78 MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 36. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 81, “the enlightenment is consequently the period par excellence in which most intellectuals lack self-knowledge.”
80 MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 78-79. See also *Three Rival*, 189-190. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126-127, “all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular and the aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion.”
81 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 336. See also *Whose Justice?*, 346.
83 Katongole, 224, “the liberal claim to devise procedural mechanisms that are neutral in respect to any particular conception of the good greatly undermines the conversation that politics is meant to be….rather than ensuring ‘fairness’ for all the voices, the claim of neutrality simply creates an inherent bias and rids the conversation of room for any meaningful or substantial disagreements.”
narrative. Since MacIntyre traces the failure of the Enlightenment project to the rejection of Aristotelianism, he asks a further question typically neglected by Nietzscheans who simply radicalize modernity’s emphasis on autonomy through appeal to the figure of the ‘great man.’

‘Was it right in the first place to reject Aristotle?’ It is MacIntyre’s contention that the emotivist or Nietzschean project – whatever its merits in unmasking modern pretensions to neutrality – fails to recognize that a modified return to premodern Aristotelianism can provide standards or foundations for moral practice.

### 1.4 MacIntyre’s ‘Social Teleological’ Alternative

According to MacIntyre, Aristotle’s ethics presupposes that ‘human beings, like the members of all other species, have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific telos.’ In *After Virtue* MacIntyre explicitly distances his constructive retrieval of Aristotelian ethics from what he labels Aristotle’s ‘ahistorical’ account of human nature and his related tendency to downplay the historicity of human knowing and choosing. Since MacIntyre agrees with the post-modern

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84 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11.
85 Ibid, 117-118.
87 Ibid, “Aristotle thus sets himself the task of giving an account of the good which is at once local and particular – located in and partially defined by the characteristics of the *polis* – and yet also cosmic and universal. The tension between these poles is felt throughout the argument of the *Ethics*.” Ibid, 146-147, “to treat Aristotle as part of a tradition, even as its greatest representative, is a very unAristotelian thing to do….the notion of a tradition embodies a very unAristotelian theory of knowledge according to which each particular theory or set of moral or scientific beliefs is intelligible and justifiable – only as a member of an historical series.” Ibid, 147, “just as the absence of any sense of the specifically historical – in our sense – in Aristotle as in other Greek thinkers, debars Aristotle from recognizing his own thought as part of a tradition, it also severely limits what Aristotle can say about narrative. Hence the task of integrating what Aristotle had to say about the virtues with the kind of thesis about the relationship between virtues and forms of narratives which I have suggested is present in epic and tragic writers has to wait – a very long wait – for successors to Aristotle whose biblical culture has educated them to think historically.” Ibid, 159, “History indeed is not a reputable form of inquiry – less philosophical than poetry because it aspires genuinely to deal with individuals, whereas even poetry, on Aristotle’s view, deals with types. Aristotle was well aware that the kind of knowledge which he takes to be genuinely scientific, to constitute *episteme* – knowledge of essential natures grasped through universal necessary truths, logically derivable from certain first principles – cannot characteristically be had of human affairs at all.” This way of characterizing the Aristotelian positions seems to imply that Aristotle has access or appeals to tradition-independent norms in a way that blurs MacIntyre’s construal of the relationship between dialectical and demonstrative argumentation.
deconstruction of Enlightenment pretensions to tradition-independence shared in a similar albeit significantly different way by Aristotle’s functional account of the human person, he must reconceive Aristotle’s account of teleology. In other words, MacIntyre must develop an alternative account of Aristotelian ethics that is compatible with historicism. In response to this challenge, MacIntyre develops a ‘social teleological’ transposition of Aristotle’s ethics that he believes is compatible with the context-dependence of all rationality. MacIntyre attempts to disengage ‘a unitary core concept of the virtues’ capable of accounting for disagreement concerning the specific context and nature of the good life or a framework compatible with a wide range of different ‘tables’ of virtue and their ordering ends. Proceeding in three interrelated stages, MacIntyre’s argument distinguishes between practices, the ‘narrative order of a single human life,’ and tradition, where each succeeding stage or concept provides a more comprehensive background for those that precede it. To each of these stages and their interrelation I now turn.

1.4.1 Practices: Internal and External Goods

A practice denotes a ‘form of socially established cooperative human activity’ in which participants seek to realize certain ‘internal’ goods by operating in accord with practice-specific ‘standards of excellence.’ According to MacIntyre, new participants develop a responsiveness to a practice’s constitutive ‘rules’ and acquire the capacity to comply with ‘standards of excellence’ whose exercise facilitate the realization of internal goods through a complex process

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88 Ibid, 163, 197.
89 Ibid.
90 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 186, “provide the tradition of which I have written the history with its conceptual unity.”
92 Ibid, 187-188. Practices include, for example, the ‘arts, sciences, games,’ ‘farming,’ ‘family life,’ as well as ‘politics,’ and ‘philosophy’ in the Aristotelian and medieval sense. See also ibid, 190; 193-194, “a practice is never just a set of technical skills….what is distinctive in a practice is in part the way in which conceptions of the relevant goods and ends which the technical skills serve…are transformed and enriched by these extensions of human powers and by that regard for its own internal goods which are partially definitive of each particular practice.”
of socialization.\textsuperscript{93} This process requires that newcomers seek to align their own ‘attitudes, choices, preferences, and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice.’\textsuperscript{94} By subordinating themselves to these ‘objective’ standards, MacIntyre’s account of practices avoids strong variations of subjectivism or emotivism that reduce the criteria for ‘judgment’ to personal feeling or preference.\textsuperscript{95} In general, MacIntyre argues that virtues ‘are those goods by reference to which we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kind of purposes and standards which inform practices.’\textsuperscript{96} In other words, the presence of the virtues, regardless of how they are conceptualized or related, set the conditions of possibility for conforming to standards of excellence and achieving a practice’s constitutive internal goods.\textsuperscript{97}

Practices are closely related to and sustained by but must not be confused with ‘institutions.’\textsuperscript{98} Institutional frameworks are the ‘social bearers’\textsuperscript{99} of practices, those second-order activities that serve the ongoing functioning of the latter through the acquisition and distribution of ‘external goods.’\textsuperscript{100} Whereas internal goods remain accessible only to those individuals who excel within such a practice, ‘external goods’ refer to those benefits of ‘property

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 190.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid, 191-192.
\textsuperscript{97} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 191-193, “this recognition that we cannot escape the definition of our relationships in terms of such goods is perfectly compatible with the acknowledgement that different societies have and have had different codes of truthfulness, justice and courage.” Ibid, 201, “sure it may be suggested, some practices – that is, some coherent human activities which answer to the description of what I have called a practice – are evil….that the virtues are defined not in terms of good and right practices but of practices does not entail or imply that practices as actually carried through at particular times and places do not stand in need of moral criticism.” See also ibid, 191-193. MacIntyre argues that participation in a well-ordered practice requires ‘justice,’ a capacity to treat and judge ourselves and others fairly, ‘truthfulness’ or ‘honesty,’ a capacity to refrain from deceiving ‘without which fairness cannot find application,’ and a willingness to ‘trust the judgments of those whose achievements in the practice give them an authority to judge which presuppose fairness and truthfulness,’ and courage, a capacity to ‘take whatever self-endangering risks are demanded along the way.’
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 194. “Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions.”
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 195-196.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 194. See also ibid, 188-189
and possession\textsuperscript{101} that remain ‘externally and contingently attached’ to any particular practice such as ‘prestige, status, and money.’\textsuperscript{102} According to MacIntyre, unlike in premodern contexts where the ‘competition to excel’ in social practices is compatible with the common good of all participants,\textsuperscript{103} modernity tends to focus exclusively on the achievement of external goods.\textsuperscript{104}

This sort of truncation is typified by Hobbes’ state of nature where individuals are driven to compete against each other for a limited number of external goods in zero-sum fashion.\textsuperscript{105} In this context, political institutions cease to foster virtues necessary for sustaining, for example, the practice of politics conceived as inquiry into and movement toward the shared or common good of the community. As a result, institutions are thereby reduced to protecting self-interested individuals’ possession of, and right to external goods.\textsuperscript{106}

1.4.2 Narrative and the ‘Unity of a Human Life’

The second stage in MacIntyre’s argument focuses on accounting for the coherence or ‘unity of a human life’ through a narrative conception of selfhood and its related commitment to a comprehensive conception of the good. By conceiving human action as a series of disconnected and fragmented deeds or by separating the subject from her social roles, MacIntyre argues that modern analytic and existentialist philosophy tends to deny the conditions necessary for conceiving the subject’s life as a cohesive whole.\textsuperscript{107} Both approaches tend to account for behavior in abstraction from its ‘place in a narrative sequence’ that links the present with the past and future. By contrary, MacIntyre argues that the intelligibility of action depends precisely upon

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, 190. See also ibid, 188-189.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 188-189.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 190.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 196.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 195.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 204-206.
its placement within a story or narrative that has social and historical dimensions. In response, MacIntyre develops a narrative account of human action that contextualizes an agent’s ‘intentions’ or reasons for acting through reference to her personal history, the history of the social settings and roles she inhabits, and the way in which short-term intentions relate to long-term goals.

Reference to the agent’s long-term orientation reveals that a narrative account of human living is inescapably teleological in nature. According to MacIntyre, in the absence of an ‘overriding conception of the telos of a whole human life’ capable of providing a criterion for ordering individual practices into a cohesive whole, human life ‘would be pervaded by too many conflicts and too much arbitrariness.’ In an effort to bring unity to human living that practices on their own cannot provide, MacIntyre moves to the broader question ‘what is the good life for man?’ or from the quest for practice-specific internal goods to questions concerning humankind’s overarching telos. According to MacIntyre, answers to this broader question supply the ‘moral life with its unity.’ In other words, ‘the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest’ or a search for and movement toward a summum bonum or final end capable of ordering the goods internal to social practices. The quest-like character of a moral narrative presupposes both an at least inchoate conceptualization of the final end sought and the recognition that this goal must be continually pursued, both intellectually in terms of knowledge and practically in terms of achievement. From this broader perspective, the virtues are not simply those habits of character that facilitate the proper functioning of practices. Virtues also

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108 Ibid. 212-215.
109 Ibid. 208.
110 Ibid. 203.
111 Ibid. 203.
112 Ibid. 219.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid, “A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.”
include those dispositions that ‘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.’ In other words, the virtues are those habits that sustain the ‘good life’ conceived as a quest, an ongoing search for deeper understanding and realization. Attention to the quest-like character of the good life requires cultivation of those virtues that support ‘political communities’ in which individuals can inquire about and search after the good.

1.4.3 Tradition as Communal Horizon

The communal dimension of this quest for the good naturally leads to the third and most comprehensive stage of MacIntyre’s transposition of Aristotle’s virtue ethics. According to MacIntyre, the premodern individual never seeks the good life as an individual in isolation. In other words, the individual’s own unique narrative is always at least partially defined by or ‘embedded in the story of those communities’ that shape her moral identity. More specifically, the individual’s search for the good is always contextualized by the roles she inhabits as a member of a particular family, city, tribe, nation, church etc. It is this social and historical background that provides the particularistic starting-point for all ongoing reflection on and search for the good. All human knowing and choosing – far from being freed from all particularity as liberals presume – is already contextualized or ‘qualified’ by the communally

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115 Ibid, 220.
116 Ibid, “the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man.” See also ibid, 203. This emphasis on the subject’s comprehensive conception of the good is intimately connected with the virtue of ‘integrity’ ‘constancy,’ or ‘singleness of purpose’ whose exercise serves the realization of her final telos or sumnum bonum.
117 Ibid, 220.
118 Ibid, 220.
119 Ibid, 221.
120 Ibid, 221; 172-173, “I confront the world as a member of this family, this household, this clan, this tribe, this city, this nation, this kingdom. There is no ‘I’ apart from these…it is always as part of an ordered community that I have to seek the human good.”
121 Ibid, 221.
mediated narratives or stories that constitute a particular ‘form of life.’

MacIntyre calls this broader horizon responsible for shaping and ordering individual practices and the telos that unifies a narrative-quest a ‘tradition.’ Traditions are constituted by agreement surrounding internal goods and final ends but also by ongoing inquiry and argument concerning the goods that are shared by members of the tradition. This type of ongoing inquiry takes place primarily within certain ‘second-order’ practices such as philosophy and politics into which individuals are socialized. This brings MacIntyre to his final characterization of the virtues as those dispositions necessary for sustaining traditions, habits that inculcate a respect for that which is inherited and that help guide the ongoing development of tradition in continuity with this inheritance.

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123 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 223; 222, “within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual’s search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual’s life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life. Once again the narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions.”

124 Ibid, 222. “A tradition is…always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose….a living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.” Ibid, 223, “living traditions, just because they continue a not yet completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past.’ MacIntyre, Three Rival, 111-112; 149, “among the beliefs and belief-presupposing practices which are subject to reformulation as a rationally mature tradition moves through its various stages may be, and characteristically are, both those which concern what it is to evaluate beliefs and practices as more or less rational, what truth is and how rationality and truth are connected, and those which concern the theoretical and practical goals toward which at each stage those participating in that particular tradition are directing themselves.” MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 326.

125 Mark C. Murphy, “MacIntyre’s Political Philosophy,” in Alasdair MacIntyre, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 163.

126 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 223, “the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one. This virtue is not to be confused with any form of conservative antiquarianism…an adequate sense of tradition manifest itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present.”
1.5 Tradition-Constitted Rationality and the Challenges of Relativism/Perspectivism

In this chapter’s previous section I outlined MacIntyre’s three stage transposition of Aristotle’s virtue ethics, distinguishing between practices, the narrative ‘unity of a human life’ provided by a comprehensive conception of the good, and the social and historical dimensions of the individual’s quest provided by the notion of a tradition. In this chapter’s next section I will turn my attention to the notion of tradition-constituted rationality and its purported limitations before examining MacIntyre’s theory of the ‘rationality of traditions.’

From the perspective of tradition-constituted rationality, all enquiry ‘begins in and from some condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitutes a given.’127 Each distinct community constructs substantive first principles through the conjunction of universal concepts that supply the starting-point for demonstrative argumentation within a particular tradition.128 The result is a multiplicity of rationalities each with their own attendant standards or criteria for assessing an agent’s particular acts of knowing and choosing.129 Since there is no tradition-independent or neutral standpoint from which to judge between claims advanced within or between ‘incommensurable’ traditions,130 the result would appear to be rationally insoluble, ‘intractable disagreement.’131

127 MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 354.
128 See Ibid, 91-93, 100-101, 224. First principles are constructed through a conjunction of universal concepts arrived at through epagoge, the process of empirical study that culminates in the mind’s grasp of the concept or ‘form’ that orders the variety of particulars that fall under it. MacIntyre contrasts this type of inference (epagoge) with the subsequent manipulation of first principles typical of demonstrative argument describing the former in ocular terms as a ‘seeing that’ that may also be termed ‘intuition’ or ‘insight.’ It is unclear here whether MacIntyre means to correlate the act of understanding with the grasp of a concept or with a prelinguistic ‘insight’ from which a concept intelligently flows. In Whose Justice?, 100-101, he seems to correlate epagogai with nous’ apprehension of ‘universal concepts.’ In Whose Justice?, 91-93, it is not altogether clear: “epagoge involves inference but is more than inference; it is rather that scientific method through which the particular varyingly impure or distorted exemplifications of a single form can be understood in terms of that form.”
129 Ibid, 100-101, 91-93.
130 MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 32-33. MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 333-334; 350, “there is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting and rejecting reasoned argument from that which is provided by some particular tradition or other.” MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 166-167, “each standpoint has its own account of truth and knowledge, its own mode of characterizing the relevant subject matter.” Whose Justice?, 144, “there is…no neutral mode of stating the problems, let alone the solutions.”
Since each rival tradition constructs a particular version of reality the result would appear to be a form of ontological relativism. This charge of relativism differs from but is closely related to the challenge of ‘perspectivism.’ For the perspectivist, ‘no tradition is entitled to arrogate to itself an exclusive title’; rival traditions provide different but ‘complementary perspectives’ of reality none of which is more ‘legitimate’ than any other. Both charges lead to the conclusion ‘that no claim to truth made in the name of any one competing tradition could defeat the claims to truth made in the name of its rivals.’ This conclusion is imputed to MacIntyre by certain authors who claim that when MacIntyre rejects Aristotle’s metaphysical biology in favour of a ‘social teleology’ he is in effect repudiating the metaphysical foundations that are central to the natural law position of Aquinas.

According to MacIntyre, both challenges derive their apparent force from ‘their inversion of certain central Enlightenment positions concerning truth and rationality.’ More specifically, MacIntyre argues that Nietzschean-inspired, post-modern deconstructions of Enlightenment foundationalism trade in facile dichotomizations that neglect the possibility of a middle-ground between tradition-independence and relativism/perspectivism. Although MacIntyre’s
historicism demands that he deny the possibility of ‘justification independent of the context of any tradition’ he remains committed to the possibility that one conceptual framework or standpoint may be judged superior ‘relative to some competing theory.’ At the same time, MacIntyre is adamant that the tradition-relative nature and ‘time-bound’ formulation of substantive first principles does not preclude the possibility of tradition-transcendent or ‘timeless’ truth claims. Far from being a hindrance to metaphysical truth, MacIntyre argues that ‘reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested,’ but rather locally contextualized. MacIntyre develops this middle-ground or historicist approach to justification and truth by aiming to articulate an account of the way in which intra- and inter-tradition dialogue and debate occur. In Whose Justice?, MacIntyre argues that the foundations for this type of response are not to be found in any one particular tradition but rather are to be isolated by objectifying those presuppositions that structure the ‘practices of enquiry’ in each tradition. In Three Rival Versions and in First Principles, MacIntyre makes it clear that these supposedly transcendental conditions of dialogue and debate are themselves in fact tradition-dependent, tied to a particular interpretation or reading of the work of Aquinas. In recent years, MacIntyre goes so far as to argue that the norms that govern this type of exchange within and between traditions – norms that include, for example, a shared

genealogical deconstruction of ‘post-Cartesian and post-Kantian philosophy was no more than a discrediting of claims which there had been no good reason to advance in the first place.”

140 MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 252; 144, “progress in rationality is achieved only from a point of view.” MacIntyre, Three Rival, 116-117, “how particular traditions are to be evaluated as more or less rational…cannot be adequately answered except from some one particular standpoint.”

141 MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 9.

142 MacIntyre, Three Rival, 60; 116-117, “from the standpoint of the encyclopedia no tradition is rational qua tradition: …..so also from the standpoint of the genealogist no tradition can be rational.”

143 MacIntyre, Whose Justice?, 354, “Notice that the grounds for an answer to relativism and perspectivism are to be found, not in any theory of rationality as yet explicitly articulated and advanced within one or more of the traditions with which we have been concerned, but rather with a theory embodied in and presupposed by their practices of enquiry, yet never fully spelled out.”

144 In Three Rival Versions the norms that govern dialogue and debate – the so-called ‘rationality of traditions’ in Whose Justice? – are explicitly identified as Thomist. In First Principles MacIntyre argues explicitly for the Aristotelian-Thomist notion of inquiry.
commitment to the *telos* of inquiry and that exclude violent and manipulative forms of interaction – are in fact correlative with what Aquinas regards as the natural law.\textsuperscript{145} In what follows I will outline MacIntyre’s retrieval of Aristotelian-Thomist dialectic.

### 1.6 Dialectic and the ‘Rationality of Traditions’\textsuperscript{146}

At the heart of MacIntyre’s middle-ground approach to justification and truth lies his retrieval of the Thomist notion of dialectic. Recall the distinction between dialectical and demonstrative argumentation I introduced in section 1.1. Demonstrative arguments proceed deductively from substantive first principles in the context of completed sciences that represent the end or ideal result of the dialectical quest for truth, both theoretical and practical. Unlike the purportedly ‘self-sufficient, self-justifying epistemological first principles’ of Enlightenment rationality,\textsuperscript{147} tradition-specific first principles are justifiable through a historically-extended dialectical process of testing.\textsuperscript{148} Although proponents of the various traditions may regard such principles as ‘both necessary and evident’ within a particular demonstrative system,\textsuperscript{149} substantive first principles always remain intrinsically provisional in relation to the long-range *telos* of inquiry.\textsuperscript{150} Unlike ‘warranted assertability’ which is linked to a tradition’s current best standards or norms and therefore subject to change, truth is ‘timeless.’\textsuperscript{151} Distancing himself

\textsuperscript{145} MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 21-26. See MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 2-3, “The answer proposed will be that we will only be able to enquire together with such others in a way that accords with the canons of rationality, if both we and they treat as binding upon us a set of rules that turn out to be just those enjoined by the natural law.”

\textsuperscript{146} See MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, chapter 18, “The Rationality of Traditions.”

\textsuperscript{147} MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 360.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid. MacIntyre, “Moral Relativism,” 204. The proponents of any particular standpoint ‘are never themselves relativists’ but rather regard their own account of rationality as universally true. See also MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 65, “the participant in a craft is rational qua participant insofar as he or she conforms to the best standards of reason discovered so far.” In other words, the objectivity of particular claims within a tradition are the product of fidelity to that community’s first principles or bedrock presuppositions.

\textsuperscript{150} MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 65. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 361, “no one at any stage can ever rule out the future possibility of their present beliefs and judgments being shown to be inadequate in a variety of ways.”

from crude rationalist or empiricist variations of the correspondence theory of truth. MacIntyre argues that ‘insofar as a given soul moves successfully towards its successive intellectual goals in a teleologically ordered way, it moves towards completing itself by becoming formally identical with the objects of its knowledge.’ MacIntyre argues that adequacy is a function of intelligent thought’s capacity to respond successfully to the ‘realities of the social and rational world’ through ‘activities’ such as ‘identification, reidentification, collecting, separating, classifying, and naming.’ It is the very possibility that one’s currently warranted standards or ‘expectations’ may not withstand dialectical questioning that ‘gives point to the assertion of truth.’

According to MacIntyre the way in which first principles are justified relative to their competitors takes place in similar albeit significantly different ways within and between traditions. In a first stage of development, a tradition’s first principles typically remain unthematized and yet tend to be regarded in absolute terms. A second stage emerges when ‘alternative and incompatible interpretations’ arise, when incoherencies are identified, or when ‘new situations’ stimulate novel questions that the resources of the tradition may currently be

152 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 358, “conceive of a realm of facts independent of judgement or of any other form of linguistic expression, so that judgments or statements or sentences could be paired off with facts, truth or falsity being the alleged relationship between such paired items.”
153 MacIntyre, *First Principles*, 12-13. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 364. MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 201, “truth as the measure of our warrants cannot be collapsed into warranted assertability.” *Three Rival*, 121-122, “And a conception of what is which is more and other than a conception of what appears to be the case in the light of the most fundamental criteria governing assertability within any particular scheme is correspondingly required, that is, a metaphysics of being, of esse, over and above whatever can be said about particular entia in the light of particular concepts.”
154 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 356-357. The mind is adequate to its objects insofar as the expectations which it frames on the basis of these activities are not liable to disappointment.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid, 388, “‘only those whose traditions allows for the possibility of its hegemony being put in question can have rational warrant for asserting such a hegemony.’
157 Ibid, 8. “to those who inhabit a social and intellectual tradition in good working order the facts of tradition, which are the presuppositions of their activities and enquiries, may well remain just that, unarticulated presuppositions which are never themselves the objects of attention and enquiry.”
158 Ibid, 355.
incapable of resolving.\textsuperscript{159} The result is what MacIntyre regards as an ‘epistemological crisis.’\textsuperscript{160} The resolution of this form of crisis may unfold in one of two ways. In the first instance adherents of a tradition may respond to these exigencies by developing a ‘new conceptually enriched scheme.’ The latter is designed to explain and resolve the tradition of enquiry’s hitherto ‘intractable’ problems while remaining in ‘fundamental continuity’ with the shared standards that have marked enquiry in that tradition up to the present.\textsuperscript{161}

The second way in which an epistemological crisis may be resolved is through inter-tradition dialogue and debate.\textsuperscript{162} The rational evaluation of competing claims in different traditions proceeds in an analogous way to intra-traditional debate but is complicated by the fact that different traditions advance ‘incommensurable’ conceptual schemes.\textsuperscript{163} According to MacIntyre, inter-traditional dialectic moves through two stages.\textsuperscript{164} In the first stage, proponents of rival traditions tend to apply their own standards as a criterion for rational superiority without attempting to understand the rival tradition in its own terms.\textsuperscript{165} A second stage of exchange

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, 355; 362, “At any point it may happen to any tradition-constituted enquiry that by its own standards of progress it ceases to make progress. Its hitherto trusted methods of enquiry have become sterile. Conflicts over rival answers to key questions can no longer be settled rationally. Moreover it may indeed happen that the use of the methods of enquiry and of the forms of argument, by means of which rational progress had been achieved so far, begins to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognized incoherences, and new problems for the solution of which there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief.”

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid, 361.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, 362; 355-356. See also ibid, 8; 329, “in the first type of case we have a set of relatively unproblematic standards to which to appeal in making the comparison: how far does the later thinker solve either the problems posed by or problems found insoluble by the earlier thinker? How far is the later thinker able to resolve incoherencies in the work of the earlier? How far does the later thinker make available conceptual or theoretical resources which do not have the limitations of those of his predecessors?”

\textsuperscript{162} According to MacIntyre, a tradition ‘becomes mature’ when individuals socialized within a particular context enter dialogue with adherents of other traditions. MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 327.

\textsuperscript{163} MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 80-81, “that narrative prevails over its rivals which is able to include its rivals within it, not only to retell their stories as episodes within its story but to tell the story of the telling of their stories as such episodes.”

\textsuperscript{164} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 166-167

\textsuperscript{165} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 166. See MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 180-181, “Robertson Smith, Frazer and Tylor, and by implication Sidgwick, assert the rational superiority of their Encyclopedia stance….over the stance of the ‘primitive’ and the ‘savage’ by invoking their own standards and not the standards of the ‘primitive’ and the ‘savage’ and by identifying as its failures and limitations what are failures and limitations in their terms, not in its.” See also MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 113-114. MacIntyre describes the dialectical process of exchange that took place
becomes possible when individuals develop an understanding of the conceptual framework or language that embodies and expresses a rival tradition’s ‘beliefs, institutions, practices’ as a ‘second first language.’\textsuperscript{166} This capacity for empathetic understanding or for entering ‘imaginatively’ into the conceptual framework of an alien tradition\textsuperscript{167} allows rivals to identify and explain the emergence of ‘limitations’\textsuperscript{168} or ‘incoherencies’\textsuperscript{169} associated with an alternative perspective’s ‘strongest’\textsuperscript{170} articulation of its own standards. For the adherents of a tradition undergoing an epistemological crisis, this type of exchange may reveal that another tradition possesses ‘resources required for understanding, overcoming and correcting’ the limitations internal to their own position.\textsuperscript{171}

At each stage in this dialectical process that marks intra- and inter-tradition dialogue and debate, current ‘beliefs and judgements’ will be justified relative to those claims and standards whose inadequacy gave rise to the search for new formulations.\textsuperscript{172} From this perspective, older beliefs and formulations are considered to be false; they no longer correspond to ‘reality as now perceived, classified and understood.’\textsuperscript{173} The ‘test for truth in the present, therefore is always to summon up as many questions and as many objections of the greatest strength possible; what can between the Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions at the University of Paris after the reintroduction of Aristotle’s works as a confrontation between two incommensurable conceptual schemes. MacIntyre charges Aristotle’s Augustinian opponents with failing to grasp the radical incommensurability of the traditions.

\textsuperscript{166} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 373. See also \textit{Whose Justice?}, 375, 364.
\textsuperscript{167} MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 182. See also MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 166-167.
\textsuperscript{168} MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 145-146.
\textsuperscript{169} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 39.
\textsuperscript{170} MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 180-181, “no claim to rational superiority, can be made good except on the basis of a rationally justifiable rejection of the strongest claim to be made out from the opposing point of view.”
\textsuperscript{172} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 359; 7. At each stage in this ongoing dialectical process, the rational superiority of current standards is a function of their capacity ‘to transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.’ MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 65, “the standards of achievement within any craft are justified historically. They have emerged from the criticism of their predecessors and transcended the limitations of those predecessors as guides to excellent achievement within that particular craft.”
\textsuperscript{173} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 356; 358, “the relationship of correspondence or of lack of correspondence which holds between the mind and objects is given expression in judgments but it is not judgments themselves which correspond to objects or indeed to anything else.”
be justifiably claimed as true is what has sufficiently withstood such dialectical questioning and framing of objections.\textsuperscript{174} The possibility of an epistemological crisis thereby deflates the relativist and perspectivist challenges by identifying the conditions of possibility wherein a tradition’s current standards of justification may be rationally questioned and ultimately reformed or replaced.\textsuperscript{175} Contrary to such challenges, one tradition’s claims to truth can indeed be defeated by appealing to the standards of an alien tradition.\textsuperscript{176} In other words, as MacIntyre argues, ‘it is in respect of their adequacy or inadequacy in their responses to epistemological crises that traditions are vindicated or fail to be vindicated.’\textsuperscript{177}

MacIntyre notes how Aquinas possessed an internal understanding of the Aristotelian, Neoplatonist, Augustinian and Averroist traditions that allowed him to synthesize resources from each tradition while transcending the defects of each individual framework.\textsuperscript{178} Just as Aquinas’ synthesis is justified relative to the standards advanced by his contemporaries in alternative traditions, so too MacIntyre argues that the Thomist system is judged rationally superior to its contemporary opponents through dialectical testing.\textsuperscript{179} Although the first principles of the Thomist tradition are fallible insofar as they are tradition-dependent, MacIntyre claims that they currently provide the best and most coherent account of human knowing and choosing. Thomist

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 358, “In what does such sufficiency consist? That too is a question to which answers have to be produced and to which rival and competing answers may well appear. And those answers will compete rationally, just insofar as they are tested dialectically in order to discover which is the best answer to be proposed so far.”

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 364

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 366.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 366.

\textsuperscript{178} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 12, 68. MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 145-146; 125, “Aquinas’ dialectical synthesis will be able to render those standpoints intelligible in a way that cannot be achieved by their own adherents from their own point of view and to distinguish their defects and limitations from their insights and merits in such a way as to explain the occurrence of what they themselves would have to take to be their defects and limitations at points at which their own explanatory capacities are resourceless.”

\textsuperscript{179} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 144, 176-77. MacIntyre, “Intractable,” 51.
first principles avoid both the untenable aspirations to tradition-independence associated with Enlightenment foundationalism and the incoherence of the genealogical project.\textsuperscript{180}

\section*{1.7 Critical Reflections on MacIntyre’s Constructive Project}

MacIntyre is to be commended for recognizing that coherent ethical and political practice depends, in some respect, upon a return to premodern teleological schemes focused on self-transcendent conceptions of human fulfillment. His efforts to develop a middle-ground approach to truth and justification that avoids false pretensions to neutrality (contra the Enlightenment project) and post-modern relativism (contra the genealogical project) is particularly promising. In my judgment, MacIntyre’s theory is substantially correct and I commend him for identifying the importance of dialectical argumentation in Aristotle and Aquinas and the essential role it plays in structuring tradition-dependent inquiry. At the same time there are tensions present in MacIntyre’s constructive work that appear to undercut his stated aims. Here I am not necessarily questioning MacIntyre’s theory of the rationality of traditions so much as I am calling into question the status of this theory in relation to MacIntyre’s stance on tradition-constituted rationality.

\subsection*{1.7.1 The ‘Rationality of Traditions’?}

First, I would like to draw attention to the tension that exists in MacIntyre’s work between nature and history or between tradition-transcendent norms and his historicist retrieval of virtue ethics. On the one hand MacIntyre argues that there exists no neutral standpoint from which to adjudicate between rival and ‘incommensurable’ claims within and between

\textsuperscript{180} MacIntyre sets himself the task of narrating the superiority of the Thomist tradition in \textit{Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry}. On the rational superiority of Thomism to genealogy in particular see chapter 9 where MacIntyre argues that the genealogical project presupposes precisely that which it denies: namely, a stable sense of self required for speaking about movements beyond self-deception.
traditions,\textsuperscript{181} and on the other he purports to identify certain features of human rationality shared or presupposed by adherents of all traditions.\textsuperscript{182} The latter would seem to include a commitment to ‘logic’ correlative with what MacIntyre elsewhere calls ‘trivial’ first principles,\textsuperscript{183} as well as the norms that govern dialectical dialogue and debate. In other words, MacIntyre appears committed to the claim that Thomism is both one among many traditions and yet its substantive first principles are in fact transcendentally normative for all individual frameworks.\textsuperscript{184} MacIntyre would likely reply that this purported tension between historicism and nature is dissolvable since, as he claims, historicist starting-points do not preclude the possibility of transperspectival truth claims. The problem however is that Thomism can only be vindicated in dialectical fashion by presupposing the adequacy of this dialectical method at the outset. So either Thomism is transcendental, in which case MacIntyre’s commitment to tradition-dependent rationality is only half-hearted, or it is not transcendentally normative in which case it can hardly be invoked to

\textsuperscript{181} This appears to be a negative conclusion arrived at through empirical investigation. See MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 346. “From the fact that liberalism does not provide a neutral tradition-independent ground from which a verdict may be passed upon the rival claims of conflicting traditions in respect of practical rationality and of justice, but turns out itself to be just one more such tradition with its own highly contestable conceptions of practical rationality and of justice, it does not of course follow that there is no such neutral ground. And it is clear that there can be no sound \textit{a priori} argument to demonstrate that such is impossible. What is equally clear, however, is that liberalism is by far the strongest claimant to provide such a ground which has so far appeared in human history or which is likely to appear in the foreseeable future. That liberalism fails in this respect, however, provides the strongest reason that we can actually have for asserting that there is no such neutral ground, that there is no place for appeals to a practical rationality as such, or a justice as such to which all rational persons would by their very rationality be compelled to give their allegiance. There is instead only the practical rationality of this or that tradition and the justice of this or that tradition.” Allyn Fives, \textit{Political Reason: Morality and the Public Sphere} (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 46.

\textsuperscript{182} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 354.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 353. Those first principles shared by all investigators but whose vagueness cannot compel agreement on substantive issues.

defend itself. This tension comes to a head when MacIntyre argues that Thomist first principles are fallible or potentially revisable when in reality the first principles that counsel their revision are themselves Thomist.

Another way to think of this tension is to ask whether MacIntyre affirms the existence of an *a priori* in human knowing and choosing, a subject methodologically prior to tradition, or whether he conceives the subject in thoroughly conventional and language-dependent terms. With his focus on the constitutive role of moral traditions or communities in shaping human selfhood, MacIntyre seems to be saying that there is no subject that is not the ‘creation’ of a particular tradition’s language-games. A more technical way of making this point would be to argue that ‘there are no preconceptual or even pretheoretical data’ capable of providing ‘a neutral court of appeal for decision’ between rival accounts of human knowing and choosing. MacIntyre also questions attempts to argue that ‘desires are psychologically basic items, largely, even if not entirely, invariant in their function between cultures.’ Since the categorization, interpretation and prioritization of emotions or desires within a particular community presuppose reference ‘to one set of justifying norms rather than another’ there can be ‘no single invariant human psychology.’ MacIntyre’s unwillingness to explicitly affirm the *a priori* as a standard

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186 Maxwell, 389-390.
187 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 333. MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 111-112. MacIntyre highlights the disagreement between Augustinian and Aristotelian accounts of human knowing and choosing and notes that epistemological attempts to appeal to ‘how things in fact are in the human psyche’ to settle such disagreements inevitably fail. Either the characterization of such ‘empirical data’ remains coloured by ‘theoretical conceptualizations’ intrinsic to each particular tradition or, if characterizable in a way that makes them independent of and neutral between schemes’ the data remain ‘too meager and underdetermine any characterization at the required level.’
189 Ibid., 75-77.
190 Ibid. “Thus to exhibit a particular pattern of emotions and desires, to treat them as appropriate or inappropriate in one type of situation rather than another, is always to reveal a commitment to one set of justifying norms rather than another….the justifying norms which govern both emotions and desires and their interpretation either embody or presuppose a rank ordering of goods and evils….psychologies thus understood express and presuppose moralities.” MacIntyre goes on to note that “from this it does not follow that such patterns of emotion, desire, satisfaction and preference, whether in individuals or in social and cultural groups, cannot be treated instead in detachment from
or criterion at least partly stems from his prioritization of metaphysics over epistemology and his concomitant rejection of the modern ‘turn to the subject.’¹⁹¹ MacIntyre argues that ‘knowledge is a secondary phenomenon to be understood in the light of the objects of knowledge and not vice versa. The whole epistemological turn of philosophy is thus from this point of view the outcome of a mistake, that of supposing that the skeptics’ challenge was to be met by some vindication of rationality in general.’¹⁹² In other words, the prioritization of epistemology, far from being a genuine instance of progress, represents a degenerative reaction to the breakdown of the Thomistic synthesis.¹⁹³ MacIntyre singles out Rosmini’s attempt to accommodate Catholic theology to modern philosophy,¹⁹⁴ Marechal’s attempt to portray Aquinas as a ‘rival and a corrector of Kant’¹⁹⁵ and Maritain’s efforts to mount a ‘Thomistic defence of the doctrine of human rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights’¹⁹⁶ as failed

their evaluative background, as some kind of nonmoral, natural, precultural given. The passions thus understood then become that in terms of which norms and evaluations are justified, themselves beyond justification because part of nature. And goods may then be defined in terms of the satisfaction of desire, either that of each particular individual or that of people in general. This is how many characteristically modern moral philosophers have understood evaluation, and this is how their sophistic ancestors understood it. What members of neither group have understood, however, is that in conceptualizing and understanding the passions in one way rather than another, indeed in treating the passions as part of nature defined independently of culture rather than as an expression of culture, they were already adopting one particular evaluative standpoint, derived from their culture’s understanding of nature.’¹⁹¹


¹⁹² MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 69. See also MacIntyre, *First Principles*, 12-13, 45. MacIntyre seems to conceive the ‘epistemological enterprise’ in strictly negative terms as a ‘first-person project’ that, by inappropriately presupposing the priority of the subject-object split, is preoccupied with ensuring ‘my beliefs, my perceptions, my judgments connect with reality external to them, so that I can have justified certitude regarding their truth and error.’ At the same time, even here MacIntyre’s stance is marked by internal tension. It is unclear how the following statement – ‘the mind knows itself only in the second-order knowledge of its own operations’ – is not an example of a non-pejorative ‘turn to the subject.’ Elsewhere MacIntyre seems to argue that Aquinas’ account of knowledge is capable of transposition or that his project is at least in principle compatible with first-person accounts of knowledge. “Each type of predication of truth and each type of activity of rational justification stand in a relationship to others specifiable only in terms of their place within the overall teleological ordering of the intellect’s activities of inquiry. Those activities, it should be noted, involve a variety of types of intentionality. And were we to attempt to specify those intentionalities adequately, we should have to learn not only from what Aquinas says about intentionality but from Brentano, Husserl and above all Edith Stein.”¹⁹³

¹⁹³ MacIntyre, *Three Rival*, 69.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 71.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 75-76.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.
endeavours to adapt Thomistic thought to modern presuppositions. MacIntyre and Tracey Rowland claim that this movement finds particularly disturbing expression in the ‘fashionable’ Thomism influential during and after the Second Vatican Council. In the end MacIntyre seems to be arguing that the epistemological project is inextricably bound up with foundationalism and modern individualism. However, in the absence of any epistemological foundation MacIntyre is left with a multiplicity of conceptual frameworks or metaphysical systems with mutually exclusive accounts of epistemic and moral objectivity. Any appeal to Thomism as a transcendental standard within a tradition-dependent framework ends up presupposing the *a priori* without being able to account for it adequately.

Prominent follower of MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas and Radical Orthodox theologian John Milbank are perhaps slightly more consistent in their rejection of transcendental standards and in their embrace of context-dependence. According to Hauerwas, the breakdown of foundationalism and the subsequent turn to tradition-dependent moral reasoning demands that Christians who wish to remain Christian embrace the particularity of their formative narrative and praxis. As a result, Hauerwas castigates contemporary theological ethicists for translating distinctively Christian claims into modern philosophical idioms that render a Christian reading of moral reasoning and fulfillment private and irrelevant *a priori*. Here Hauerwas singles out

197 Ibid, 75-76, 146; 77, “the Thomisms which they constructed appeared to be systems of the same order as, making the same type of inadequately supported epistemological claims as, idealisms, materialism, rationalisms, empiricisms, and positivisms.”


200 These efforts at translation tend to presuppose the autonomy of ‘ethics’ as a discipline shaped by norms available to all humans insofar as they are rational.

natural law attempts to ‘explain the [Christian] narrative in relationship to some…master story beyond the biblical text.’ \(^{202}\) In a similar way, Milbank castigates liberals for ‘resigning’ themselves ‘to an ‘apologetic’ project of correlation’ or a ‘rapprochement with the Enlightenment’ that defends a natural theology or natural law basis for moral and political reasoning. \(^{203}\) In opposition, Milbank affirms an ‘absolute historicism,’ a multiplicity of equally ungrounded narrative traditions or cultural-linguistic horizons from within which individuals may make claims to objective truth and value. \(^{204}\) Since the foundations of all human knowing and choosing are context-dependent, theologians need not embrace an autonomous secular sphere that does not exist, nor dialogue with disciplines whose presuppositions are intrinsically


opposed to the Christian story.\textsuperscript{205} Since ‘there is no absolute rationality which allows adjudication between…traditions, a choice between’ Christianity and other narratives (modern or postmodern) ‘must be made on rhetorical rather than rational grounds.’\textsuperscript{206} According to Milbank, Christians must ‘out-narrate’ or try to persuade outsiders that the Christian narrative is a ‘better and more convincing story’ by appealing to reasons of ‘aesthetic’ or ‘literary taste.’\textsuperscript{207} The result, in all three authors’ cases appears to be the very relativism that MacIntyre has fought hard to avoid. From this perspective objectivity is the product of fidelity to communally mediated or at best arbitrarily selected norms.

\textit{1.7.2 Conceptions of the Good, Moral Consensus and Pluralism}

A related tension appears in MacIntyre’s account of liberalism. MacIntyre tends to conceive liberalism in exclusively negative terms as intrinsically individualist and hence anti-traditional.\textsuperscript{208} In the opening of \textit{After Virtue} MacIntyre argues that modern ethical and political debate is interminable and counsels a return to premodern traditions capable of providing the shared rational background for genuine friendship and coherent discourse.\textsuperscript{209} According to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{205} Milbank, \textit{Theology}, 1, “if theology no longer seeks to position, qualify or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology.” John Milbank, “Faith, Reason and Imagination: The Study of Theology and Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century,” in \textit{The Future of Love}, 307. Smith, 153.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Alister E. McGrath, \textit{A Scientific Theology, Volume 2: Reality} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 102. John Milbank, “On Theological Transgression,” in \textit{The Future of Love}, 145. Smith, 180-181. Milbank, \textit{Theology}, 1, “If my Christian perspective is persuasive then this should be a persuasion intrinsic to the Christian logos itself, not the apologetic mediation of a universal human reason.” See also Milbank, \textit{Theology}, 279; 347, “The encounter of these diverse reasons cannot be contained and mediated by dialectical conversation alone: at the limits of disagreement it will take the form of a clash of rhetorics.”
\item \textsuperscript{208} MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 345-346. MacIntyre of course contradicts himself in \textit{Whose Justice?} when he argues that liberalism is a tradition with its own conception of the good, and its own “authoritative texts and…disputes over their interpretation.”
\item \textsuperscript{209} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 2. In the opening of \textit{After Virtue}, MacIntyre claims that the language of morality is in a ‘state of grave disorder.’ MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice?}, 2. See also MacIntyre, \textit{Three Rival}, 60, “membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry and more especially for moral and theological enquiry.”
\end{itemize}
MacIntyre, practices such as philosophy, theology and politics have ‘been removed to the margins of social and cultural life’ and, as a result, ‘the tradition of the virtues remains central only in the lives of social groups whose existence is on the margins of the central culture.’ At the end of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre compares the present age with the Dark Ages, complaining that ‘the barbarians…have already been governing us for quite some time,’ and urging the formation of small communities capable of sustaining the tradition of the virtues. Statements such as these seem to imply that only a thick conception of the good shared by members of a relatively homogeneous community can provide the background necessary for coherent discourse and practice. Although MacIntyre is careful not to rule out any and all participation in the ‘modern political order,’ each of these preceding claims do tend to encourage disengagement or sectarian withdrawal from modern political life. The result would seem to be a form of pluralism that in overemphasizing the tradition-constituted nature of rationality downplays the transcendental features of MacIntyre’s meta-theory of inter-tradition encounter. The latter would seem to provide a thin conception of the good that conditions the possibility of coherent dialogue in a pluralistic context, a thin conception that shares much with many non-pejorative accounts of liberal reason-exchange. In the absence of such shared standards it becomes difficult to encourage and conduct inter-traditional dialogue and debate and to identify and justify universal norms such as human rights or those natural law precepts that would structure this type of exchange.

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210 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 228.
211 Ibid, 263.
212 Ibid, 255, “each particular task, each particular responsibility (governmental) has to be evaluated on its own merits.”
213 In the limit case this type of dichotomization of modernity and the shared evaluative commitments or homogeneity of premodern communities necessary for coherent living tends to sanction isolationism and authoritarianism.
214 This would be the commitment in the face of radical diversity to rational inquiry or the search for the true and good via dialectical testing.
Again, Hauerwas and Milbank seem to radicalize these tendencies in the direction of sectarian withdrawal. According to Hauerwas, the church exists as a ‘countercultural phenomenon,’ a ‘social manifestation of God’s kingdom’ set apart from the secular ‘world’ that trains its members ‘to see and act in the world, not as we want it to be, but as it is, namely as God’s good but fallen creation.’\(^{215}\) As a result of this church/world dichotomy, Hauerwas argues that ‘without the church the world literally has no hope of salvation since the church is necessary for the world to know it is part of a story that it cannot know without the church.’\(^{216}\) Since salvation is linked to the transformation of character wrought through commitment to the distinctive narrative and set of practices available only to Christians, there does not appear to be any basis for extending the offer of grace to those beyond the visible Christian communion.\(^{217}\) In other words, the church’s constitutive narrative and practices function as a necessary condition for the possibility of distinctively Christian religious experiences. There is no experience that is not already ‘shaped, molded, and in part, constituted by [particular] cultural and linguistic forms.’\(^{218}\) All individuals who are not members of the church are incapable of being transformed so long as they remain outside the Christian communion.\(^{219}\)

Milbank argues similarly that Christian social theory is ‘first and foremost an ecclesiology’\(^ {220}\) and ‘only an account of [other] human societies to the extent that the church

\(^{216}\) Hauerwas, *Peaceable*, 34. Hauerwas, *After*, 16, 36, 37; 35, “salvation is a political alternative that the world cannot know apart from the existence of a concrete people called church.”
\(^{218}\) Katongole, 205-206. Here Hauerwas follows George Lindbeck’s rejection of the experiential-expressivist claim that underlying all diverse religious traditions is a ‘unity of experience.’ According to Lindbeck, there is no “experience which is…not antecedent to or independent of language….religious conceptual categories are logically prior to religious experience and serve as conditions of possibility for the same.”
\(^{220}\) Ecclesiology is an explication of and reflection upon the constitutive practices of the Christian community.
defines itself, in its practice, as in continuity and discontinuity with these...societies.”

Drawing on Augustine’s *City of God*, Milbank develops a distinctively Christian ‘theory of society’ by contrasting the narrow self-interest and conflict intrinsic to modern liberalism and postmodern nihilism (*civitas terrene*) with the church (*altera civitas*). Milbank conceives the latter as a counter-cultural ‘community of peace’ and ‘harmony’ defined by ‘authentic relations of charity and love’.

In other words, Milbank argues that apart from the story-formed community of the church ‘there is only sin and darkness.’ ‘Salvation is available for us after Christ, because we can be incorporated into’ and formed by ‘the community which he founded.’

Both Hauerwas and Milbank tend to read the distinction between church and world in terms of a grace-sin dialectic that demonizes liberal political structures, that encourages Christians to disengage and that relegates non-Christians to the unsaved.

### 1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an exposition of MacIntyre’s critical and constructive project. MacIntyre regards the breakdown of premodern forms of perfectionism and correlative rise of modern ethical and political practice as the first stage in a historical narrative of decline that culminates in emotivism and post-modern relativism. Siding at least in part with the genealogical project’s deconstruction of Enlightenment individualism and foundationalism MacIntyre develops a social teleological or historicist retrieval of Aristotelian-Thomist virtue

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ethics that affirms a multiplicity of traditions or cultural-linguistic frameworks. At the same time, MacIntyre develops a systematic account of tradition-dependent rationality designed to walk a middle-ground between Enlightenment pretensions to neutrality and post-modern relativism and perspectivism. According to MacIntyre, tradition-dependent first principles are provisional and justified relative to alternatives through a process of dialectical testing whose long-range *telos* is transperspectival truth, the goal of theoretical and practical inquiry. This meta-theory provides the rational background necessary for intra- and inter-tradition dialogue and debate.

In section 1.7 I shifted from exposition to critique. There is much to commend in MacIntyre’s narrative of historical decline and retrieval and in MacIntyre’s response to what he perceives as the incoherent character of modern ethical and political discourse and practice. In response to this contemporary problematic MacIntyre advocates a return to the premodern notion of teleology in general and a historicist retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition in particular. Although I agree with MacIntyre that coherent ethical and political discourse requires in some sense the retrieval of self-transcendent conceptions of the good and with the substance of MacIntyre’s ‘theory of rationality,’ I find myself struggling with certain tensions in his work. Drawing on MacIntyre’s own theory of dialectic, I argued that MacIntyre’s constructive proposal is clouded by confusions surrounding the status of Thomism as a tradition and its relationship to liberalism. Either Thomism offers tradition-transcendental standards or it is one among many particular traditions. Either Thomism provides a thin conception of the good that structures coherent discourse in pluralistic contexts or MacIntyre’s critique of liberalism entails a form of disengagement predicated on the belief that rationality requires a shared commitment to a thick conception of the good. In both instances I pointed to the possible resolution of these tensions in the direction of the latter through reference to the work of Hauerwas and Milbank. In the end, it
is my contention that any retrieval of the premodern Aristotelian-Thomist tradition that neglects or fails to accommodate the *a priori* in human knowing and choosing remains incapable of adequately addressing the challenges associated with historicism and pluralism.
Chapter 2

*John Rawls’ Political Liberalism*

2. **Introduction**

The birth of the liberal-communitarian debate may be traced, at least in part, to the publication of John Rawls’ contemporary defense of classical liberalism in *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls’ early work crystallized the so-called communitarian critique of Enlightenment rationality and individualism associated with the work of philosophers such as Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank. The recent work of John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout represent what Stout calls ‘second-generation’ or distinctively post-Enlightenment variations of liberalism that remain sympathetic to liberal ideals but that aim at side-stepping certain key features of the communitarian critique. All three authors, in similar albeit significantly different ways, are committed to developing post-metaphysical or pragmatic objectifications of the norms underlying and structuring democratic practice that take seriously the rise of post-modern historicism. Central to the work of each author is a reinterpretation of the Kantian-inspired relationship between the right and the good or between public norms that govern democratic practice and private conceptions of human fulfillment. Each of these authors reinterprets the relationship between the public and private by dropping the foundationalist and individualist presuppositions that mark Enlightenment defences of liberalism. In this chapter I intend to articulate and evaluate the presuppositions that underlie each author’s objectification of liberal democratic norms. It is my contention that despite their individual strengths and differences each author remains committed to a constellation of related post-modern presuppositions that impugn their efforts at critical retrieval. I will begin my
examination with the later work of John Rawls which Richard Rorty engages and end with an investigation of Jeffrey Stout who responds to the work of both.

2.1 The Later Work of John Rawls

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls articulates a ‘freestanding,’ post-metaphysical or ‘political’ conception of justice designed to be endorsable by citizens who remain committed to alternative comprehensive doctrines or thick\(^1\) conceptions of human fulfillment. It is Rawls’ contention that the political conception of justice, the political conception of the person that underlies it, and the constructivist procedure which gives rise to the principles of justice do not presuppose controversial positions on the nature of truth, reality and value. In this way Rawls is able to argue that the political conception of justice functions as a ‘module’ that may become the focus of an ‘overlapping consensus,’ insofar as it is endorsed by and justified through appeal to rival comprehensive doctrines. It is this distinction between a political conception of justice and comprehensive conceptions of fulfillment that underlies Rawls’ distinction between public and non-public reason. According to Rawls, the principles of justice provide the basis for ‘public’ political discourse concerning matters of basic justice distinguishable from the ‘non-public’ reasons of those associations shaped by alternative comprehensive doctrines. These public standards specify the principles of right that provide standards for discriminating between permissible and non-permissible thick conceptions of human fulfillment.

I am sympathetic to Rawls’ project in *Political Liberalism* for a variety of reasons. First, Rawls correctly diagnoses the contemporary need for a stable set of public norms in the face of radical pluralism. Second, Rawls partially succeeds in responding to communitarian critiques of

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\(^1\) I treats the terms ‘comprehensive doctrine’ and ‘thick conception of the good’ as interchangeable in the work of Rawls except where otherwise noted. Rawls tends to draw the distinction between a ‘freestanding’ conception of justice or thin conception of the good and comprehensive doctrines or thick conceptions of the good by correlating the former and latter with a post-metaphysical and metaphysical standpoints respectively.
A Theory of Justice that claim his early work remains indebted to Enlightenment conceptions of rationality and individuality. At the same time, it is my contention that Rawls’ rendering of the metaphysical/post-metaphysical divide and related private/public distinction suffers from a number of confusions and inadequacies that render Rawls’ response to the communitarian critique partial rather than complete.

This chapter will proceed in eight stages. In section 2.1 I will introduce the problematic that leads to Rawls’ revised defence of liberalism. In sections 2.2-5 I will trace the various components in Rawls’ freestanding or post-metaphysical conception of political justice, including the political conception of the person as citizen, political or non-comprehensive constructivism, the original position, and the notion of primary goods. In section 2.6 I will switch from the freestanding character of political liberalism to Rawls’ claim that the political conception of justice can be the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. In section 2.7 I will focus on what is considered to be the most controversial aspect of Rawls’ work, the notion of public reason and its relation to comprehensive or non-public claims. In section 2.8 I will transition from exposition to evaluation, noting several major strengths of Rawls’ proposal as well as several related criticisms.

2.2 Rawls and the Challenge of Political Liberalism

At the heart of Rawls’ modified defence of justice as fairness in Political Liberalism stands his distinction between a post-metaphysical or political conception of justice and comprehensive or thick conceptions of human fulfillment. Comprehensive doctrines presuppose positions on the nature of truth, reality, and value, and include a variety of ‘conceptions of what is of value in human life, as well as ideals of personal virtue and character’ that norm ‘life as a
whole. In the opening of *Political Liberalism*, Rawls traces a brief narrative of the evolution of moral theory that distinguishes between classical Greek, medieval Christian, and early modern liberal forms of comprehensive thought. Classical Greek philosophy – associated with the work of Plato and Aristotle – emphasizes the individual’s quest for the ‘*summum bonum*’ or ‘the reasonable pursuit of…true happiness’ discerned by the ‘exercise of free, disciplined reason.’

Citing Augustine and Aquinas as examples, Rawls correlates a second stage with the rise of an ‘authoritarian’ and ‘expansionist’ form of Christianity that correlates salvation with ‘true belief.’ Although Rawls implicates three particular shifts in the rise of modern moral and political philosophy, the most prominent feature of this transformation is the sixteenth century Reformation, the related wars of religion and the concomitant rise of pluralism. According to Rawls, the Reformation fractured medieval religious unity by generating a variety of alternative ‘authoritative, salvationist, and expansionist’ expressions of Christianity. The rise of denominational pluralism is at least partly responsible for the wars of religion that condition the concomitant rise of ‘religious toleration’ and with it the ‘modern understanding of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought.’ Initial responses to the breakdown of medieval religious

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2 Rawls, *Political*, 175.
3 Ibid, xxii.
4 Ibid, 134.
5 Ibid, xxiii, xxv. See also 35. Rawls sometimes (see p.97 for example) makes it seem as if he distinguishes between rational intuitionism or intuitive knowledge of the natural law and divine command theories that appeal in voluntarist fashion to the will of God. See also William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009). Cavanaugh argues that the conflation of orthodoxy with ‘true belief’ is an invention of the modern West designed to marginalize religion in public discourse.
6 Rawls, *Political*, xxii-xxiii. Rawls mentions the Reformation, the “development of the modern state with its central administration, at first ruled by monarchs with enormous if not absolute powers,” and “the development of modern science beginning in the seventeenth century.”
7 Ibid, xxiii. In *The Myth of Religion Violence*, Cavanaugh deconstructs this particular reading of the birth of modernity that regards religions as inherently violent.
8 Rawls, *Political*, xxiii. See also ibid, xxv, “what the ancient world did not know was the clash between salvationist, creedal and expansionist religions. That is a phenomenon new to historical experience, a possibility realized by the Reformation.” Ibid, xxvi, “what is new about this clash is that it introduces into people’s conceptions of their good a transcendent element not admitting of compromise.”
unity in early modern moral philosophy attempted to ‘establish a basis of moral knowledge independent of ecclesiastical authority’ that would be accessible to all ‘reasonable and conscientious’ persons.’\(^{10}\) In responding to basic questions of ‘moral epistemology and psychology,’ early modern liberals generally argue that moral theory is not derived from an ‘order of values in God’s intellect’ but is the product of reflection on human nature as ‘reason or feeling’ in conjunction with the ‘requirements of our living together in society.’\(^{11}\)

Drawing on historicist presuppositions, communitarian authors argued that Rawls’ initial defense of liberalism in *A Theory of Justice* inappropriately presumed that citizens in a ‘well-ordered’\(^{12}\) democratic society would share a commitment to a post-religious comprehensive form of liberalism.\(^{13}\) In the years following *Theory*’s publication Rawls affirmed that pluralism – the fact that no one particular comprehensive doctrine is endorsed by all individuals – is the ‘normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of a constitutional democratic regime.’\(^{14}\) According to Rawls, the fact of pluralism must not be lamented nor circumvented but accounted for and accommodated within any viable political philosophy. As a result, Rawls’ efforts in *Political Liberalism* shift to identifying the ‘fair terms of social cooperation’ for

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\(^{10}\) Ibid, xxvi. See also ibid, xxxvii, “political liberalism is not a form of Enlightenment liberalism, that is, a comprehensive liberal and often secular doctrine founded on reason and viewed as suitable for the modern age now that the religious authority of Christian ages is said to be no longer dominant.”

\(^{11}\) Ibid, xxvi-xxvii. Rawls mentions the work of Kant and Hume as representative attempts to appeal to reason and feeling respectively. According to Rawls, both authors also argue that “we have in our nature sufficient motives to lead us to act as we ought without the need of external sanctions, at least in the form of rewards and punishments imposed by God or the state.”

\(^{12}\) Ibid, 334. A well-ordered society, in other words, is one in which (a) all citizens affirms the principles of justice; (b) its basic structure is judged to reflect such principles; and (c) all citizens possess an ‘effective sense of justice’ that allows them to act in fidelity to such principles.

\(^{13}\) Ibid, xl, “the argument in *Theory* relies on a premise the realization of which its principles of justice rule out. This is the premise that in the well-ordered society of justice as fairness, citizens hold the same comprehensive doctrine, and this includes aspects of Kant’s comprehensive liberalism, to which the principles of justice might belong.” See also ibid, xv-xvi. In *Theory*, Rawls did not explicitly distinguish between moral and political philosophy and presented social contract theory in general and his conception of justice as fairness in particular as a ‘comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrine.’ See also ibid, xxix. Drawing on historicist presuppositions, broadly communitarian authors criticized *Theory* for its ‘abstract conception of the person,’ Rawls’ purported commitment to an ‘individualist, nonsocial, idea of human nature,’ and his related commitment to a rigid distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, xvi.
individuals who do not share commitment to a singular comprehensive doctrine.\textsuperscript{15} In other words, the goal of Political Liberalism is to ‘uncover the conditions of the possibility of a reasonable public basis of justification on fundamental political questions’ congruent with yet distinguishable from ‘nonpublic bases of justification’ internal to the variety of comprehensive frameworks.\textsuperscript{16}

In responding to this challenge Rawls develops a more limited ‘political’ or ‘freestanding’ conception of justice articulated in abstraction from any particular comprehensive doctrine and its attendant epistemological, metaphysical and moral presuppositions.\textsuperscript{17} Although the political conception of justice contains its own ‘intrinsic normative and moral ideal,’\textsuperscript{18} the application of those norms is restricted to what Rawls calls the ‘basic structure of society’\textsuperscript{19} constituted by the ‘main institutions of political, [economic] and social life.’\textsuperscript{20} According to Rawls, the political conception is arrived at by objectifying and organizing the ‘basic ideas and principles ’implicit in the ‘public political culture of a democratic society’\textsuperscript{21} constituted by the ‘institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation.’\textsuperscript{22} Starting

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, xxv.
\item Ibid, xix. See also ibid, xxxvi.
\item See for example: Ibid, xix, xx, xlii, 10, 40.
\item Rawls, Political, xlii.
\item Ibid, 11. “The initial focus, then of a political conception of justice is the framework of basic institutions and the principles, standards and precepts that apply to it.”
\item Ibid, 175.
\item Ibid, 8. “We collect such settled convictions as the belief in religious toleration and the rejection of slavery and try to organize the basic ideas and principles implicit in these convictions into a coherent political conception of justice. These convictions are provisional fixed points that it seems any reasonable conception must account for. We start, then, by looking to the public culture itself as the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles. We hope to formulate these ideas and principles clearly enough to be combined into a political conception of justice congenial to our most firmly held convictions.”
\item Ibid, 14. “In a democratic society there is a tradition of democratic thought, the content of which is at least familiar and intelligible to the educated common sense of citizens generally. Society’s main institutions, and their accepted forms of interpretation, are seen as a fund of implicitly shared ideas and principles.” See also ibid, 13-14. Whereas democratic institutions and the ‘public traditions of their interpretation’ constitute a society’s ‘public culture,’ comprehensive doctrines and their expression in associations such as ‘churches and universities, learned and scientific societies, and clubs and teams’ constitute the ‘background culture of civil society.’
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
from ‘within a certain political tradition,’\textsuperscript{23} the political conception of justice as fairness purports to provide a systematic articulation of democratic citizens’ ‘shared and public political reason.’\textsuperscript{24}

Rawls builds the freestanding portion of his argument through reference to a number of interrelated ideas. First, Rawls appeals to a thin or political conception of the person as a ‘free and equal citizen’ that purports to prescind from controversial metaphysical commitments. Second, in contrast with rational intuitionism and Kantian constructivism, Rawls articulates a form of ‘political’ constructivism that regards the principles of justice as constructions that remain neutral between conceptions of moral truth. Third, Rawls outlines the way in which the principles of justice or the fair terms of social cooperation are constructed or selected from within a hypothetical standpoint, the original position, whose veil of ignorance restricts parties’ appeal to a thin conception of the human good. To the ‘idealized’ conception of the person as citizen I now turn.

\subsection*{2.3 The Political Conception of the Person}

Central to Rawls’ post-metaphysical approach is his conception of the person as a moral agent whose correlative rights and duties pertain in restricted fashion to the political domain concerned with the character and functioning of the basic institutions of society.\textsuperscript{25} According to Rawls, the political conception of the person as a ‘free and equal citizen’ or ‘fully cooperating

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 14. See also ibid, 45. Political philosophy does not ‘withdraw from society and the world’ or ‘claim to discover what is true by its own distinctive methods of reason apart from any tradition of political thought and practice.’

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 9, 13. See also ibid, 45-46. See also ibid, 14-15, 18. At the heart of this account stand Rawls’ ‘idealized’ objectifications or abstract formulations of two interrelated ideas implicit in democratic practice: (a) the notion of society as a ‘fair system of cooperation’ and (b) the notion of the person as a ‘free and equal citizen.’

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, xliii. Citizens are no doubt ‘moral agents’ but the moral values – the rights and duties – at stake are limited to the political sphere. See also ibid, 18, n.20, “In the present case the conception of the person is a moral conception, one that begins from our everyday conception of persons as the basic units of thought, deliberation, and responsibility, and adapted to a political conception of justice and not a comprehensive doctrine. It is in effect a political conception of the person, and given the aims of justice as fairness, a conception suitable for the basis of democratic citizenship.”
member of society”\textsuperscript{26} presupposes ‘no particular metaphysical doctrine about the nature of persons, distinctive and opposed to other metaphysical doctrines.’\textsuperscript{27} Citizens in this limited political sense possess two moral powers or capacities to be both ‘reasonable’ and ‘rational.’\textsuperscript{28} Reasonableness includes a ‘willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment’ or the grounds of ‘reasonable disagreement’\textsuperscript{29} distinguishable from ‘unreasonable’ sources such as ‘prejudice and bias, self- and group interest, blindness and willfulness.’\textsuperscript{30} The fact that so many of ‘our most important judgments’ are shaped by ‘our individual and associative points of view, intellectual affinities, and affective attachments’ implies that it is unreasonable to expect ‘conscientious persons’ to affirm the same comprehensive doctrine.\textsuperscript{31} The ‘burdens of judgment’ therefore counsel ‘some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought’ for, by definition, it would be unreasonable to use ‘political power’ to enforce any one particular thick conception of fulfillment.\textsuperscript{32} In conjunction with this realization, reasonableness also includes a ‘capacity for a

\textsuperscript{26} Rawls, Political, 19. Citizens are free insofar as they possess the ‘two moral powers’ – a ‘capacity for a sense of justice and for a conception of the good’ – and the ‘powers of reason’ such as ‘judgment, thought and inference’ connected with the moral powers. The minimum possession of these powers grounds the equality of citizens.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 29, n.30, “Part of the difficulty is that there is no accepted understanding of what a metaphysical doctrine is. One might say, as Paul Hoffman has suggested to me, that to develop a political conception of justice without presupposing, or explicitly using, a particular metaphysical doctrine, for example, some particular metaphysical conception of the person, is already to presuppose a metaphysical thesis: namely, that no metaphysical doctrine is required for this purpose. One might also say that our ordinary conception of persons as the basic units of deliberation and responsibility presupposes, or in some way involves, certain metaphysical theses about the nature of persons as moral or political agents. Following the precept of avoidance, I should not want to deny these claims….If metaphysical presuppositions are involved, perhaps they are so general that they would not distinguish between the metaphysical views – Cartesian, Leibnizian, or Kantian; realist, idealist, or materialist – with which philosophy has traditionally been concerned.”

\textsuperscript{28} See ibid, 48-49, n.1. Here Rawls argues that the distinction between the ‘reasonable’ and the ‘rational’ traces its roots to the work of Kant and his distinction between the categorical and the hypothetical in particular.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 56-57. Reasonable sources of disagreement in human judgment include, for example: difficulties in assessing ‘evidence,’ the ‘indeterminacy’ of concepts that leads to a diversity of interpretations, differences in the weighting of considerations, diversity in ‘total’ life experience that shape the way in which individuals ‘assess evidence and weigh moral and political values,’ and difficulties in ‘setting priorities and making adjustments’ among moral and political values.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 54-55, 58.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 58. “It is unrealistic – or worse, it arouses mutual suspicion and hostility – to suppose that all our differences are rooted solely in ignorance and perversity, or else in the rivalries for power, status, or economic gain.” See also, ibid, 60.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 61. See also ibid, 62-63. Here Rawls distances his account of the burden of judgements from sceptical arguments proposed by authors such as Descartes and Hume who claim in different ways that the ‘external world of
sense of justice’ or an ability to affirm and live in fidelity to principles that specify ‘fair terms of cooperation acceptable to all parties.’ This capacity to act reasonably or in accord with the criterion of ‘reciprocity’ does not delimit the whole of ‘moral sensibility’ but refers primarily to the agent’s commitment to principles that structure the basic institutions of a democratic society.

‘Rationality’ refers to the solitary agent or ‘corporate person’s’ capacity to use her ‘powers of judgment and deliberation’ to ‘form… revise, and… pursue a conception of… rational advantage or good.’ This abstract power is complemented in the concrete lives of citizens by a particular conception of human fulfillment or ‘scheme of final ends’ that the subject pursues ‘for their own sake’ and that is contextualized by commitment or ‘devotion’ to ‘other persons and to ‘various groups and associations.’ According to Rawls, the broader horizon within which these pursuits make sense is provided by a ‘view of our relation to the world – religious, philosophical and moral – by reference to which the value and significance of our ends and attachments are understood.’

objects’ cannot be known because ‘one or more of the necessary conditions of knowledge’ is unavailable. The burdens of judgment do not claim a priori that agreement is impossible but rather simply that agreement, based on ‘historical experience,’ is extremely ‘difficult’ to obtain. See also ibid, 63. This is not to say that Rawls denies the transperspectival aspirations to truth of any particular comprehensive doctrine, rather, political liberalism proceeds on the assumption of the ‘practical impossibility’ of agreement.

33 Ibid, 49.
34 Ibid, 54. “The reasonable (with its idea of reciprocity) is not the altruistic (the impartial acting solely for the interest of others) nor is it the concern for self (and moved by its ends and affections alone). In a reasonable society, most simply illustrated in a society of equals in basic matters, all have their own rational ends they hope to advance, and all stand ready to propose fair terms that others may reasonably be expected to accept, so that all may benefit and improve on what every one can do on their own. This reasonable society is neither a society of saints nor a society of the self-centered….yet the moral power that underlies the capacity to propose, or to endorse, and then to be moved to act from fair terms of cooperation for their own sake is an essential social virtue all the same.”
36 Ibid, 50.
37 Ibid, 19
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid, 19-20. “Persons’ conceptions of the good are not fixed but form and develop as they mature, and may change more or less radically over the course of life.” See also ibid, 51-52. Here Rawls argues that the reasonable and the rational, though ‘complimentary,’ are distinct ideas and that there can be no ‘thought of deriving the reasonable from the rational’ in particular. Rawls singles out ethical theories that prioritize the rational and thereby claim that
2.4 Political Constructivism

Rawls distinguishes his approach to moral knowledge and truth from two main alternatives, ‘rational intuitionism’ and ‘moral constructivism.’

Rational intuitionists argue that moral knowledge – roughly analogous to axiomatic ‘knowledge of mathematics in arithmetic and geometry’ is the product of ‘theoretical’ reason’s intuitive or perceptual access to an ‘independent moral order,’ ‘realm of values,’ or ‘natural law.’

From the perspective of rational intuitionism, moral truth is a product of correspondence between moral judgments expressed in the principles of justice and the ‘independent order of moral values’ grounded, typically, in the mind of God.

In contrast with intuitionists, Rawls affirms a form of political constructivism that conceives the fair terms of cooperation as the product of a process or procedure of ‘construction’ that presupposes the political conceptions of person and society discussed above.

For the political constructivist the emphasis shifts from theoretical reason’s intuitive access to or ‘knowledge of given objects’ to ‘practical’ reason’s capacity to produce objects ‘according to a conception of those objects.’

This more limited form of constructivism also differs from Kantian moral constructivism, a comprehensive doctrine whose conceptions of person and society and concomitant ‘ideal of autonomy’ presuppose Kant’s ‘transcendental idealism.’

Although comprehensive constructivism shares a preference for practical over theoretical reason,
it differs from political constructivism insofar as it claims that all moral values are the product of or constituted by ‘practical (human) reason itself.’

2.5 The Original Position

Rawls draws on this formal or political conception of the person as citizen to articulate the way in which the principles of justice are constructed from within what he calls the ‘original position.’ According to Rawls, since the original position is an idealized ‘device of representation,’ the initial agreement it contributes to ‘must be regarded as both hypothetical and nonhistorical’ in character. This interpretation of the original agreement does not conflict with ‘the present-time of entry interpretation’ which claims that individuals may ‘simulate being in the original position’ simply by conducting…moral reasoning about first principles in accordance with the stipulated procedural constraints. As a result, Rawls is able to side-step charges that the original position presupposes a metaphysical conception of the subject’s ‘essential nature’ as ‘independent of and prior to’ her ‘final ends and attachments.’

46 Ibid, 99. See also ibid, 125.
47 Ibid, 22. See also ibid, 450. Rawls’ commitment to pluralism compels him to regard the original position as merely one device among others through which the principles of justice may be derived.
48 Ibid, 24. See also ibid, 271; 273, “agreement in the original position represents the outcome of a rational process of deliberation under ideal and nonhistorical conditions that express certain reasonable constraints.” See also ibidm 286-287. Here Rawls argues that other contract doctrines, including the ‘historical process doctrines such as those of Hobbes and Locke or the libertarian view,’ stand susceptible to what he calls the ‘idealist critique.’ The original agreement in each of these cases appears to be ‘substantially affected by contingencies and accidents of the as-if just historical process which has no tendency to preserve or to move toward background justice.’ Rawls himself notes, “this difficulty is strikingly illustrated by Locke’s doctrine. He assumes that not all members of society following the social compact have equal political rights: citizens have the right to vote in virtue of owning property so that the propertyless have no vote and no right to exercise political authority. Presumably the diverse accumulations of the as-if just historical process over generations has left many without property through no fault of their own….From a Kantian viewpoint, Locke’s doctrine improperly subjects the social relationships of moral persons to historical and social contingencies that are external to, and eventually undermine, their freedom and equality.”
49 Ibid, 274. See also ibid, 27-28, “justice as fairness is badly misunderstood if the deliberations of the parties, and the motives we attribute to them, are mistaken for an account of the moral psychology, either of actual persons or of citizens in a well-ordered society.” See also ibid, 25-26, “as a device of representation the idea of the original position serves as a means of public reflection and self-clarification. It helps us work out what we now think, once we are able to take a clear and uncluttered view of what justice requires when society is conceived as a scheme of cooperation between free and equal citizens from one generation to the next.” In other words, the original position “models what we regard – here and now – as fair conditions.”
50 Ibid, 27.
According to Rawls, rationality is modeled in the original position by the parties’ ‘higher order’ interests in ‘developing and exercising’ their two moral powers and in furthering the realization of a particular determinate conception of the good. The capacity to be reasonable is modeled in the original position by those ‘conditions imposed on the parties as rationally autonomous’ or by those ‘limits on information to which their deliberations are subject.’ In order for individuals to select genuinely fair principles the original position must abstract from the ‘contingencies’ and ‘bargaining advantages that inevitably arise within the background institutions of any society from cumulative social, historical, and natural tendencies.’ More specifically, Rawls argues that parties in the original position select the principles of justice from behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ that prescinds from knowledge of ‘social position,’ comprehensive doctrines, ‘race and ethnic group,’ ‘sex and gender,’ as well as ‘native endowments such as strength and intelligence.’ The imposition of such constraints limits the parties’ conception of ‘rational advantage’ to an index of ‘primary goods’ or those ‘background conditions’ and ‘general all-purpose means’ required for the realization of citizens’ thick conceptions of human fulfillment. The list of such goods include ‘basic rights, liberties, and opportunities, and...all-

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51 Ibid, 73-74. See also ibid, 75, “observe that rational autonomy is but an aspect of freedom, and differs from full autonomy. As merely rationally autonomous the parties are but artificial persons we fashion to inhabit the original position as a device of representation.”
53 Ibid, 23.
54 Ibid, 23-25.
55 Ibid, 75-76. “the parties are trying to guarantee the political and social conditions for citizens to pursue their good and to exercise the moral powers that characterize them as free and equal.” Ibid, 178. The goal here is to objectify the basic needs and requirements of free and equal citizens conceived as ‘fully cooperating members of society’ by appealing to the subject’s ‘moral powers and higher order interests’ along with the ‘basic facts of social life and conditions of human growth and nurture.’
56 Ibid, 178, 180. According to Rawls, these basic needs and requirements are derived through appeal to the subject’s ‘moral powers and higher order interests’ along with the ‘basic facts of social life and conditions of human growth and nurture.’
purpose means such as income and wealth, with all of these supported by the same social bases of self-respect.\footnote{Ibid, 181. Rawls divides the list of primary goods into five categories: “a. basic rights and liberties, also given by a list; b. freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities; c. powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility in the political and economic institutions of the basic structure; d. income and wealth; and finally, e. the social bases of self-respect.”}

### 2.6 The Priority of Right and Political Liberalism’s Thin Conception of the Good

The appeal to an index of primary goods raises questions about the relationship between the right and the good. Although the priority of right is an ‘essential element’ in political liberalism,\footnote{Ibid, 173.} Rawls argues that the right and the good are ‘complementary’ and that no conception of political justice can articulate its ideal without appealing to both aspects.\footnote{Ibid.} In the first instance, the priority of right refers to the ‘thin’ or ‘political’ conception of the good – specified by the index of primary goods – that prescinds from any comprehensive or determinate conception of human fulfillment.\footnote{Ibid, 176.} With this limited conception of the good in place, parties in the original position construct or select the principles of justice from a ‘short list of alternatives given by the tradition of moral and political philosophy’\footnote{Ibid, 305.} based on ‘how well they secure the primary goods.’\footnote{Ibid, 71.} According to Rawls, the first principle states that ‘each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all.’\footnote{Ibid, 7. See also ibid, 7. “The first principle covering the equal basic rights and liberties may easily be preceded by a lexically prior principle requiring that citizens basic needs be met, at least insofar as their being met is necessary for citizens to understand and to be able fruitfully to exercise those rights and liberties.”} The second principle states that ‘social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the
greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society." According to Rawls, the basic structure is just insofar as it adequately reflects the agreed upon principles whose implementation is designed to secure the availability of primary goods. Rawls argues that although the selection of principles is constrained by the ‘ideals and principles’ intrinsic to democratic society, political liberalism recognizes a range or ‘family’ of ‘liberal political conceptions of justice.’

Once the principles of justice have been selected by the parties in the original position, Rawls speaks of the priority of right pertaining to the restrictions imposed by such principles on particular and more comprehensive conceptions of human fulfillment. This second limitation allows Rawls to distinguish between the ‘fact of pluralism’ *per se* and the reality of ‘reasonable pluralism.’ The latter notion demands that only those comprehensive doctrines that abide by such principles may be deemed acceptable in a democratic context. In other words, to speak of the priority of right in political liberalism is to affirm that the ‘principles of political justice impose limits on permissible ways of life; and hence the claims citizens make to pursue ends that

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64 Ibid, 6, “the two principles together, with the first given priority over the second, regulate the basic institutions that realize these values.”
65 Ibid, 266-268. Although the institutions constitutive of the basic structure of society are initially designed to ‘secure just background conditions,’ over time the ‘overall result of separate and independent transactions is away from and not toward background justice.’ See also ibid, 267, “the fact that everyone with reason believes that they are acting fairly and scrupulously honoring the norms governing agreements is not sufficient to preserve background justice….We might say: in this case the invisible hand guides things in the wrong direction and favors an oligopolistic configuration of accumulations that succeeds in maintaining unjustified inequalities and restrictions on fair opportunity. Therefore, we require special institutions to preserve background justice, and a special conception of justice to define how these institutions are to be set up.” In other words, the basic structure must be ‘regulated’ by those ‘operations that continually adjust and compensate for the inevitable tendencies away from background fairness.’
66 Ibid, 450. See also ibid, 164, “in a political society with a consensus of this kind, several conceptions of justice will be political rivals and no doubt favored by different interests and political strata.” See also ibid, 167, ‘different social and economic interests’ underlie and support different conceptions of justice. “The differences between these conceptions expresses, in part, a conflict between these interests. Let us define the relevant interests for each conception as those that it would encourage and be supported by in a stable basic structure regulated by it. The width of the range of liberal conceptions will be determined by the degree of opposition among these interests….I simply conjecture that the narrower the differences between the liberal conceptions when correctly based on fundamental political ideas in a democratic public culture, and the more compatible the underlying interests that support them in a stable basic structure regulated by them, the narrower the range of liberal conceptions defining the focus of the consensus.”
68 Ibid, 37-38.
69 Ibid.
transgress those limits have no weight.\textsuperscript{70} Although the democratic society structured by these principles is not a ‘political community’ unified through commitment to a comprehensive end, this fact does not reduce society to a collection of ‘distinct individuals or distinct associations,’ that share no ‘final ends in common.’\textsuperscript{71} In other words, a liberal society need not therefore be a ‘private society,’ a society in which political institutions are simply ‘instrumental to individual or associational ends.’ In reality, members affirm the same political conception of justice and thereby share and prioritize at least one ‘very basic’ political end, namely the establishment of a just democratic society.\textsuperscript{72} In a concomitant way, political liberalism commends the cultivation of certain limited political virtues such as ‘toleration and mutual trust,’\textsuperscript{73} ‘reasonableness and the sense of fairness,’\textsuperscript{74} and the ability to ‘meet others halfway.’\textsuperscript{75} Each of these virtues are essential to securing the sustainability of a basic structure informed by the principles of justice\textsuperscript{76} and thereby help define what it means to be a ‘good citizen of a democratic state.’\textsuperscript{77}

2.7 The Possibility of an Overlapping Consensus

Since political liberalism’s non-metaphysical form of construction replaces the concept of moral truth with the politically ‘reasonable,’ political constructivism remains at least potentially compatible with the truth of either intuitionism or Kantian forms of comprehensive liberalism.\textsuperscript{78} In other words, political constructivism remains agnostic with respect to alternative ‘accounts of

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 174.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 201. The notion of community as a ‘private society’ – implies that political institutions are nothing more ‘instrumental to individual or associational ends.’
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 202.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 194-195.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 157.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. For example, “the virtues of political cooperation that make a constitutional regime possible are, then, very great virtues. I mean, for example, the virtues of tolerance and being ready to meet others halfway and the virtue of reasonableness and the sense of fairness. When these virtues are widespread in society and sustain its political conception of justice, they constitute a very great public good, part of society’s political capital.”
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 194-195.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 151.
the truth of moral judgements’ so as to provide principles of justice acceptable to those who
stand committed to alternative doctrines within the context of reasonable pluralism. By
prescinding from comprehensive commitments, the political or post-metaphysical conception of
justice functions as a ‘module’ that may be interpreted and related to different comprehensive
doctrines in different ways. This openness to a wide diversity of reasonable comprehensible
standpoints made possible by the freestanding nature of Rawls’ constructivism provides the
foundations for the possibility of what Rawls’ calls an ‘overlapping consensus’ capable of
providing ‘stability for the right reasons.’

In the first stage of Political Liberalism, Rawls’ revised account of justice as fairness is
characterized as a freestanding political conception that may be justified ‘pro tanto,’ or in
abstraction from any particular comprehensive doctrine. Once the principles of justice have
been selected, the focus in the second stage of political liberalism shifts to the question of
‘stability’ and to the possibility of an ‘overlapping consensus,’ justified or supported by reasons
internal to the various comprehensive doctrines. According to Rawls, an ‘overlapping
consensus’ differs fundamentally from a modus vivendi arrangement grounded in mutual self-
or group-interest’s capacity to counsel commitment to democratic institutions. The latter form of
consensus is achieved through ‘political bargaining’ wherein the parties remain willing to

79 Ibid, 126-127, “These further claims political constructivism neither asserts nor denies. As I have said, here it
does not speak. It says only that for a reasonable and workable political conception, no more is needed than a public
basis in the principles of practical reason in union with conceptions of society and person.”
80 Ibid, 144-145. See also ibid, 126, “let us say, then, that when we speak of the moral truth of a political conception,
we assess it from the point of view of our comprehensive doctrine.” Most citizens who hold alternative
comprehensive doctrines would be naturally inclined to provide the political conception of justice with a
‘metaphysical foundation’ drawn from within their own basic horizon.
81 Ibid, xix, xlii.
82 Ibid, 140-141.
83 Ibid, 10-11, “specify the political domain and its conception of justice in such a way that its institutions can gain
the support of an overlapping consensus. In this case, citizens themselves, within the exercise of the liberty of
thought and conscience, and looking to their comprehensive doctrines, view the political conception as derived
from, or congruent with, or at least not in conflict with, their other values.” See also ibid, 12, 15.
84 Ibid, xlii.
‘pursue their goals at the expense of the other…should conditions change.’ Rawls illustrates the nature of a *modus vivendi* by appealing to the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century and their unprincipled commitment to the ‘principle of toleration.’

Despite affirming toleration as a practical necessity, each party believed that ‘it was the duty of the ruler to uphold the true religion and to repress the spread of heresy and false doctrine’ and that if one side were to gain an advantage the principle of toleration ought to be discarded.

According to Rawls, the *modus vivendi* agreements that marked the end of the Wars of Religion were succeeded by a second form of arrangement that differs from an overlapping consensus. According to Rawls, a ‘constitutional consensus’ is marked by a shared commitment to guaranteeing and prioritizing certain ‘basic political rights and duties’ whose ‘breadth’ is limited to safeguarding ‘democratic procedures.’ Although the commitment to such ‘liberal principles’ is deep enough to place the rights they are designed to protect ‘beyond the calculus of social interests,’ it coexists with disagreements concerning the ‘content and boundaries of these rights and liberties.’

According to Rawls, an overlapping consensus differs from both of these arrangements. On the one hand, the main difference between a *modus vivendi* and an overlapping consensus is that in the latter citizens affirm a political conception of justice as a limited moral ideal and are prepared to act in accordance with such an ideal precisely on ‘moral grounds.’ More specifically, it is Rawls’ contention that citizens who remain committed to different reasonable comprehensive doctrines can affirm the priority of political values and the congruence or compatibility of their broader moral ideals with the political conception of justice operative in a

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85 Ibid, 148.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, 164.
88 Ibid, 161-162.
89 Ibid, 159.
90 Ibid, 168.
democratic context. The commitment to political values is not the result of a ‘compromise compelled by circumstances’ or ‘between those holding different views’ but stems from reasons internal to the comprehensive viewpoints affirmed by different citizens. The result is a consensus that obtains ‘stability for the right reasons’ precisely insofar as the political conception of justice ‘fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines.’

On the other hand, an overlapping consensus differs from a more limited form of constitutional consensus in two fundamental ways. In the first instance, the former presupposes a capacity to ground liberal principles through appeal to a political conception of justice that makes reference to correlative conceptions of society and person. According to Rawls, at some point in time, ‘political groups must enter the public forum of political discussion and appeal to other groups who do not share their comprehensive doctrine.’ This reality naturally pushes citizens who hold diverse conceptions of the good to develop political conceptions of justice ‘in terms of which they can explain and justify their preferred policies to a wider public so as to put together a majority.’ Only in the wake of such formulations is it possible to provide the ‘conceptual resources’ necessary for guiding the ongoing interpretation and amending of the constitution.

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92 Ibid, 169, “in these circumstances a balance of reasons as seen within each citizen’s comprehensive doctrine, and not a compromise compelled by circumstances, is the basis of citizens’ respect for the limits of public reason.” See also ibid, 170-171.
94 Ibid, 164.
95 Ibid, 165.
96 Ibid. “These conceptions provide the common currency of discussion and a deeper basis for explaining the meaning and implications of the principles and policies each group endorses.”
97 Ibid, 165-166, “in a constitutional system with judicial review, or review conducted by some other body, it will be necessary for judges, or the officers in question, to develop a political conception of justice in the light of which the constitution, in their view, is to be interpreted and important cases decided. Only so can the enactments of the legislature be declared constitutional or unconstitutional; and only so have they a reasonable basis for their interpretation of the values and standards the constitution ostensibly incorporates.”
procedural…consensus” is ‘too narrow’ and that, in response, there must be additional legislation that guarantees rights and liberties that extend beyond liberal political principles.  

2.8 The Ideal of Public Reason

With the freestanding character of political liberalism in place (sections 2.1.2-5) and the ideal relationship of the political conception of justice to comprehensive doctrines outlined (section 2.1.6), I now turn to the distinction between public and non-public reason. The latter includes the comprehensively grounded reasons of ‘associations’ such as ‘churches…universities, scientific societies, and professional groups’ that pertain to the ‘background culture’ of ‘civil society.’ By contrast, the content of public reason is specified by the political conception of justice and includes two separate but intimately related dimensions: (a) the principles of justice; and (b) ‘guidelines and criteria’ for the application of those principles as well as those virtues essential to public reason’s exercise. The ideal of

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98 Ibid, 166-167, “there must be fundamental legislation that guarantees liberty of conscience and freedom of thought generally and not merely of political speech and thought. Equally there must be legislation assuring freedom of association and freedom of movement; and beyond this, measures are required to assure that the basic needs of all citizens can be met so that they can take part in political and social life… the main point under breadth, then, is that the rights and liberties and procedures included in a constitutional consensus cover but a limited part of the fundamental political questions that will be debated. There are forces tending to amend the constitution in certain ways to cover further constitutional essentials, or else to enact the necessary legislation with much the same effect.”

99 Ibid, 220, “these reasons are social, and certainly not private.” See also ibid, 443, “the background culture includes, then, the culture of churches and associations of all kinds, and institutions of learning at all levels, especially universities and professional schools, scientific and other societies. In addition, the non-public political culture mediates between the public political culture and the background culture. This comprises media – properly so named – of all kinds: newspapers, reviews and magazines, television and radio.” See also ibid, 444, “sometimes those who appear to reject the idea of public reason actually mean to assert the need for full and open discussion in the background culture. With this political liberalism fully agrees.”

100 Ibid, 223.

101 Ibid, 225. Both dimensions are selected by the parties in the original position.

102 Ibid, 223-224. Beside the principles of justice and that which they counsel, the political conception of justice must also include ‘guidelines of inquiry’ or ‘principles of reasoning and rules of evidence in the light of which citizens are to decide whether substantive principles properly apply and to identify laws and policies that best satisfy them.’

103 See for example: ibid, 224-225, 253.
public reason demands that when citizens deliberate or exchange reasons\textsuperscript{104} concerning ‘constitutional essentials’ and ‘questions of basic justice’\textsuperscript{105} they strive to inculcate the political virtue of ‘reasonableness.’\textsuperscript{106} ‘Reasonable’ citizens operate in fidelity to what Rawls calls the ‘duty of civility’ whose satisfaction grounds the legitimate exercise of political power in a pluralistic context.\textsuperscript{107} More specifically, Rawls argues that the ‘principle of liberal legitimacy’ requires that when citizens exchange reasons on matters pertaining to basic justice, they adopt principles that fulfill the demands associated with the criterion of reciprocity.\textsuperscript{108} In other words, citizens ought to be willing to present reasons for their basic political commitments and for their balancing of political values that others may reasonably be expected to affirm or endorse.\textsuperscript{109} This ideal of public reason applies especially to: (i) ‘the discourse of judges in their decisions…especially…of a supreme court’; (ii) ‘of government officials’; and (iii) ‘of candidates for public office and their campaign managers.’\textsuperscript{110} Citizens who are not officially involved in the political process are expected to ‘think of themselves as if they were legislators and ask themselves what status, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity,  

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid, 448. At the heart of Rawls’ understanding of democracy stands the ‘idea of deliberation itself.’ Deliberation refers to the process of reason exchange and debate that occurs when citizens share and evaluate each other’s stances on matters of basic justice.

\textsuperscript{105}Ibid, 214. This delimits the ‘scope’ of public reason. “Many if not most political questions do not concern those fundamental matters, for example, much tax legislation and many laws regulating property; statues protecting the environment and controlling pollution; establishing national parks and preserving wilderness areas and animal and plant species; and laying aside funds for museums and the arts. Of course, sometimes these do involve fundamental matters.”

\textsuperscript{106}Ibid, 224.

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid, 216-218, 242, 446-447.

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid, 216, 242; 446-447. ‘Political legitimacy’ in general or the legitimate ‘exercise of political power’ is the product of fidelity to the ‘criterion of reciprocity’ or to a commitment to offer reasons for basic political positions that we might reasonably believe others could affirm.

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid, 253.

\textsuperscript{110}Ibid, 443. “In discussing what I call the wide view of public political culture, we shall see that the idea of public reason applies more strictly to judges than to others, but that the requirements of public justification for that reason are always the same.”
they would think it most reasonable to enact. This type of procedure allows citizens to illustrate their commitment to the duty of civility by voting for and supporting government officials whom they regard as best operating in accord with the ideal of public reason.

According to Rawls, broad agreement concerning citizens’ duty to appeal to public reason or to inculcate reasonableness coexist with more specific disagreements concerning the political conception of justice, its constitutive principles and or its ordering of values. More specifically, since the content of public reason is coextensive with a ‘family of political conceptions of justice,’ the ‘forms of permissible public reason are always several.’ Even though parties will not necessarily agree, the duty of civility compels citizens to reason based on the conviction that the political values to which one appeals are capable of being endorsed by all. Rawls argues that even when ‘disputed questions’ give rise to a dialogical impasse, if such questions are ‘debated by appeal to political values and citizens vote their sincere opinion, the ideal is sustained.’ When citizens and government officials operate in fidelity to the ideal of public reason, the ‘outcome of the vote’ designed to settle such disputes ‘is to be seen as legitimate’ or ‘binding on citizens’ by ‘majority principle.’

111 Ibid, 444-445. “When firm and widespread, the disposition of citizens to view themselves as ideal legislators, and to repudiate government officials and candidates for public office who violate public reason, is one of the political and social roots of democracy, and is vital to its enduring strength and vigor.”

112 Ibid, 445.

113 Ibid, 226, “the view I have called ‘justice as fairness’ is but one example of a liberal political conception; its specific content is not definitive of such a view.” See also ibid, 227, “it is inevitably and often desirable that citizens have different views as to the most appropriate political conception: for the public political culture is bound to contain different fundamental ideas that can be developed in different ways. An orderly contest between them over time is a reliable way to find which one, if any, is most reasonable.”

114 Rawls, Political, 450.

115 Ibid, 479.


117 Ibid.

118 Ibid, 480. Although some citizens may nevertheless reject the outcome of a vote designed to settle a disputed issue – such as is the case with Catholics who deny the legitimacy of a ‘right to abortion’ – they can continue to offer arguments grounded in public reason for opposing this decision and they may refuse to exercise such a right. At the same time, Catholics who accept the ideal of public reason ought to ‘recognize the right as belonging to legitimate law enacted in accordance’ with democratic procedures. Efforts to forcefully resist such legislation
In the first edition of *Political Liberalism* Rawls draws a distinction between ‘exclusive’ and ‘inclusive’ views of public reason. According to the former, citizens engaged in public political discourse may never introduce reasons articulated in terms of their comprehensive commitments. By contrast, the ‘inclusive’ view allows citizens, in certain special circumstances, to introduce the comprehensive reasons that underlie or ground their commitment to political values, provided their doing so supports the citizenry’s general commitment to public reason. For example, in an ‘ideal case’ where society is ‘more or less well-ordered’ or where there exists a ‘firm overlapping consensus’ citizens may feel no need to appeal to extra-political values and hence the exclusive view may predominate. In a second case where disagreements concerning the application of a principle of justice are present in a relatively well-ordered society, adherents of different comprehensive doctrines may question the ‘sincerity of one another’s allegiance to fundamental political values.’ In cases like this, the inclusive view would invite citizens to introduce into public debate the comprehensive presuppositions of their basic political commitments, an exception that helps illustrate how an overlapping consensus differs from a *modus vivendi*. This exception supports the fostering of ‘mutual trust and public confidence’ in the ideal of public reason. A third example focuses on societies marked by deep disagreement concerning matters of basic justice. Rawls offers the example of ‘abolitionists’ who argued on the basis of their religious convictions that the ‘institution of slavery was contrary

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119 Ibid, 247.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid, 247, 249.
122 Ibid, 248
123 Ibid. “Suppose that the dispute concerns the principle of fair equality of opportunity as it applies to education for all. Diverse religious groups oppose one another, one group favoring government support for public education alone, another group favoring government support for church schools as well. The first group views the latter policy as incompatible with the so-called separation of church and state, whereas the second denies this.”
124 Ibid, 249.
125 Ibid.
to God’s law’ or the ‘civil rights movement’ of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{126} Here the comprehensive or non-public reason of certain ecclesial communities ‘supported the clear conclusions of public reason.’\textsuperscript{127} According to Rawls, both parties may have viewed their ‘actions as the best way to bring about a well-ordered and just society in which the ideal of public reason could eventually be honored.\textsuperscript{128} In other words, their actions were not contrary to the ideal of public reason provided they believed that the ‘comprehensive reasons they appealed to were required to give sufficient strength to the political conception to be consequently realized,’ primarily because of historical contingencies.\textsuperscript{129} The difference in these examples leads Rawls to conclude that since the ‘appropriate limits of public reason vary depending on historical and social conditions,\textsuperscript{130} the inclusive view is to be preferred to the exclusive view precisely insofar as it is ‘more flexible.’\textsuperscript{131}

Before his death, Rawls was engaged in revising \textit{Political Liberalism} and had completed an initial article entitled ‘The Idea of Public Reason Revisited’ that was to form the basis for a number of such changes.\textsuperscript{132} In this later article Rawls responds to certain critics who objected to what they regarded as the overly restrictive variation of public reason in \textit{Political Liberalism}’s first edition by developing what he calls a ‘wide view of public political culture.’\textsuperscript{133} Rawls argued that individuals may appeal to their comprehensive doctrines in matters pertaining to basic justice provided that they stand ready ‘in due course,’ to offer ‘public reasons’ to support

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Rawls, \textit{Political}, 249-250,”except that King could appeal – as the abolitionists could not – to the political values expressed in the Constitution correctly understood.”
\item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 249-250.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 250.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 251.”The abolitionists could say, for example, that they supported political values of freedom and equality for all, but that given the comprehensive doctrines they held and the doctrines current in their day, it was necessary to invoke the comprehensive grounds on which those values were widely seen to rest.’ See also Ibid, 251, n.41, “this suggests that it may happen that for a well-ordered society to come about in which public discussion consists mainly in the appeal to political values, prior historical conditions may require that comprehensive reasons be invoked to strengthen those values.”
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 251.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 248. More flexible and, hence, better oriented to supporting the ideal of public reason ‘in the longer run.’
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 437.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 462.
\end{itemize}
the policies their comprehensive doctrines commend.\textsuperscript{134} According to Rawls, the \textit{proviso} is to be ‘satisfied in good faith’ where good faith ‘cannot feasibly be governed by a clear family of rules given in advance.’\textsuperscript{135} Again his argument in favour of the wide view echoes his earlier claim regarding the inclusive perspective of public reason. Since the ‘roots’ of citizens’ allegiance to their political conceptions lie in their respective comprehensive doctrines, by allowing citizens to introduce reasons drawn from such doctrines the so-called ‘proviso’ can help strengthen citizens’ commitment to public reason.\textsuperscript{136}

2.9 \textbf{Critical Reflections on Rawls’ Political Liberalism}

John Rawls’ revised defence of justice as fairness is designed to meet many of the objections that communitarian authors such as MacIntyre and Hauerwas have levelled against the rationalist and individualist aspects of classical liberalism.\textsuperscript{137} On the rationalist front, Rawls is to be commended for recognizing that the fact of pluralism not only negates comprehensive liberalism but also generates a novel imperative to identify terms of cooperation compatible with a diversity of comprehensive doctrines. The fact of pluralism motivates Rawls’ efforts to articulate a post-metaphysical account of justice as fairness that, by prescinding from controversial metaphysical or moral claims, functions as a freestanding module that fits into and is supported by a variety of comprehensive doctrines.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 453. See also Ibid, 462. Although Christians may appeal to the story of the ‘Good Samaritan,’ public reason demands that Christians articulate the point of this story through reference to political values that may be reasonably endorsable by other free and equal citizens.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 462–463.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 463. Ibid, 465-466. Rawls names two other forms of non-public discourse: (a) ‘declaration’ whereby citizens share the connection between their comprehensive commitments and the specific political conception of justice they endorse so as to foster the bonds of ‘civic friendship’; and (b) ‘conjecture’ whereby citizens seek to illustrate how the comprehensive doctrine held by others may ground their commitment to democratic values capable of providing a basis for public reason.

\textsuperscript{137} See Mulhall and Swift, \textit{Liberals and Communitarians}, 191-222.
On the individualist front, Rawls appears to side-step communitarian critiques of the liberal conception of the subject as radically asocial and self-interested in at least three related ways. First, Rawls argues that his thin or political conception of the person as a ‘free and equal citizen,’ as well as the original position within which citizens select the principles of justice, do not presuppose controversial metaphysical claims about the nature of the self. Second, although citizens ought to prescind from appealing to their comprehensive conceptions when deliberating on matters of basic justice, Rawls maintains that political liberalism’s thin conception of the good remains compatible with robust commitment to associational ideals. Third, even though Rawls is forced to deny that democratic society is a community in the strong sense he need not deny that citizens share a commitment to a just social order and shared political virtues whose possession are oriented to the realization of the former. This last concession separates political liberalism from both unrealistic ideals of unity and debunks the communitarian claim that liberal democracy is antithetical to virtue.

At the same time, although I commend Rawls for recognizing and addressing a variety of deficiencies in his original articulation of justice as fairness, I question certain features of Rawls’ ‘political’ or post-metaphysical response to the fact of pluralism in particular. In my judgment, although some distinction between a public or thin conception of the good and non-public or thick conceptions of human fulfillment is viable, I disagree with Rawls’ particular understanding of this relationship. In other words, although I am sympathetic to the Rawlsian project of political liberalism – a fact that distinguishes me from a large proportion of critics – I nevertheless question the ‘true scope, source and status’ of the political conception along with its

138 See Mulhall and Swift, 192-201.
139 Ibid. See also ibid, 221; 208, “the abstraction involved…does not…represent an abstraction from our particular culture and social meanings, but rather a careful attention to the abstraction from particular conceptions of the good that precisely characterizes that culture and those meanings.”
140 Ibid, 202, 219-221.
141 Ibid, 201-204.
effects. More specifically, it is my contention – shared by many others – that political liberalism’s attempt to define a post-metaphysical or freestanding conception of justice not only fails to avoid philosophical controversy, it results in a partisan and truncated vision of the subject and society.

Just as MacIntyre struggles to identify the status of Thomism, so it is my contention that part of the problem with Rawls’ position stems from confusions concerning the unique status of political liberalism and its relationship to the fact of pluralism. On the one hand, Rawls incorporates historical consciousness in his redesigned defence of justice as fairness. According to Rawls, the burdens of judgment dictate that the background culture in a democratic society will be marked by enduring competition between comprehensive doctrines. On one reading of political liberalism, Rawls appears to adapt a pragmatic or ‘conventionalist’ account of justice as fairness that regards democracy as one particular tradition among others. According to the pragmatic reading, political liberalism does not provide an independent justification for the epistemic superiority or truth of democratic practice but rather functions as one among many possible objectifications of the norms implicit in such practice. From this perspective, political liberalism’s conception of ‘reasonableness’ appears not so much as a tradition-independent standpoint but rather as a tradition-specific criterion that is normative only for those already

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142 Mulhall and Swift, 197-198, “If the communitarians are to renew their attack upon the Rawlsian conception of the person, they seem to have two options. First, they can contest Rawls’s claims about the true scope, source and status of that conception: for if it is not restricted to the domain of the political in the ways Rawls claims, then the communitarians’ original criticism of its validity and coherence might retain some of their force. Second, they can question the desirability of the conception, even given its restricted status: they can, for example, defend the view that it posits a split between the political and the personal that seems to require those holding non-liberal comprehensive doctrines to do so in a rather half-hearted (perhaps even liberal) way, and it accords a priority to the political over the personal that gives the value of autonomy a primacy it may not fully deserve.”

143 Christopher Wolfe, Natural Law Liberalism (NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 21-23.

144 George Klosko, “Rawls’ Public Reason and American Society,” in Reflections on Rawls: An Assessment of his Legacy, ed. Shaun P. Young (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 28. “He never explains exactly how a given intuitive idea is derived from aspects of public culture, or shows how, of a number of possible intuitive ideas, a particular one rather than others should be the focus of theoretical attention.” Mulhall and Swift, 234.
committed to political liberalism. This approach would seem to suggest that political liberalism, far from being exempt from the burdens of judgment, is itself subject to the same limitations. In this context, the post-metaphysical or freestanding character of political liberalism would seem to denote nothing more than the inability to offer metaphysical foundations for democratic institutions. In the absence of such justificatory standards, political liberals are left to commend the pragmatic superiority of justice as fairness as a framework for balancing the interests of those individuals who remain committed to one among many relativized doctrines. This result hardly seems different from the very *modus vivendi* that Rawls seeks to distance his position from.

On the other hand, Rawls seems committed to defending the uniqueness and priority of political liberalism’s distinctively post-metaphysical account of democratic culture vis-à-vis all other comprehensive doctrines. The strong form of the uniqueness claim stipulates that the political conception of justice is distinguished by its freestanding character or by the fact that it is formulated independently of comprehensive accounts of the nature of human knowing and choosing. From this perspective, political liberalism supplies a privileged and purportedly unifying standpoint insulated from the relativism correlative with the fact of pluralism that justifies a particular form of public/private realm distinction. This type of approach appears to

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146 Ibid, 239, 245.


148 Norman Daniels, “Reflective Equilibrium and Justice as Political,” in *The Idea of a Political Liberalism*, 134, “if the ideas out of which the political conception of justice are constructed must already be embedded in a shared democratic culture, then why are they not ‘mired’ in existing ways that challenge their credentials as an Archimedean point?...can we be sure we have agreement on more than a mere compromise, a *modus vivendi*, or the results of historical accident or a stage of class struggle?”

149 Mulhall and Swift, 243-244, “he can fully flesh out the limits of what is publicly justifiable in a way that flows immediately from the conjunction of an epistemological insight with his political conception of the person as free and equal. But then he has no need to take a detour via the public political culture in order to determine what is publicly justifiable.”
transpose Enlightenment rationalism’s claim to uniqueness from the metaphysical to the post-
metaphysical realm in order to escape the ambiguity and contingency of history by abstracting
from all *a posteriori* particularity.\(^{150}\)

In line with many other scholars, however, I question whether it is possible to develop a
post-metaphysical or freestanding account of justice. More specifically, I question whether it is
possible to develop a position on political legitimacy and justice that does not presuppose at least
partially comprehensive commitments or particular claims about the nature of human knowing
and choosing.\(^ {151}\) Two interrelated examples should suffice to illustrate this point. First, although
Rawls argues that the burdens of judgment do not license scepticism,\(^ {152}\) he remains committed to
a form of ‘agnosticism’ concerning comprehensive knowledge.\(^ {153}\) By prejudging the
impossibility of attaining comprehensive knowledge Rawls appears committed to a substantive
epistemological claim, a stance that appears to support his redrawing of the public/private
divide.\(^ {154}\) Second, Rawls’ argues that only those participants in democratic discourse who accept
the preceding epistemological claim together with the positive commitment to political
liberalism may be deemed reasonable.\(^ {155}\) Supporters of Rawls’ notion of the modular character of
political liberalism might argue that the appeal to an overlapping consensus leaves room for
comprehensive truth claims. In reality, however, this type of appeal neglects the fact that

\(^{150}\) This type of approach is prepared for by Kant’s efforts. Glen Newey, “John Rawls: Liberalism at the Limits of
Intolerance,” in *Reflections on Rawls*, 151. Kristen Deede Johnson, Theology, *Political Theory and Pluralism:
Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 66. This is John Gray’s argument in

\(^{151}\) Mulhall and Swift, 239, 245. Kozinski, 41-42. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 380. Rawls notes that this is
Habermas’ reading of his own work. Raymond Plant, *Politics, Theology and History* (NY: Cambridge Univ. Press,
147-165.

\(^{152}\) The distinction is between agnosticism and skepticism.

Between Lonergan and Rawls,” in *Lonergan Workshop* 15 (1999), 105-106. “It is not clear whether his is an
epistemological doctrine on the impossibility of comprehensive knowledge or a practical agnosticism which simply
gives up on such questions for the sake of the practical business of living together.” Wolfe, 17.

\(^{154}\) Mulhall and Swift, 239, 245. Wolfe, 17.

\(^{155}\) Mulhall and Swift, 238.
political liberalism stands in an *a priori* relationship of superiority to all other doctrines: comprehensive doctrines cannot enter public discourse unless they have already tailored their horizon to fit politically liberal conceptions of person and society. In the end, any attempt to regard political liberalism as unique vis-à-vis comprehensive doctrines ends up presupposing the correctness of these conceptions as a starting-point for political reflection. For both of these reasons, the post-metaphysical claim to avoid substantive commitments – Rawls’ modified attempt to escape the contingency of history – collapses. Even purportedly thinly constructed notions of the person and of the good presuppose certain, at least partially, comprehensive claims. Under the cover of its purported neutrality, political liberalism appears to inappropriately privatize comprehensive commitments unable or unwilling to conform with its own notion of objectivity. Critics argue that Rawls’ partisan account distorts the nature of society and political discourse by continuing to prioritize individual autonomy. The result, they claim, is a derivative account of society and correlative form of discourse that conceives politics not as a dialogue or debate concerning the nature of the good but as a form of bargaining designed to secure the arbitrary preferences of individuals. Although I can understand how Rawls’ account might be read in this way, particularly in light of his abstractly thin conception of person, this

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158 Friedman, 29, “one of the very features making a doctrine ‘unreasonable’ in Rawls’ conception of it, namely, that it is coercively imposed on persons who reject it, turns out to be a feature of the very political liberalism that is supposedly legitimized using Rawls’ methods.” Daniels, 134. “Is this moral double bookkeeping a kind of multiple moral personality disorder?” Klosko, 31-32, “In the guise of protecting citizens from one another’s comprehensive views, neutralists use their position to insure that their own views win.” Kozinski, 28, 38. Deede Johnson, 52-66, for an extended discussion of Rawls’ partisan sense of ‘toleration.’
159 Martin Rhonheimer, “The Political Ethos of Constitutional Democracy and the Place of Natural Law in Public Reason: Rawls’ ‘Political Liberalism’ Revisited,” in *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy and on Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. William F. Murphy Jr. (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 2013). Rhonheimer argues that Rawls does not recognize ‘the naturally social character of human existence and a thereby defined political common good, in the service of which every political organization of society and public reason is to be put.’
critique seems somewhat unfair given his broader efforts to respond to the communitarian project.

In my judgment, these two readings of political liberalism – the pragmatic and the post-metaphysically unique – are inconsistent.\(^{161}\) For the sake of coherency Rawls must either drop the burdens of judgement and the agnosticism it licenses or expand them to include even political conceptions of justice. The former would require an admission that political liberalism presupposes certain comprehensive claims and an argument for the superiority of such claims vis-à-vis other doctrines.\(^{162}\) In at least one place Rawls takes the first step in this regard when he drops the burdens of judgment for certain non-controversial metaphysical presuppositions. On the one hand, the claim for the non-controversial nature of such presuppositions seems to beg the question in favour of Rawls’ own standpoint.\(^{163}\) This weaker form of the uniqueness argument continues to insulate political liberalism’s particular presuppositions from genuine contestation and debate, a position that hardly differs from the aspirations of those forms of comprehensive liberalism that Rawls has sought to avoid. In my judgment, if Rawls is willing to admit that political liberalism requires an appeal to some form of comprehensive knowledge then he should be willing to argue for its superiority among other options, both democratic and non-democratic. On the other hand, this type of approach appears to run afoul of pragmatic readings that disavow justificatory aspirations.

The latter position of expansion would require an admission that the burdens of judgment apply to the political realm.\(^{164}\) In rejecting the possibility of any strong claim to uniqueness, either post-metaphysical or non-controversially metaphysical, Rawls’ position ends up looking

\(^{161}\) Daniels, 134.
\(^{162}\) Klosko, 38. Beiner, 84.
\(^{163}\) Wolfe, 21-23.
very much like the pragmatic position discussed above. Political liberalism functions as one among many objectifications of one among many traditions. This last conclusion represents the starting-point of both post-modern Christian and liberal authors such as William T. Cavanaugh\textsuperscript{165} and Richard Rorty, respectively. This dissertation’s next chapter will examine the latter’s dissolving of the Rawlsian tension by adopting a thoroughly historicized account of democratic norms.

Although I am not opposed to Rawls’ adoption of a public/private distinction \textit{per se}, in my judgment Rawls’ rendering of that distinction suffers from confusions and distortions that require modification. First, I reject the metaphysical/post-metaphysical distinction, preferring to draw a distinction between thick and thin or heuristic variations of metaphysics. Second, I question Rawls’ tendency to portray thin conceptions of the person and the content of his conception of justice in excessively abstract terms. According to Rawls, the former prescinds from the particularities of individuals and the latter is captured by conceptual first principles, a position that motivates his metaphysical/post-metaphysical distinction and that supports his understanding of modularity. It is my contention that what is needed to meet the contemporary challenge of pluralism that Rawls rightfully identifies is a thin, modular account of the subject that provides norms that guide the immanent movement of history rather than purporting to avoid its exigencies through abstraction. In my judgment, this type of approach might, in the process, answer many of the related and perhaps overdrawn criticisms of Rawls that center on the lingering charge of individualism and its purportedly pejorative construal of the subject and society. The real question is whether or not this challenge can be successfully answered.

Chapter 3
Richard Rorty’s Post-Modern Liberalism

3. Introduction

The work of Richard Rorty represents one attempted resolution of the Rawlsian tension between historicism and uniqueness. Drawing on Nietzsche’s perspectivism and American pragmatism, Rorty develops a critique of representationalist accounts of human knowing as well as essentialist and rationalist accounts of human choosing. By contrast, Rorty develops what he terms an ‘antirepresentationalism’ or ‘ironism’ that combines historicist and pragmatist themes. Critical of the correspondence theory of truth, he defends a historicist account of knowledge that conceives truth as internal to context-dependent cultural-linguistic frameworks. Rorty’s pragmatism evaluates cultural-linguistic frameworks based on their social utility and conceives the latter in polytheistic terms as relative to a particular community. This purportedly ‘post-metaphysical’ approach to human knowing shapes his nonfoundationalist account of ethics in general and liberal politics in particular. Rorty conceives ethical principles as objectifications of the norms implicit within a community’s social practices, those ‘we-intentions’ shared by those socialized within a particular context. This historicization of ethics leads him to reconceive liberal norms as tradition-dependent ‘we-intentions’ that place limits on the character and scope of private self-creation. According to Rorty, the development of such norms depends upon a community’s shared commitment to instrumental rationality and the expansion of fellow-feeling or sentiment. This revisionist account of Enlightenment politics guides Rorty’s pragmatic reinterpretation of religious belief and his correlative call for the privatization of religion.

In my judgment, there is much to commend in Rorty’s project. On the one hand, he usefully exposes a number of limitations associated with representationalist, essentialist, and
rationalist accounts of human knowing and choosing. Rorty’s antirepresentationalist alternative recognizes that human knowing and choosing is shaped by the various cultural-linguistic frameworks into which individuals are socialized. The naturalist thrust of his thought highlights the pragmatic orientation of language and its role in responding to environmental pressures or practical problem solving. These emphases shape an account of liberal politics that depends, in large part, upon the enlargement of biologically-grounded forms of sentiment. The results, in general, aspire to be more consistent that Rawls’ political liberalism and more humble vis-à-vis non-liberal frameworks. On the other hand, there are limitations in both aspects of Rorty’s project that threaten to impugn many of its positive aspects. Not only does Rorty’s appeal to pragmatic utilitarianism appear incapable of answering the charges of irrationalism and linguistic idealism he fights hard to avoid, his critical project appears to suffer from a number of tensions related to the status of antirepresentationalism.

This chapter will proceed in eight stages. In section 3.1 I will examine the interrelated focus of Rorty’s critical project: representational realism and moral foundationalism. Section 3.2 will examine his antirepresentationalist account of human knowing, focusing in particular on two facets, historicism and pragmatism and their interrelation. In section 3.3 I will introduce his correlative account of ethics and its relationship to liberal politics. In section 3.4 I will investigate the development of liberal norms, linking their emergence to rational consensus and sentimental education. Section 3.5 outlines Rorty’s strategies for defending democratic practice, noting the connection, in particular, between democratic institutions and antirepresentationalism. Section 3.6 draws on themes developed in previous sections to articulate the role of religious belief and practice in liberal democratic contexts. Section 3.7 will focus on his response to the challenge of relativism. Finally, in section 3.8 I switch to an evaluation of Rorty’s critical and constructive project, focusing on both its strengths and two criticisms.
3.1 Representational Realism, Human Nature and Moral Foundationalism

Richard Rorty’s critical and constructive project takes as its point of departure traditional metaphysical and or theological accounts of human knowing, choosing and political belonging. The primary target of Rorty’s efforts at deconstruction is a form of representationalism or realism that conceives objectivity or true belief as a function of correspondence between language and ‘determinate realities’\(^1\) that exist independently of the human mind.\(^2\) The realist presupposes the existence of ‘nonlinguistic…meanings’ or ‘facts’ which it is the purpose of language to ‘discover’ and ‘express’ or ‘represent’.\(^3\) According to Rorty, the epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions of realism are shared in different ways by philosophers stretching from classical Greece through the Enlightenment.\(^4\) Realist epistemology begins with the subject’s orientation to seek knowledge ‘for its own sake’.\(^5\) Proponents conceive reason as a ‘transcultural…ability’\(^6\) that allows humans to compare their beliefs with reality via ‘detachment’\(^7\) – by obtaining a ‘God’s eye point of view’\(^8\) – or through ‘obedience’ to ‘built-in’

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2. Rorty, “Introduction,” 2-3. Rorty notes Michael Dummett’s definition of realism: “statements of the dispute class possess an objective truth-value independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us.” See also “Introduction,” 5, “we achieve accurate representation, because, sometimes, nonlinguistic items cause linguistic items to be used as they are.” Rorty, “Introduction,” 11. 13. Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 75-77; 5, “the reason why physicists have come to use ‘atom’ as we do is that there really are atoms out there which have caused themselves to be represented more or less accurately.” Rorty, “Introduction,” 4, “‘making true’ and ‘representing’ are reciprocal relations…the nonlinguistic item which makes S true is the one represented by S.”
4. Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity?” in Volume I, 21, “it was perhaps the growing awareness by the Greeks of the sheer diversity of human communities which stimulated the emergence of this ideal.”
5. Rorty, “Solidarity,” 21. See also Rorty, Contingency, 76-77, “all men by nature desire to know.” Contingency, 75, “a picture of knowledge as a relation between human beings, and reality, and the idea that we have a need and a duty to enter into this relation.”
criteria. From this perspective, the goal or telos of language development and culture is progressive ‘attunement’ to reality or the gradual discovery of the ‘intrinsic nature’ or ‘essence’ of ‘the world.’ Realists argue that this progression is made possible by a discrimination of rival theories or ‘vocabularies’ through ‘logical argument’ that begins ‘from relatively uncontroversial premises.’

According to Rorty, the notion of ‘language-independent reality’ that lies at the heart of realist metaphysics sanctions ‘universalistic notions,’ such as ‘the nature of the self’ or ‘our essential humanity’ shared by ‘Greek metaphysics, Christian theology and Enlightenment rationalism.’ Rorty argues that ethical foundationalists argue in similar albeit significantly different ways that the content of ‘moral intuitions’ may be deduced from or justified by appeal to a ‘philosophical anthropology’ or knowledge concerning ‘the nature of human beings.’ This conception prioritizes the ‘necessary, essential, telic’ features or the ‘universal impress’ of

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9 Rorty, “Solidarity,” 27. See also ibid, 22, “They also must argue that there are procedures of justification of belief which are natural and not merely local….an epistemology which has room for a kind of justification which is not merely social but natural, springing from human nature itself.” Rorty, Contingency, 76, “we have built-in criteria which enable us to recognize the right final vocabulary when we hear it.”
10 Rorty, Contingency, 16, 17.
11 Ibid, 6-7.
12 Ibid, 77, “that is, spotting the inferential relationships between propositions rather than comparing and contrasting vocabularies.”
13 Ibid, 78.
16 Rorty names Plato, Aquinas and Kant as examples.
17 Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality,” in Truth and Progress, Volume 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 171-172, “our moral intuitions are recollections of the form of the good, or…we are disobedient children of a loving God or that human beings differ from other kinds of animals by having dignity rather than mere value are all claims about human nature.” See also Rorty, Contingency, 93.
18 Rorty, “Priority,” 181-182.
19 Rorty, “Human Rights,” 171-172. These ‘premises’ are supposed to ‘justify our intuitions.’ See also Rorty, Contingency, 88.
human nature at the expense of the ‘accidental’ traits that characterize ‘individual lives’ and conceives moral knowledge as a function of subsuming particulars under ‘general principles.’

Each of these authors correlates the ‘ahistorical natural center’ of the subject with rationality, an ‘extra added ingredient’ or ‘divine’ element that distinguishes humans from ‘brutes.’ The result is a strongly dichotomized reading of the relationship between affect – the ‘empirical bundle of desires and passions’ – and reason, the ‘transcendent, dominant controller’ responsible for ordering, passing judgment upon or disciplining the former. This differentiation between passion and reason grounds a further distinction between ‘prudence’ or instrumental rationality and ‘morality’ that finds expression in the work of both Plato and Kant. According to Rorty, Kant transposes the Platonic distinction between a ‘true’ or rational and ‘false’ or passionate self into a ‘distinction between categorical…moral obligation and…empirically determinable self-interest.’ Rorty argues that Plato and Kant seek to unify the ‘public and

20 Rorty, Contingency, 26.
21 Rorty, Contingency, 33-34. See also Richard Rorty, An Ethics for Today: Finding Common Ground Between Philosophy and Religion (NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009), 9. Rorty is as likely to mention Plato and Kant in this context as he is the Catholic church’s appeal to ‘the structure of human existence.’
22 Rorty, “Priority,” 176.
25 Rorty, Contingency, 47. See also Rorty, “Priority,” 188, “divine spark, or truth-tracking faculty called ‘reason.’”
27 Rorty, Contingency, 10, 21. Desires are ‘irrational or unnatural’ when they do not ‘correspond to the essential nature of the self.’ See also Contingency, 32-33. Rorty, An Ethic, 13, “the notion of redemption presupposes a distinction between the lower, mortal, animal parts of the soul and the higher, spiritual, immortal part. Redemption is what would occur when the higher finally triumphs over the lower, when reason conquers passion, or when grace defeats sin.”
29 Rorty, “Human rights,” 176-177, “by insisting that he could re-educate people who had matured without acquiring appropriate moral sentiments by invoking a higher moral power than sentiment, the power of reason, Plato got moral philosophy off on the wrong foot.”
30 Rorty, “Human Rights,” 176; 174, “the revival by the new science of the 17th century of a Democritean-Lucretian corpuscularian picture of nature scared Kant into inventing transcendental philosophy, inventing a brand new kind of knowledge, one that could demote the corpuscularian world picture to the status of appearance.” Rorty, Contingency, 30. Kant’s denying that ‘scientific knowledge of hard facts is our point of contact with a power not ourselves,’ contributes to his efforts to ‘find that point of contact in our moral consciousness,’ to exchange truth ‘out there’ with internal ‘righteousness.’ Richard Rorty, “Justice as a Larger Loyalty,” in Philosophy in Cultural Politics, Volume 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 44, “Kantians typically insist that justice springs from reason
private, by appealing to a common human nature – the source of ‘intrinsic human dignity and intrinsic human rights’ – capable of supplying norms whose fulfillment are necessary for personal ‘fulfillment’ or ‘perfection.’ In other words, metaphysicians seek ‘a single description which will suffice for both public and private purposes, for self-definition and for one’s relations with others.’

According to Rorty, the Kantian picture of rationality as the source of human dignity and moral obligation provides ‘philosophical foundations’ for one particularly influential strand of Enlightenment liberalism. From the perspective of Enlightenment rationalism, these ‘philosophical’ foundations provide those metaphysical presuppositions required for defending the ‘political’ dimensions of the so-called Enlightenment project. In other words, ‘social reform’ and moral progress is ‘made possible by objective knowledge of what human beings are like’ and by universal reason’s capacity to overcome ‘the base and irrational and animal’ – the ‘parochial’ – so as to form and sustain an ‘ultimate community.’

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31 Rorty, Contingency, 33-34, xiii.
33 Rorty, Contingency, 33-4. See also Contingency, xiii.
34 Ibid, 92.
35 Rorty, Contingency, 57, 94; 84. For the liberal metaphysician, “liberal political freedoms require consensus about what is universally human.”
36 Richard Rorty, Truth, Politics, and ‘Post-Modernism’ (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997), 35. Rorty, “Solidarity,” 22, “to most thinkers of the 18th century, it seemed clear that the access to Nature which physical science had provided should now be followed by the establishment of social, political, and economic institutions which were in accordance with nature.”
38 Rorty, “Rationality,” 189.
40 Ibid.
3.2 Antirepresentationalism and Pragmatism

Drawing on a number of post-modern and pragmatist thinkers, much of Rorty’s career has been devoted to deconstructing representational realism and moral foundationalism’s attempted escape from ‘time and chance.’ In contrast with representationalism, Rorty develops a theory of truth that does not require recourse to a metaphysical theory of correspondence nor an epistemology which appeals to special ‘cognitive abilities’ that underwrite the representationalist’s view of language. His alternative combines two major strands – historicism and pragmatism – which are not always differentiated in his work. From a ‘historicist’ perspective Rorty argues that there exists a multiplicity of culture-specific ‘final vocabularies’ or languages, ‘various ways in which human beings come together in societies and have established traditions’ into which individuals are socialized. At the same time, Rorty argues that there is no way for humans to escape the contingency of such frameworks, no ‘God’s eye standpoint’ from which they might ascertain the relationship between their local final vocabulary and reality. More specifically, Rorty is a ‘nominalist’ who argues that since ‘truth

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41 Rorty, *Social Hope*, xix, “the group of philosoophers I have in mind includes a tradition of post-Nietzschean European philosophy and also a tradition of post-Darwinian American philosophy, the tradition of pragmatism. The great names of the first tradition include Heidegger, Sartre, Gadamer, Derrida, and Foucault. The great names of the second tradition include James, Dewey, Kuhn, Quine, Putnam, and Davidson….the most important thing that links the great names of each tradition to one other, and thus links the two traditions together, is suspicion of the same set of Greek distinctions.” See also Richard Rorty, “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism,” in *The Rorty Reader*, 444, “the resemblance between Nietzsche’s perspectivism and the pragmatist theory of truth.” Rorty, *Truth, Politics*, 13-14, “use pragmatism as the name for the views about truth, knowledge and rationality which were common to Nietzsche and William James.”

42 Rorty, *Contingency*, xiii. See also *Contingency*, 22. Rorty, “Introduction,” 3-4. The Wittgensteinian view of philosophy as therapy that Rorty shares is designed to expose the traditional concerns of philosophy as ‘pseudo-problems’ that ought to be transcended.

43 Rorty, “Solidarity,” 23

44 Rorty, *Contingency*, 74-75.

45 Rorty, *Contingency*, 73, “all human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives…It is final in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse….a small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible and ubiquitous terms such as ‘true’, ‘good,’ ‘right,’ and ‘beautiful.’ The larger part contains thicker, more rigid and more parochial terms, for example, Christ, England, the Church.”


is a property of sentences’ that play constituent roles in contingent vocabularies created by humans, truth ‘cannot exist independently of the human mind.’ The result is what Rorty calls an ‘antirepresentationalism’ or ‘ironism’ that exchanges the classical metaphysician’s concern with ‘objectivity’ for ‘solidarity’ or an ‘internalist’ conception of truth as ‘intersubjective agreement.’ While it remains possible to speak of truth and falsity within established language games as a function of shared norms, vocabularies as a whole are human creations that cannot be tested for accuracy against an independent ‘reality.’ Rorty reconceives languages and the broader cultures which they shape as the product of ‘sheer contingencies’ and rationality as a function of ‘coherence’ among shared beliefs. The result is what Rorty, following Robert Brandom, calls the ‘ontological priority of the social,’ the claim that ‘truth and reality’ are functions of ‘social practice and not objective matters of fact.’

24, 27. Rorty, “Priority,” 193, “I think the very idea of a ‘fact of the matter’ is one we would be better off without.” Rorty, Contingency, 75, 48, 50, 6-7; 26, “Nietzschean perspectivist view that starts with the rejection of ‘truth’ as something to be discovered.” Rorty, Social Hope, 48.

48 Rorty, Contingency, 74-75.

49 Rorty, Contingency, 4-5, “truth is not out there.” See also Rorty, Social Hope, xvii, “scientific and moral truths, for example, are described by our opponents as ‘objective,’ meaning that they are in some sense out there waiting to be recognized by us human beings.”

50 See Rorty, “Introduction.”

51 See Rorty, Contingency.

52 Rorty, “Solidarity,” 23. See also Rorty, Social Hope, xxv; 51, “the term ‘objective’ is defined by antiessentialists not in terms of a relation to intrinsic features of objects but rather by reference to relative ease of attaining consensus among inquirers.”


54 Rorty, “Solidarity,” 24

55 Rorty, “Solidarity,” 23. See also Rorty, Social Hope, xxv. Rorty, “Introduction,” 13. Rorty, “Solidarity,” 21, “insofar as a person is seeking solidarity, she does not ask about the relation between the practices of the chosen community and something outside that community.” Rorty, “Solidarity,” 24. Rorty, “Polytheism,” 450, “There is no such thing as the love of truth. What has been called by that name is a mixture of the love of reaching intersubjective agreement.”

56 Rorty, Contingency, 5-6; 6-7, “most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it.” See also Rorty, “Introduction,” 5. Rorty, “Solidarity,” 24, “for the pragmatist, knowledge is like truth simply a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed.” Rorty, Contingency, 48-49, “limit the opposition between rational and irrational forms of persuasion to the interior of a language game.”

57 Rorty, Contingency, 22.


Overlapping with this historicist emphasis on the contingency and diversity of final vocabularies is a closely related pragmatic notion of truth ‘as what is good’ or useful ‘for us to believe.’ If language games are intrinsically social practices, Rorty argues that the latter are shaped by and in response to the ‘social needs’ of a particular community. In combining antirepresentationalism and pragmatism, Rorty sides with Nietzsche and Darwin’s ‘biologistic’ conception of humans as ‘clever animals,’ who utilize instrumental reason in order to solve ‘transitory problems.’ For a pragmatist like Rorty, language is a distinctively human ‘tool’ that helps individuals ‘cope’ with environmental pressures. Language is simply a ‘flag which signals the desirability of using a certain vocabulary when trying to cope with certain kinds of organisms.’ ‘Beliefs’ are not ‘quasi-pictures’ that represent reality but rather ‘habits of action’ or ‘adaptations to the environment’ that allow humans to ‘enjoy more pleasure and less pain.’

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60 Rorty, “Solidarity,” 23. See also Rorty, Social Hope, xxvi-xxvii, “the relativity of descriptions to purposes is the pragmatist’s principal argument for his antirepresentational view of knowledge.” Social Hope, xxv, “we cannot pursue truth for its own sake.” Rorty, “Introduction,” 1, “one which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality.” Rorty, Truth, Politics, 23, “the adjective truth is a perfectly useful tool, but the use of the noun ‘Truth’ as the name of an object of desire is a relic of an earlier time.”

61 Rorty, Social Hope, 48, “to say that everything is a social construction is to say that our linguistic practices are so bound up with our other social practices that our descriptions of nature, as well as of ourselves, will always be a function of our social needs.”

62 Rorty, Social Hope, xxii-xxiii.

63 Rorty, Human Rights,” 175. See also Rorty, Social Hope, xxii-xxiii, 72; 68, “language rather than consciousness or mind…is the distinguishing feature of our species.” Rorty, Social Hope, “the pragmatist sees our difference (with animals) as a much greater degree of flexibility.” Rorty, “Human Rights,” 169-170, “flexible, protean, self-shaping.” Rorty, Social Hope, 72. Rorty, “Polytheism,” 445. Rorty, Truth, Politics, 37. Rorty, An Ethic, 13, “clever because they, unlike the other animals, have learned how to cooperate with one another in order better to fulfill one another’s desires.”

64 Rorty, Social Hope, xxii. “stop…describing it [human inquiry] as an attempt to correspond to the intrinsic nature of reality.”

65 Ibid, xxii-xxiii, “words are among the tools these clever animals have developed.” See also Rorty, Social Hope, xxv, xxvi-xxvii, 63; xxvi, “all the descriptions we give of things are descriptions suited to our purposes.”

66 Rorty, “Introduction,” 5, “it is one thing to say that a prehensile thumb or an ability to use the word ‘atom’…is useful for coping with the environment.” See also Rorty, Social Hope, 65; 50, “Language is not a medium of representation. Rather it is an exchange of marks and noises, carried out in order to achieve specific purposes. It cannot fail to represent accurately, for it never represents at all.”

67 Rorty, Contingency. 15.

68 Rorty, “Introduction,” 11, “reflection on what a belief is is not ‘the analysis of representation.’ Rather it is reflection on how a language-using organism interacts with what is going on in its neighborhood.” See also Rorty, Social Hope, xxv.
Here pragmatism’s concern for utility rather than reality overlaps with historicism’s embrace of Nietzschean perspectivism insofar as the former’s reconceptualization of beliefs as ‘tools’ renders the question ‘am I discovering or inventing, making or finding?’ moot. From this perspective, theoretical reflections, whether scientific, philosophical or theological, function as nothing other than ‘optional tools for the facilitation of individual or social projects.’

Although Rorty denies that ‘truth is out there’ he does not deny the common sense view that ‘most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states.’ In other words, ‘the relation between our truth claims and the rest of the world is causal rather than representational. It causes us to hold beliefs, and we continue to hold the beliefs which prove to be reliable guides to getting what we want.’ This allows Rorty to argue that human beings are nevertheless ‘in touch with’ reality or that their vocabularies, ‘like our bodies,’ are ‘shaped’ through or ‘caused by’ interaction with the external world, a claim that distances his historicist conception of language from linguistic idealism.

The combination of these themes shape Rorty’s account of linguistic innovation. At the heart of this account stands Donald Davidson’s distinction between the ‘literal’ and the ‘metaphorical’ use of words. The former denote ‘familiar’ uses of words that refer to the shared

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69 Rorty, Social Hope, xxii-xxiii. See also ibid, 33; xxiv-xxv, “the question to ask about our beliefs is not whether they are about reality or merely about appearance, but simply whether they are the best habits of action for gratifying our desires.”
70 Rorty, Social Hope, xxv.
71 Rorty, “Polytheism,” 454.
72 Rorty, Contingency, 4-5.
73 Rorty, Social Hope, 33. See also Rorty, “Introduction,” 12, “there is simply no way to give sense to the idea of our minds or our language as systematically out of phase with what lies beyond our skins.”
75 Rorty, “Introduction.” 5. See also Rorty, “Introduction,” 9. Rorty, Social Hope, xxii-xxiii, “stop thinking of words as representations and...start thinking of them as nodes in the causal network which binds the organism together with its environment.” This of course allows him to avoid strong forms of linguistic idealism. Rorty, Social Hope, 58, “the antiessentialist has no doubt that there were trees and stars long before there were statements about trees and stars.” Rorty, Social Hope, 33, “Davidson’s claim that a truth theory for a natural language is nothing more or less than an empirical explanation of the causal relations which hold between features of the environment and the holding true of sentences, seems to me all the guarantee we need that we are...‘in touch with the world.’”
76 Rorty, Contingency, 17.
ways of employing language within a particular community whereas the latter refer to those novel expressions whose use may spur the development of a ‘new theory.’ According to Rorty, conceptual innovation is a product of ‘metaphoric redescription,’ a process whereby a new vocabulary becomes ‘habitual’ through ‘gradual inculcation’ and hence literalized over time. Since there is no neutral standpoint from which to judge between vocabularies, the creation of new languages are not the product of progressive ‘insights into the nature of nature’ but rather the ‘poetic achievements’ of a creative minority or individual. Rather than appealing to independent criteria and logical ‘inference,’ strong poets encourage communities to ‘change’ or to ‘redescribe’ their shared standards through persuasion that appeals to utility. From this

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77 Ibid, 75, “criteria...are never more than the platitudes which contextually define the terms of a final vocabulary currently in use.”

78 Ibid, 17-18, “Uttering a sentence without a fixed place in a language game is, as the positivists rightly have said, to utter something which is neither true nor false...this is because it is a sentence which one cannot confirm or disconfirm, argue for or against. One can only savor it or spit it out. But this is not to say that it may not, in time, become a truth-value candidate. If it is savored rather than spat out, the sentence may be repeated, caught up, bandied about. Then it will gradually require a habitual use, a familiar place in the language game. It will thereby have ceased to be a metaphor – or, if you like, it will have become what most sentences of our language are, a dead metaphor. It will be just one more, literally true or literally false, sentence of the language.” Ibid, 20, “A sense of human history as the history of successive metaphors would let us see the poet, in the generic sense of the maker of new words, the shaper of new languages, as the vanguard of the species.”

79 Rorty, Social Hope, xix.

80 Rorty, Contingency, 61. See also ibid, 41-42. “A language which was ‘all metaphor’ would be a language which had no use, hence not a language but just babble. For even if we agree that languages are not media of representation or expression, they will remain media of communication, tools for social interaction, ways of tying oneself up with other human beings.” According to Rorty, any effort at metaphoric redescription or self-creation is ‘marginal or parasitic’ on the ‘background’ of literalized languages wherein ‘old words’ are ‘used in old familiar ways.’

81 Ibid, 75-77; 80, “since there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them, criticism is a matter of looking on this picture and on that, not of comparing both pictures with the original.” See also ibid, 50; 73, ‘inclined to see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one’s way past appearances to the real but simply by playing the new off against the old.” Rorty, Social Hope, 61. Rorty, Contingency, 48, “notions like ‘rational,’ ‘criteria,’ ‘argument,’ and ‘foundational’ and ‘absolute’ is badly suited to describe the relation between the old and the new.”

82 Rorty, Contingency, 16. See also ibid, 19, According to Rorty, the progressive emergence of new vocabularies is akin to the evolutionary process as ‘new forms of life...kill...off old forms’ in ‘blind’ rather than ordered fashion.

83 Ibid, 76-77. The creation of ‘new vocabularies’ are not ‘discoveries of a reality behind the appearances’. See also ibid, 78, “ironists specialize in redescribing ranges of objects or events in partially neologistic jargon, in the hope of inciting people to adopt and extend that jargon.”

84 Rorty, Contingency, 75. See also ibid, 78. Rorty, Social Hope, 63. Rorty, “Justice,” 54, “the idea of ‘the better argument’ makes sense only If one can identify a natural, transcultural relation of relevance which connects propositions with one another so as to form something like Descartes natural order of reason.”

85 Rorty, Contingency, 78. Rorty, Contingency, 76-77, “for her, sentences like ‘all men by nature desire to know’ or ‘truth is independent of the human mind’ are simply platitudes used to inculcate the local final vocabulary, the common sense of the west....when we surrender an old platitude, we have made a change rather than discovered a
perspective, the creation of new vocabularies is akin to the ‘invention of new tools,’ tools which ‘could not have been envisaged prior to the development of a particular set of descriptions, those which it itself helps to provide.’ As a result, it makes sense to argue that ‘new metaphors are causes, but not reasons for changes of belief.’ Although some ‘descriptions’ or vocabularies are ‘better than others,’ ‘betterness’ from this pragmatic standpoint is a function of utility, of helping to realize ‘some human purpose better than do competing descriptions,’ a fact that can only be assessed retrospectively.

At the same time, Rorty’s commitment to historicism explodes the notion that there exists any transcultural criterion such as an essentialist notion of human nature by which purposes or desires and the tools which serve their realization may be ranked or evaluated. Since pragmatic historicists believe that ‘there is no actual or possible object of knowledge that would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs,’ they deny the possibility of identifying a *summus bonum* toward which all humans are normatively oriented. The result is what Rorty calls a form

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86 Rorty, *Contingency*, 73-74, “anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed.” Rorty, *Social Hope*, xix. Rorty, *Truth, Politics*, 31; 24, “stop playing a certain language-game: the language game which uses the hypostatized adjective ‘truth’ in such phrases as ‘the quest for Truth’ or ‘the love of Truth.’”

87 Rorty, *Contingency*, 12-13. See also ibid, 21.


89 Rorty, *Social Hope*, 54. See also Rorty, *Social Hope*, xxiv-xxvi; 48, “distinction between appearance and reality…we should try to replace it with something like the distinction between ‘less useful description of the world’ and ‘more useful description of the world.’”

90 Rorty, *Truth, Politics*, 40, “scientific progress is made when theories which solved certain problems are replaced by theories which solve both those problems and certain other problems, which the earlier theories were unable to solve.” See also Rorty, *Truth, Politics*, 41, “science may well converge to agreement on how the world should be described in order to facilitate technological control, but this description will not be of nature as it is in itself, but of Nature as subjected to the Baconian demand for better tools with which to improve man’s estate.” Rorty, *Truth, Politics*, 16-17; 23, “like everybody else, post-modernists recognize that some beliefs are more reliable tools than others, and that agreement on which tools to use is essential for social cooperation.” Rorty, *Contingency*, 6. According to Rorty, just because ‘the world does not tell us what language games to play’ need not lead to the replacement of ‘objective criteria’ with ‘subjective criteria’ such as ‘will or feeling.’ Rorty, “Polytheism,” 445.

91 Rorty, *Social Hope*, 27, “when the question ‘useful for what?’ is pressed, they have nothing to say except ‘useful to create a better future.’ When they are asked ‘better by what criterion?’ they have no detailed answer.” Rorty, “Polytheism,” 445-446, “there are diverse, conflicting, but equally valuable forms of human life.” See also Rorty, “Polytheism,” 446-447, “Isaiah Berlin’s well-known doctrine of incommensurable human values is, in my sense, a polytheistic manifesto.”
of ‘secularized polytheism’ or value pluralism that provides the background for understanding Rorty’s reconceptualization of ethics and liberal politics.\(^9_2\)

3.3 Antirepresentational Ethics and Liberal Politics

If proponents of the metaphysical tradition begin their ethical reflection by appealing to an essentialist conception of human nature, antirepresentationalists begin by arguing that selfhood in general and ‘conscience’ in particular is a product of socialization within context-dependent traditions.\(^9_3\) Just as antirepresentationalism counsels the rejection of a single true vocabulary in general, so too Rorty’s revised starting-point for ethics leads to the rejection of the belief ‘that a single moral vocabulary and a single set of moral beliefs are appropriate for every human community.’\(^9_4\)

According to Rorty, the historicization of ethics leads to a rejection of classical renditions of the prudence-morality distinction articulated, in similar albeit significantly different ways, by Plato and Kant.\(^9_5\) On more than one occasion Rorty contrasts prudence or an individual’s efforts to satisfy her ‘private interests’\(^9_6\) with ‘an appeal to the interests of our community’ or those ‘we-intentions’ that define shared standards of right and wrong within a particular context.\(^9_7\) According to Rorty, the prudence-morality distinction only ‘makes sense for individuals’ who are socialized into particular communities; ‘it would make sense for societies only if humanity

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\(^9_2\) Ibid, 446-447.
\(^9_3\) Rorty, *An Ethic*, 24. “There is nothing in their human nature to appeal to, because humans don’t have a nature.” See also *Contingency*, 6-7, “the human self is created by the use of vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary.” Rorty, *Contingency*, 6, 30; xiii. “In denying the existence of ‘human nature’ historicist authors argue that there is ‘nothing ‘beneath’ socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human.”” Rorty, “Priority,” 191, “the view that human beings are centerless networks of belief and beliefs…determined by historical circumstances.” Rorty, “Bourgeois,” 199. Rorty, “Justice,” 45, “self is a center of narrative gravity.” Rorty, *Social Hope*, xvi.
\(^9_4\) Rorty, “Priority,” 190.
\(^9_5\) Rorty, *Social Hope*, 72-73, 77.
\(^9_7\) Rorty, *Contingency*, 59, “the core meaning of ‘immoral action’ is ‘the sort of thing we don’t do.’” See also Rorty, “Bourgeois,” 200-201. Rorty, *Contingency*, 60.
had a nature over and above the various forms of life which history has thrown up so far." He
draws another related distinction between ‘habit’ and ‘custom’ or those ‘routine and
uncontroversial adjustments to circumstances,’ and ‘morality and law’ which he associates with
‘conscious deliberation and explicit formulation of precepts’ that arises in the context of
‘controversy.’ This latter distinction brings to the forefront Rorty’s position on the nature of
moral principles. Typically, the moral norms that structure cooperative ventures remain implicit
in social practices and only subsequently are they objectified as propositions. Unlike classical
metaphysicians who believe moral philosophy’s role is to formulate principles or generalizations
capable of grounding or justifying moral judgments, Rorty argues that all moral philosophy can
do is to ‘summarize our culturally influenced intuitions.’ From this perspective, moral
principles are nothing more than ‘reminders,’ ‘abbreviations for’ or summarizations of the
norms implicit within a ‘concrete web of social practices.’

The constellation of ideas in Rorty’s antirepresentationalist account of ethics contributes
to a particular understanding of liberalism as a tradition. Rorty’s retrieval of liberalism centers on
the distinction between ‘philosophical’ and ‘political’ dimensions of the so-called Enlightenment
project. On the one hand, Rorty sides with communitarians against Enlightenment
‘rationalism’ or ‘scientism’s’ attempts to ‘find a new, comprehensive worldview which would
replace God’ with essentialist notions of ‘nature and reason’ capable of grounding universal

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99 Rorty, *Social Hope*, 73-75.
100 Ibid, 73-75, “morality and law...begin when controversy arises. We invent both when we can no longer just do
what comes naturally, when routine is no longer good enough, or when habit and custom no longer suffice. When
the individual’s needs begin to clash with those of her family, or her family’s with those of the neighbor’s, or when
economic strain begins to split her community into warring classes, or when that community must come to terms
with an alien community.”
103 Rorty, “Justice,” 46-47. See also Rorty, *Social Hope*, xxix.
human rights.\textsuperscript{105} According to Rorty, many believe that both sides of the project remain inextricably linked and that any attempt to retain the political project in the wake of foundationalism’s breakdown is, in principle, impossible.\textsuperscript{106} In other words, ‘liberal institutions and culture should not or cannot survive the collapse of the philosophical justification that the Enlightenment provided.’\textsuperscript{107} In Rorty’s estimation, many fear that polytheism is no better than ‘irrationalism’ and the latter leads inevitably to Nietzsche’s distaste for Christian and social-democratic ideals.\textsuperscript{108} This position is held in similar albeit significantly different ways by communitarians\textsuperscript{109} and critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno who argue that the failure of Enlightenment rationalism has left liberalism ‘intellectually’ and hence ‘morally bankrupt.’\textsuperscript{110} Liberals like Jurgen Habermas and Ronald Dworkin\textsuperscript{111} who remain committed to the political project in the wake of rationalism’s breakdown continue to argue that liberalism requires a modified sort of philosophical backing.\textsuperscript{112} In response to this challenge, Habermas trades a discredited modern ‘philosophy of subjectivity’ and its correlative ‘subject-centered conception of reason’\textsuperscript{113} for a ‘philosophy of intersubjectivity’ that conceives of reason in ‘communicative’ terms.\textsuperscript{114} By appealing to the ‘transcendental presuppositions’\textsuperscript{115} that govern

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. See also Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, 52, “the idea that it ought to have foundations was a result of Enlightenment scientism, which was in turn a survival of the religious need to have human projects underwritten by a nonhuman authority.” Rorty, “Priority,” 176. Rorty, “Bourgeois,” 200.

\textsuperscript{106} Rorty, \textit{Truth, Politics}, 35.

\textsuperscript{107} Rorty, “Priority,” 177.

\textsuperscript{108} Rorty, “Polytheism,” 449.

\textsuperscript{109} See for example: Rorty, “Priority,” 178; 177, “communitarianism…reject[s] both the individualistic rationalism of the Enlightenment and the idea of rights but, unlike the pragmatist, sees this rejection as throwing doubt on the institutions and culture of the surviving democratic states.”


\textsuperscript{111} Rorty, “Priority,” 177.

\textsuperscript{112} Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, 84; 83, “Habermas assumes that the task of philosophy is to supply some social glue which will replace religious belief and to see Enlightenment talk of universality and rationality as the best candidate for this glue.”


\textsuperscript{114} Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, 62-63; 67, “he still insists on seeing the process of undistorted communication as convergent, and seeing that convergence as a guarantee of the rationality of such communication.”

‘domination-free communication’ Habermas attempts to unify private perfection and justice in a ‘more comprehensive philosophical outlook,’ capable of providing an alternative basis for the universal validity of liberal institutions.

In contrast with authors of both persuasions, Rorty argues that it remains possible to disengage the political goals of the Enlightenment – its desire for ‘maximal freedom and minimal humiliation’ – from their roots in now discounted forms of foundationalism. Rather than purporting to offer foundations for or a justification of democratic institutions, Rorty follows Rawls in developing a ‘nonrationalist’ or ‘nonuniversalist’ objectification of the norms and ‘hopes’ that mark liberal social practices.

At the heart of Rorty’s antifoundationalist ‘redescription’ of liberalism is his historicist refiguring of the relationship between public and private spheres captured by the phrases ‘liberal ironism’ or ‘postmodernist bourgeois liberalism.’ According to Rorty, there is no way to unite or ‘synthesize’ the public and the private or the virtues of the ‘self-involved genius’ with the

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116 Rorty, Contingency, xiii-iv. “There is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory,” xiv-xv, “begin to think of the relation between writers on autonomy and writers on justice as being like the relation between two kinds of tools – as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars…the one tells us that we need not speak only the language of the tribe, that we may find our own words, that we may have a responsibility to ourselves to find them – the other tells us that responsibility is not the only one we have. Both are right, but there is no way to make both speak a single language.”

117 Rorty, Contingency, 66-68.

118 Authors who reject the Enlightenment project as a whole and authors, like Habermas, who seek to rehabilitate its philosophical dimensions.

119 Rorty, Truth, Politics, 35.


121 Rorty, Contingency, 57, “Dewey, Oakeshott, and Rawls have all helped undermine the idea of a transhistorical, ‘absolutely valid’ set of concepts which would serve as ‘philosophical foundations’ of liberalism.” See also Rorty, “Priority,” 177, 179, 180-183. Rorty, “Justice,” 48, “Rawls notion of what is reasonable in short confines membership…to societies whose institutions encompass most of the hard-won achievements of the West in the two centuries since the Enlightenment.”

122 Rorty, Contingency, 44-45.

123 Ibid, 54-55.

124 See Rorty, Contingency. Rorty, “Bourgeois,” 199. See also Rorty, “Introduction,” 13. The public question: “with what communities should you identify?” The private question: “What should I do with my aloneness? The first is a question about your obligations to other human beings. The second is about your obligation to, in Nietzsche’s words, become who you are.”
‘virtues of conversable companion and useful citizen.’\textsuperscript{125} In other words, his efforts are focused on articulating the relationship between two ‘equally valid, yet forever incommensurable’ emphases in a liberal democratic context, the public aims of justice and solidarity and the private aims of aesthetic individualism.\textsuperscript{126}

On the one hand, although a liberal may hold that ‘cruelty is the worst thing we do’ and that ‘the humiliation of human beings’ ought to cease, ironists regard such statements as contingent creations that merely express or summarize the norms implicit in democratic social practices.\textsuperscript{127} From this perspective, human rights and human ‘dignity’ are ‘social constructions’\textsuperscript{128} – particular ‘we-intentions’ – that function as public norms for members of a democratically-minded community.\textsuperscript{129} In other words, the ‘social glue’ that supports liberal politics ‘consists in little more than a consensus that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation…and that that goal requires, ‘besides peace and wealth,

\textsuperscript{125} Rorty, \textit{Truth, Politics}, 29, “I interpret the traditional idea that we all have a duty to love Truth as the idea that we should all aim at such a synthesis…We would like to overcome the tension between idiosyncracy and conversability.”

\textsuperscript{126} Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, xv.

\textsuperscript{127} Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, xv, “for liberal ironists there is no answer to the question ‘why not be cruel?’….nor is there an answer to the question ‘how do you decide when to struggle against injustice and when to devote yourself to private projects of self-creation?’….anybody who thinks that there are well-grounded theoretical answers to this sort of question….is still, in his heart, a theologian or a metaphysician. He believes in an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities.” See also Rorty, “Priority,” 178.

\textsuperscript{128} Rorty, \textit{Social Hope}, 85-86, “to speak of human rights is to explain our actions by identifying ourselves with a community of like-minded persons….to be a social construction is simply to be the intentional object of a certain set of sentences.”

\textsuperscript{129} Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, xiii-iv. “There is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory.” See also ibid, xiv-xv, “begin to think of the relation between writers on autonomy and writers on justice as being like the relation between two kinds of tools – as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars….the one tells us that we need not speak only the language of the tribe, that we may find our own words, that we may have a responsibility to ourselves to find them – the other tells us that responsibility is not the only one we have. Both are right, but there is no way to make both speak a single language.” See also Rorty, \textit{Social Hope}, 83-84. Rorty, \textit{Contingency}, 53-54; 87, “not need a justification for her sense of human solidarity, for she was not raised to play the language game in which one asks and gets justifications for that sort of belief.” Rorty, “Solidarity,” 32. Rorty, “Priority,” 176-177, “the Kantian identification with a certain transcultural and ahistorical self is thus replaced by a quasi-Hegelian identification with our own community, thought of as a historical product.” Rorty, “Bourgeois,” 200, “the naturalized Hegelian analogue of intrinsic human dignity is the comparative dignity of a group with which a person identifies. Persons have dignity not as an interior luminescence but because they share in such contrast-effects.”
the standard bourgeois freedoms."\(^{130}\) Although theorists like Rorty and Rawls play a role in making these we-intentions transparent via objectification, they do nothing other than explicate a particular set of contingently-grounded norms.\(^{131}\)

According to Rorty, these particular ‘we-intentions’ place restrictions on the nature of self-creation or define the acceptable public limits of polytheism within a liberal democratic context. By allowing individuals ‘to worship their own gods, so to speak,’ polytheism, itself a product of historicist relativization, privatizes the pursuit of ‘happiness’ or ‘perfection.’\(^{132}\) In the private sphere, the focus shifts from ‘priests’ and ‘priest-substitutes’ such as ‘metaphysicians and physicists,’ all of whom purport to identify the nature of reality or the essence of human nature, to the ‘poet,’ a figure capable of ‘projecting’ a variety of ‘ideals’ in support of a multiplicity of personal perfections.\(^{133}\) This Nietzschean position on self-creation exchanges Plato’s metaphysical realm for an alternative form of self-knowledge as self-definition associated with the creation of an idiosyncratic, metaphorical language.\(^{134}\) From this perspective, the ‘ultimate object of eros’ ceases to be conceived in Platonic terms as ‘unique, atemporal, and nonhuman’ but rather is correlated with an ‘indefinitely expansible pantheon of transitory temporal accomplishments.’\(^{135}\)

\(^{130}\) Rorty, *Contingency*, 84-85.


\(^{132}\) Rorty, “Polytheism,” 446-447.

\(^{133}\) Ibid, 445-446.

\(^{134}\) Rorty, *Contingency*, 27. “To create one’s mind is to create one’s own language, rather than to let the length of one’s mind be set by the language other human beings have left behind” Rorty, *Contingency*, 28, “One will not have traced that idiosyncrasy home but will merely have managed to see it as not idiosyncratic after all, as a specimen reiterating a type, a copy or replica of something which has already been identified. To fail as a poet – and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being – is to accept somebody else’s description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program, to write, at most, elegant variations on previously written poems. So the only way to trace home the causes of one’s being as one is would be to tell a story about one’s causes in a new language.” Ibid, 28-29, “With luck – the sort of luck which makes the difference between genius and eccentricity – that language will also strike the next generation as inevitable. Their behaviors will bear that impress.” As Rorty notes, ‘any literal description of one’s individuality, which is to say any use of an inherited language game for this purpose, will necessarily fail.’

\(^{135}\) Rorty, “Polytheism,” 453. See also Rorty, *An Ethics*, 10-11, “openness to new possibilities, willingness to consider all suggestions about what might increase human happiness.”
The result of this modified combination of public and private is a postmodern form of utilitarianism that reduces moral obligation to the achievement of ‘the greatest possible amount of happiness’ or the support of and non-interference with the broadest possible collection of idiosyncratic desires.\textsuperscript{136} Despite being ungrounded in anything more than a \textit{modus vivendi} or pragmatic respect for diversity,\textsuperscript{137} Rorty argues that this utilitarian stance nevertheless provides a ‘challenging moral ideal,’ one that encourages ‘heroic and self-sacrificing efforts on behalf of social justice.’\textsuperscript{138} He goes so far as to call this an alternative form of ‘spirituality’ grounded not in a ‘yearning for the infinite’ but rather in an ‘exalted sense of new possibilities opening up for finite beings’ and in a concomitant respect for human freedom.\textsuperscript{139}

3.4 The Development of Liberal Norms

According to Rorty, the birth of a ‘human rights culture’ is neither the result of a rational discovery nor does it stem from the prioritization of a particular form of obligation or justice that is opposed to loyalty and affectional ties.\textsuperscript{140} At the heart of this redescription of liberal norms is the distinction that Rorty draws between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ morality.\textsuperscript{141} According to Annette Baier’s ‘neo-Humean’ approach,\textsuperscript{142} morality begins as a ‘relation of reciprocal trust among a closely knit group, such as a family or clan.’\textsuperscript{143} These biologically-grounded and socially supported affective bonds that link individuals such as ‘parents and children’ or ‘fellow clan...

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\textsuperscript{136} Rorty, \textit{An Ethics}, 8.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 15, “though largely Christian in its original inspiration, the political idealism of modern times has no need or use for the idea that there is something over and above ‘the ego and its desires.’

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 9.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 15.


\textsuperscript{141} Rorty, “Justice,” 42, 46, “contrast between the detailed and concrete stories you can tell about yourself as a member of a smaller group and the relatively abstract and sketchy story you can tell about yourself as a citizen of the world….Plato and Kant were misled by the fact that abstract principles are designed to trump parochial loyalties into thinking that the principles are somehow prior to the loyalties.”

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 45. See also Ibid, 44.

\textsuperscript{143} Rorty, “Justice,” 45. See also Rorty, “Human Rights,” 181.
members’ to one another motivate certain ‘naturally’ or ‘spontaneously’ occurring actions. By contrast, thin morality is roughly correlative with the demands of justice or obligation that arise when ‘loyalty to a smaller group conflicts with your loyalty to a larger group.’

According to Rorty, the movement from different thick forms of morality to a common thin requires the development of both rational and affective capacities. On the one hand, the demands associated with the emergence of thin morality require the formulation of ‘abstract principles’ and laws. More specifically, Rorty argues that rationality does not discover principles normative prior to particular traditions but rather plays a role in fostering an instrumental form of consensus or an ‘agreement on how to coexist without violence.’ In other words, deflated or pragmatic renderings of rationality, wisdom and the ‘love of truth’ refer to the subject’s capacity to be ‘conversable and tolerant’ or to be open to the possibility of cooperation. Rorty correlates this process of thinning out morality with the development of what the later Rawls calls ‘an overlapping consensus’ that leads to a ‘more inclusive moral community.’ This ‘free consensus’ on democratic ideals replaces the ‘quest for ‘objective values’’ or the ‘quest for a ranking of human needs that does not depend upon such consensus.’

Intimately connected with the consensus building capacities of instrumental reason is Rorty’s emphasis on the enlargement of individuals’ moral ‘sensitivity.’ From this perspective, the difference between prudence and morality or between loyalty and justice is not

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144 Rorty, “Justice,” 45. See also Rorty, Social Hope, 76, “Baier was proposed that we substitute the notion of ‘appropriate trust’ for that of ‘obligation’ as our central moral concept.” See also Rorty, Social Hope, 78.


146 Ibid, 46.

147 Ibid, 52. See also Ibid, 53-54, “to advise people to be rational...simply to suggest that somewhere among their shared beliefs and desires there may be enough resources to permit agreement on how to coexist without violence.”

148 Rorty, Truth, Politics, 30-31.


150 Rorty, “Polytheism,” 448.

one between affectivity and rationality but rather merely a difference of ‘degree.’ In other words, the enlargement of an individual’s moral horizon – the movement from thick to thin morality or universalized justice – is facilitated by ‘sentimental education,’ a growing capacity to identify with outsiders and to cooperate with them for the shared benefit of all. From this perspective, what unites human beings is not a ‘common language’ or rationality ‘but just susceptibility to pain and in particular to that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans, humiliation.’ ‘Solidarity’ is not a ‘fact’ that is ‘discovered’ by human reason’s effort to isolate some metaphysical foundation, but is rather something ‘created,’ a ‘goal to be achieved’ by human’s ‘imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers.’ In a liberal ironist culture, emphasis shifts from philosophical theory to ‘disciplines which specialize in thick description of the private and idiosyncratic….novels and ethnographies which sensitive one to the pain of those who do not speak our language must do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature were supposed to do.’ According to Rorty, ‘mystical experience’ may also play a role in this process – not by putting humans ‘in touch with the transcendent’ –

152 Rorty, Social Hope, 73-75. See also Rorty, Social Hope, 76, 82-83. Rorty, “Justice,” 42, 44. Rorty, “Human Rights,” 185, “traditional answer…kinship and custom are morally irrelevant.”
153 Rorty, Social Hope, 78-79, 80-81, 82-83. Rorty, Contingency, 94, “imaginative identification does the work which the liberal metaphysician would like to have done by a specifically moral motivation.” Rorty, “Justice,” 44, “to treat ‘justice’ as the name for loyalty to a certain very large group, the name for our largest current loyalty, rather than the name of something distinct from loyalty.” Rorty, “Human Rights,” 176, 183-184; 181, “Hume as the woman’s moral philosopher because Hume held that corrected sympathy, not law-discrimining reason, is the fundamental moral capacity.”
154 Rorty, Contingency, 92-93.
155 Ibid, xvi. “It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people….this is a task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist’s report, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially, the novel…..that recognition would be part of a general turn against theory and toward narrative.” See also Rorty, An Ethics, 9, “when we fall in love with another person, we do not ask about the source or the nature of our obligation to cherish that person’s welfare.” Rorty, Social Hope, 81. Rorty, “Human Rights,” 181.
156 Rorty, Contingency, 94. Rorty, “Human Rights,” 172; 185, “stories [that document the suffering of those not closely related to us]…have induced us, the rich, the safe, powerful people to tolerate and even to cherish powerless people.”
but by ‘leaping over the boundaries of language’ to create new vocabularies capable of respecting larger groups of people.\(^{157}\)

‘We-intentions’ become democratic precisely insofar as thin morality becomes the thick reality of democratic citizens, when liberal ideals become second nature, implicit in a particular set of social practices into which individuals are socialized.\(^{158}\) From the perspective of Rorty’s post-modern utilitarianism, the movement from thick to thin morality, ‘the enlarging of the ‘we,’ represents ‘moral progress.’\(^{159}\) Moral progress does not require a ‘vertical ascent toward something greater than the merely human’ but rather ‘a vision of horizontal progress toward a planetwide cooperative commonwealth’ that defends human freedom and capacity for self-creation.\(^{160}\)

### 3.5 The Pragmatic Defense of Liberalism

Rorty’s antirepresentationalism dictates that no neutral or transculturally normative reason can be supplied for the adoption of democratic politics: the rise of historicism is compatible with ‘wholehearted enthusiasm and whole-hearted contempt for democracy.’\(^{161}\) Rather than approaching non-liberals with the claim to rational superiority,\(^{162}\) Rorty argues that liberals should be ‘more frankly ethnocentric and less professedly universalist.’\(^{163}\) Although he


\(^{158}\) Rorty, *Social Hope*, 78-79, “should this progress ever be completed, the term ‘morality’ would drop out of the language. For there would be no longer nor any need to contrast doing what comes naturally with doing what is moral.”

\(^{159}\) Rorty, *An Ethics*, 15.

\(^{160}\) Ibid, 17.

\(^{161}\) Ibid, 17.

\(^{162}\) See Rorty, “Polytheism,” 448, “the frequent complaint that a philosopher who holds the pragmatic theory of truth cannot give a reason not to be a fascist is perfectly justifiable. But neither can that person give you a reason to be a fascist.” See also Rorty, “Polytheism,” 449. Rorty, *Social Hope*, xxxi.

\(^{163}\) See Rorty, “Human Rights,” 180. Rather than thinking of non-liberals as ‘deprived…of moral knowledge’ Rorty argues that it makes more sense to argue that they are ‘deprived of…security and sympathy.’ Also, “security…conditions of life sufficiently risk-free as to make one’s difference from others inessential to one’s self-respect, one’s sense of worth….sympathy…the sort of reaction Athenians had more of after seeing the Persians than before, the sort that whites in the US had more of after reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin than before.”

\(^{164}\) Rorty, “Justice,” 55.
notes that liberals may appeal to the ‘various concrete advantages’ of democratic practices\textsuperscript{164} – the claim that they are ‘less cruel’ and hence ‘more desirable’\textsuperscript{165} – pragmatic polytheism’s irreducibly plural account of desire dictates that this form of debate will be ‘inconclusive.’\textsuperscript{166} In the absence of transcultural standards, the best Rorty can do is say: this is ‘what we in the west look like as a result of ceasing to hold slaves, beginning to educate women, separating church and state and so on…if you would try treating them that way, you might like the results.’\textsuperscript{167}

At the same time, if Rorty denies there is an inferential connection between antirepresentationalism and either democracy or antidemocracy, he does believe that there is a ‘plausible inference’ to be drawn from ‘democratic convictions’ to pragmatism.\textsuperscript{168} More specifically, Rorty argues that insofar as citizens harbour belief in ‘knowledge of an ‘objective’ ranking of human needs’ they will continue to believe that the ‘will to truth’ may override a polytheistic ‘will to happiness’ that lies at the heart of a democratic consensus.\textsuperscript{169} This connection leads Rorty to claim that ‘to see one’s language, one’s conscience, one’s morality…as contingent products…is to adopt a self-identity which suits one for citizenship in such an ideally liberal state.’\textsuperscript{170}

3.6 Religion and Liberalism

Rorty’s antirepresentationalist account of democratic practice tones his conception of the role of religion in public discourse. In general he advocates the priority of a form of ‘cultural politics’ that exchanges the question of whether God exists for the practical question of whether

\textsuperscript{164} Rorty, “Solidarity,” 29. See also Rorty, Social Hope, 86.
\textsuperscript{165} Rorty, Truth, Politics, 44.
\textsuperscript{166} Rorty, Social Hope, xxxi.
\textsuperscript{167} Rorty, “Justice,” 55.
\textsuperscript{168} Rorty, “Polytheism,” 449.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Rorty, Contingency, 61. See also Contingency, 86; 46, the recognition of contingency is the ‘chief virtue of the members of a liberal society.’
religion serves or ‘impedes the search for human happiness.’ Although Christianity’s central ideas of ‘fraternity and equality’ have been effective in providing a ‘basis for social organization,’ the pragmatic utility of such claims ought to be disengaged from their metaphysical ‘source’ and reinterpreted in strictly ‘sociological’ terms. More specifically, he argues that when consensus concerning the fair terms of cooperation replaces correspondence as ‘the test of a belief’ questions whose answer require an appeal to ‘ontology’ or a representationalist epistemology should be excluded from public discourse. According to Rorty, ‘the only test of a political proposal is its ability to gain assent from people who retain radically diverse ideas about the point and meaning of human life, about the path to private perfection.’ Since religious claims do not constitute ‘shared premises’ they function as ‘conversation-stoppers’ whose introduction into public discourse represents ‘bad taste.’ At the same time, he is clear that the prioritization of cultural politics over ontological considerations is itself a ‘matter of cultural politics.’ In other words, although Rorty believes ‘religious people should trim their utterances’ he can offer no transculturally compelling reason why they should do so.

At the same time, Rorty argues that since ‘private religious perfection’ is irrelevant to ‘public policy’ religious believers are free to hold whatever commitments they like provided

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173 Rorty, Social Hope, 173.
175 Rorty, “Cultural Politics,” 4-6, 21. See also Rorty, Social Hope, 173.
176 Rorty, Social Hope, 173.
180 Rorty, Social Hope, 170-171.
they do not attempt to impose their viewpoint on other citizens. From the perspective of the so-called ‘Jeffersonian Compromise,’ the ‘truth’ of any particular private religious claim is a function of its relative capacity to ‘make you and yours happier’ or to ‘help individuals find meaning in their lives.’ The resulting account of religious privatization sanctions a form of what he calls ‘anticlericalism,’ a ‘political view’ that prescinds from making claims about the non-reality of God but that regards ‘ecclesiastical institutions’ as potentially ‘dangerous to the health of democratic societies.’ Rorty criticizes ‘organizations that accredit pastors and…offer authoritative guidance to believers’ for encouraging the politicization of ‘the faithful.’ The tendency of such institutions is to commit themselves ‘not to pastoral care’ or ‘personal perfection’ but to ‘promulgating orthodoxy,’ a move which tends to generate ‘ill-will toward people…whose behavior they presume to call immoral.’ Rorty uses the example of the Catholic hierarchy’s condemnation of homosexuality as an example of an ethical commitment purportedly grounded in a contestable notion of human nature that has ‘greatly decreased the sum of human happiness.’ Although he agrees that ‘most hate speech laws are probably impossible to reconcile with the First Amendment’ he does argue that this type of position ought to be suppressed by ‘custom.’ The resulting portrait is of religion ‘pruned back to the parish

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181 Rorty, “Polytheism,” 450. This represents ‘a betrayal of one’s responsibilities to cooperate with other human beings.’ See also “Polytheism,” 451. Rorty, “Priority,” 175.
182 Rorty, “Priority,” 175.
183 Rorty, “Polytheism,” 453.
188 Rorty, Ethics for Today, 8. See also Rorty, “Reconsideration,” 459. Here Rorty argues that such “everyday peacetime sadism that uses religion to excuse cruelty’ is the modern-day equivalent of the early modern wars of religion.”
level,” a form of religion – ‘most congenial to a liberal democracy’ – that resembles ‘Liberal Protestantism.’

3.7 The Challenges of Anti-Realism and Relativism

In this section I turn more explicitly to Rorty’s efforts to respond to the objections of anti-realism and relativism. He distinguishes the realism/anti-realism debate from a broader debate between representationalism and anti-representationalism. According to Rorty, the former distinction presupposes the representationalist concern with affirming or denying the ‘fact of the matter.’ Adopting Wittgenstein’s therapeutic approach to philosophy the antirepresentationalist sidesteps the charge of antirealism by denying the ‘notion of representation’ in general. Rorty argues that intra-representationalist debates between ‘idealists and realists’ or between ‘skeptics and antiskeptics’ are ‘pointless.’ The ‘correspondence theory of truth’ which both sides in the realism/anti-realism debate presuppose is both ‘barely intelligible and of no particular importance.’

The fear of antirealism quite naturally leads to the related charge of relativism, the general claim that there exists no basis for selecting between cultural-linguistic frameworks. There are at least two interrelated issues at play here: (a) the charge that Rorty’s rejection of representationalism and essentialism leads to ‘relativism and irrationalism’; and (b) the more radical contention that his rejection of representationalism and essentialism is self-referentially incoherent. The first objection has already arisen in the context of his nonfoundationalist

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190 Ibid, 457.
191 Ibid, 461.
192 Rorty, “Introduction,” 2-3. “Antirealism…standardly used to mean the claim about particular true statements that there is no matter of fact which they represent.”
193 Ibid, 3.
194 Ibid, 2-3. See also ibid, 7.
195 Rorty, Social Hope, xvii. It is a ‘slogan’ that philosophers ‘have been mindlessly chanting for centuries.’
197 Rorty, Contingency, 44.
retrieval and defense of democratic politics. According to Rorty, metaphysicians, like Plato, Kant, Pope Benedict XVI and certain contemporary liberals associate the breakdown of essentialist forms of ethics with the triumph of ‘blind will’ or the institution of a metaphorical ‘dictatorship of relativism.’ In response, he distinguishes his ‘ethnocentric’ viewpoint, the belief that ‘truth or rationality’ is linked to ‘descriptions of the…procedures of justification which a given society…uses,’ from the ‘self-refuting’ claim that ‘every belief is as good as every other.’ In opposing ethical essentialism, he hopes to defend some form of a middle-ground between ‘arbitrary preference’ and ‘universal necessary truth.’ Rorty is never very clear about what this middle-ground approach might look like though part of an answer might be found in his contention that the contingency of an individual’s vocabulary is not incompatible with her commitment to those standards. Rorty seems to echo MacIntyre’s commitment to tradition-dependent rationality when he argues both that ‘we have to start from where we are’ and that ‘we can only hope to produce a more rational conception of rationality or a better conception of morality if we operate from within our tradition.’ Motivated by what he calls the ‘desire for intersubjective agreement,’ ongoing debate about final vocabularies proceeds via persuasion that may appeal to pragmatic concerns. In other words, the ‘justification’ of a particular vocabulary proceeds ‘not by reference to a criterion, but by reference to various detailed practical advantages.’ This is precisely the type of response Rorty gives to questions concerning linguistic change and innovation in general and to questions concerning the status and desirability of democracy vis-à-vis other social frameworks. This appears to be all that Rorty

200 Rorty, *Ethics for Today*, 26, “no important decisions are made by an exercise of arbitrary preference, no important decisions are made by assured grounding in universal truth. We are always somewhere in between.”
can say here and though I have reason to question whether this type of approach succeeds in
defusing the charge of subjectivism I will bracket this issue for now and return to it in my closing
section.

This type of appeal to the pragmatic dimensions of dialogue and debate concerning the
relative superiority of contingent vocabularies leads directly to the second and more fundamental
charge of self-referential incoherence. Rorty has already addressed one version of this objection
when he argues that his commitment to ethnocentrism need not preclude genuine commitment.
The more radical form of this objection centers on the status of his antirepresentationalism itself.
Critics argue that Rorty’s rejection of an essentialist account of human nature appears to require
appeal to a ‘metaphysico-epistemological view of the traditional sort.’\(^{206}\) Another way to put this
point is to note that although Rorty appears to be ‘rejecting a concern with philosophical
theories,’ the very rejection of such concerns presupposes an alternative theory of human
knowing and choosing.\(^{207}\) Although Rorty believes that his position is ‘better’ than the
representationalist’s\(^{208}\) he recognizes that it would be ‘inconsistent with his own
antiessentialism\(^{209}\) to argue that his historicist and pragmatic approach to language and truth is
‘objectively true’\(^{210}\) or that it corresponds to the ‘nature of things.’\(^{211}\) According to Rorty, the
claim that truth is not ‘out there waiting to be discovered’ does not entail the further claim that


\(^{207}\) Rorty, “Priority,” 192.

fundamentalism and relativism cannot be solved through appeal to ‘philosophical reflection’ since it is the reflection
of ‘two visionary poems’ or two different ‘possible futures for humanity.’”


\(^{210}\) Ibid. See also Rorty, “Solidarity,” 33. Rorty claims that his position does not presuppose “a metaphysical claim
that the objects in the world contain no intrinsically action-guiding properties, nor of an epistemological claim that
we lack a faculty of moral sense, nor of a semantical claim that truth is reducible to justification.” Rorty, *Contingency*, 9.

fundamentalism and relativism cannot be solved through appeal to ‘philosophical reflection’ since it is the reflection
of ‘two visionary poems’ or two different ‘possible futures for humanity.’” See also Rorty, *Contingency*, 8.
‘we have discovered that, out there, there is no truth.’ More specifically, Rorty argues that he is not proposing a ‘positive theory about the nature of truth’ but merely the ‘negative point’ that ‘we should drop the traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion.’ In other words, he claims that antirepresentationalism does not presuppose an ‘epistemological or metaphysical’ basis, and that questions surrounding the ‘metaphysico-epistemological’ status of the antirepresentationalist’s rejection of the ‘fact of the matter’ are ‘pointless and sterile.’

Rorty’s efforts to evade the charge of incoherence by appealing to the ‘negative’ character of his approach or by dismissing such fears as ‘pointless’ are intimately linked to his account of linguistic innovation as redescription. In line with this account, he argues that the movement beyond the ‘correspondence theory of truth’ is not the product of an insight into the ‘nature of a pre-existent entity called ‘philosophy’ or ‘truth’ but rather the result of ‘changing the way we talk.’ This tactic stems at least partially from the fact that the debate between essentialism and relativism cannot be solved through appeal to ‘philosophical reflection’ since it is the reflection of ‘two visionary poems’ or two different ‘possible futures for humanity.’ There is no ‘argument’ to be made here since ‘intellectual progress’ refers to nothing more than the literalizing of a new vocabulary. Negatively, Rorty attempts to ‘make the vocabulary in which these objections are phrased look bad, thereby changing the subject, rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on.’ Since he regards the so-called ‘relativist predicament’ as an ‘expression of the [misguided] need to

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214 Ibid. “Not having an epistemology, a fortiori…[the pragmatist] does not have a relativistic one.”
218 Rorty, *Contingency*, 44. Rorty hopes to illustrate how the distinctions between “absolutism and relativism, between rationality and irrationality, and between morality and expediency are obsolete and clumsy tools – remnants of a vocabulary we should try to replace.”
219 Rorty, *Contingency*, 50.
preserve...habits nurtured by the Enlightenment,"\textsuperscript{220} he contends that the charge need ‘not be answered’ directly but simply ‘evaded.’\textsuperscript{221} Positively, he proposes his alternative as a ‘redescription of the relation between human beings and the rest of the universe’ capable of being evaluated ‘like every other redescription...on the basis of its utility or purpose.’\textsuperscript{222} Rorty gauges the utility of this redescription in terms of its capacities to dissolve or transcend ‘traditional philosophical problems’ thereby helping humans ‘come to terms with Darwin.’\textsuperscript{223} In other words, since philosophy is not a rational ‘contest’ between vocabularies he must commend his alternative as more ‘attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics.’\textsuperscript{224} In my next section I will raise questions as to whether or not Rorty can claim to have successfully responded to or evaded the charge of self-referential incoherence.

3.8 Critical Reflections on Rorty’s Antirepresentationalism

There is much to appreciate in Rorty’s critical and constructive project. First, he rightfully exposes the limitations in the representationalist account of knowing and essentialist/rationalist account of moral knowing and choosing. Representationalist epistemologies that conceive human knowing as a form of correspondence between reality and mental pictures or language inappropriately presuppose a God’s-eye standpoint. Rorty’s antirepresentationalist alternative recognizes that there is no higher standpoint from which to verify the relationship between mental representations and external reality. Second, he correctly notes that the representationalist tradition overemphasizes deductive argumentation and neglects

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{221} Rorty, Contingency, 53-54. See also Rorty, “Solidarity,” 30. According to Rorty, the realist who charges the pragmatist with relativism is guilty of ‘projecting his own habits of thought upon the pragmatist’ and of attributing to the pragmatist a ‘perverse form of his own attempted detachment.’ Rorty, “Solidarity,” 24, “the reason that the realist calls this negative claim relativistic is that he cannot believe that anybody would seriously deny that truth has an intrinsic nature.” Rorty, “Bourgeois,” 202, “to accuse postmodernism of relativism is to try to put a metanarrative in the postmodernist’s mouth.”
\textsuperscript{222} Rorty, Social Hope, 65-66. Rorty, Contingency, 9.
\textsuperscript{223} Rorty, Social Hope, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{224} Rorty, Contingency, 9.
the context-dependent character of human language and knowing. His antirepresentationalist alternative highlights the way in which human knowing is shaped by the various cultural-linguistic frameworks into which individuals are socialized, along with the context-dependent character of and the role of persuasion in justification. Third, he recognizes that representationalists underemphasize the pragmatic orientation of language and knowing. In his response, Rorty argues that pressures in the external environment and practical problem solving in general shape the development of human language and meaning and that utilitarian concerns are central to the adjudication of rival claims.

In a similar way, Rorty’s critical and constructive approach to ethics in general and liberal politics in particular ought to be commended on a number of fronts. First, his critique of ethical essentialism and its corresponding forms of liberalism identifies parallel tendencies to neglect the social embeddedness of moral knowledge and choosing. Second, rather than starting in foundationalist fashion with thin, universal moral principles from which particular moral claims may be deduced, he regards moral principles as secondary objectifications of habituated moves within social practices. Third, he is correct to condemn the rationalist tendency to conceive moral knowing and living as entirely disconnected from instrumental rationality and affectivity. In responding to this deficiency, he develops a compelling account of how the development of liberal norms proceeds via pragmatic appeal to shared safety and the education of sentiment or affection moving from love of and trust in family to all of humankind. Rorty’s nonfoundationalist account of the public nature of liberal norms is both more consistent than Rawls’ appeal to the uniqueness of political liberalism and correspondingly more humble in its claims vis-à-vis other, non-liberal standpoints.
At the same time, there are limitations in both aspects of Rorty’s project that threaten to impugn many of its positive aspects. Beginning with his constructive project, much like with MacIntyre and Rawls I question the scope and implications of Rorty’s commitment to historicism. First, it is my contention that the author’s response to the charge of irrational subjectivism is insufficient in certain respects. Although rational commitment is not incompatible with recognition of contingency, he proffers two potentially incompatible claims that appear to support rather than dissolve the charge of subjectivism. On the one hand, Rorty argues that there exists no single account of human knowing and choosing and no single set of values that is shared by all individuals, no shared presuppositions that might provide some form of unity amidst diversity. Contingency and hence pluralism goes, as he is fond of saying, ‘all the way’ down. As a result, the nature of debate concerning the selection of a particular vocabulary whether within a tradition marked by a shared final vocabulary or between traditions is primarily rhetorical. In the absence of any common standards it appears that language creates ‘knowledge’ rather than discovers and articulates an account of the way the world really is. In other words, Rorty’s antirepresentationalism appears to lead to the very linguistic idealism and or antirealism he hopes to avoid or at least transcend.

One potential way out of both the irrationalist and idealist dilemmas is to focus on Rorty’s appeal to pragmatism. Rorty of course attempts to side-step this charge by complimenting his appeal to historicism with a strong dash of pragmatism. First, he argues that antirepresentationalism does not deny the reality of an external world and that human responses to environmental pressures demonstrate that there is at least some connection between linguistic

\[225\] Rorty, “Pragmatism, Relativism,” 116, “There is no way to choose between incompatible philosophical theories of the typical Platonic or Kantian type.”
\[226\] Rorty, “Priority,” 188
\[227\] This position hardly seems all that different than the very emotivism that authors like MacIntyre decry but struggle to avoid.
innovation and ‘reality’ conceived in a very limited way. Second, the author appears to argue, in certain contexts, that an appeal to utility can indeed provide a common criterion for the assessment of final vocabularies. This type of approach would seem to presume that vocabularies and the social frameworks they structure may be adjudicated by assessing their relative utility in solving practical problems and serving human needs and desires. In my judgement, however, this type of response to the charges of irrationalism and subjectivism stands in a particularly confused relation to Rorty’s historicism. On the one hand, Rorty himself admits that the appeal to pragmatic concerns does not also imply that human needs and desires can be ranked or compared in any objective way. In other words, pragmatism is contextualized by his commitment to historicism which cashes out as a form of value pluralism or what he calls ‘romantic polytheism.’

The deeper issue at play here concerns the relationship between historicism and pragmatism in general and the question whether the latter is actually compatible with Rorty’s commitment to the former. The pragmatic pole of his position appears to conceive the human subject in a rather distinctive way. Rorty’s conception of the subject appears to combine two features. First, an animalistic desire to satisfy biologically-grounded needs and desires. Second, human uniqueness conceived as a capacity to use language (among other tools) together with a more diverse and malleable conception of desire. From a pragmatic standpoint, reason appears reduced to instrumental rationality. Humans are, as he notes, clever animals driven to satisfy their irreducibly distinct desires. Rorty’s brand of post-metaphysical or nonfoundationalist liberalism appeals to this account of the subject when it defends a modus vivendi account of democratic practice grounded in utilitarian concerns. However, it remains unclear to me how this type of approach can remain consistent in its attempt to avoid metaphysical commitments. In other words, it appears that Rorty has smuggled a lowest common denominator – the utilitarian
notion of the subject as satisfaction-driven – in through the backdoor so to speak. Contrary to what he argues, antirepresentationalism cannot help but appeal to certain epistemological and metaphysical claims, even if only implicitly. His partisan conception of the subject appears to inappropriately exclude alternative conceptions of human nature and the human good from public discourse.

This charge of inconsistency is not unrelated to the more general charge of incoherence that arises in response to the assertion of a historicist starting-point in general. The question here concerns the possibility of moving beyond representationalism without asserting the ‘truth’ of perspectivism. On its own terms I would be inclined to argue that there is an inconsistency here that historicism cannot avoid. At the same time, I am willing to entertain Rorty’s claim to have transcended metaphysics in general. Unfortunately, his purported transcendence of these issues derives much of its rationale from the pragmatic appeal to utility. More specifically, he believes that an antirepresentationalist view of knowledge and ethics is not metaphysically correct but simply more useful insofar as it dissolves traditional philosophical problems and helps pave the way for democratic politics. However, this type of response simply begs the question in favour of pragmatic utilitarianism’s picture of the subject: antirepresentationalism appears to be useful for inculcating his partisan account of human nature. In the end, he may find himself forced to defend some form of realism in general and argue for the truth of his own account of human nature in particular. The real question is whether there exists an approach to both issues that retains the insights in Rorty’s perceptive critique of representationalism as one form of realism. I for one am convinced that this sort of middle-ground does in fact exist and that it can provide a basis for grounding democratic norms that is not implicated in the critique of the Enlightenment

\[228\] This type of approach differs at least in part from atomist forms of liberalism that deny the sociality of human beings. Rorty’s appeal to the affective bonds that tie families and primitive communities together points to a richer account of the human subject.
project. In this chapter’s final section I will examine Jeffrey Stout’s first steps in this direction in
general and his attempt to harmonize the best in MacIntyre, Rawls and Rorty in particular.
Chapter 4

Jeffrey Stout’s Pragmatic Middle-Ground

4. Introduction

In 2004’s *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeffrey Stout develops an alternative account of democratic practice designed to rise above the stalemate between second-generation liberal and Christian communitarian portrayals of modern ethical and political discourse.¹ The key to understanding his intention to develop a middle-ground approach rests in his claim that both second-generation liberals and their traditionalist detractors tend to misconstrue the nature of democratic discourse. Stout’s middle-ground alternative combines two major components. On the one hand, he distinguishes between a narrow or hierarchical conception of tradition and a wider, more ‘democratic’ notion in the work of traditionalist authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. The former contributes to the characterization of modernity as intrinsically incompatible with the premodern concern for tradition and virtue and to MacIntyre and Hauerwas’ correlative call for democratic disengagement. The latter is roughly correlative with MacIntyre and Rorty’s reflexive conception of a tradition and with the Thomist reading of tradition-dependent rationality that MacIntyre develops in the latter portions of *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* in particular. Stout argues that democratic norms are nothing other than those contingently-grounded standards – at least implicit in reflexive contexts – that govern the practices of intra- and inter-tradition reason exchange. Democratic tradition inculcates a collection of virtues and dispositions that structure the way in which individuals relate to their heritage and to others situated differently. This reconception of democracy as a tradition in its

own right allows Stout to reconceive authority and piety in ways that respect democratic concerns for individuality and self-reliance. On the other hand, Stout distances his account of reason-exchange from the rigidly secularist forms of democratic discourse defended by second-generation liberals such as John Rawls and Richard Rorty. According to Stout, secularized democratic discourse presupposes the relativizing of comprehensive commitments but allows for unconstrained dialogue and debate between traditions. This alternative approach allows him to reconceive public reason and the liberal notion of right in ways that better respect diversity. It is Stout’s contention that his contextual approach to justification and pragmatic conception of truth occupies a discursive middle-ground between pejorative forms of metaphysics and relativistic forms of anti-realism.

In my judgment, Stout’s middle-ground approach is to be commended on a number of fronts. First, his alternative succeeds in moving beyond the false dichotomization that characterizes much of the liberal-communitarian debate by harmonizing insights from communitarian and second-generation liberal authors. His rehabilitation of the liberal emphases on self-determination, critical reflection, equality and tolerance takes seriously the communitarian critique and its correlative commitment to virtue, diversity, and metaphysical claims. The result is a particularly compelling account of post-conventional discourse. At the same time, Stout’s pragmatic approach to truth in general and democratic norms in particular suffers from many of the same limitations as authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian divide. Although Stout’s characterization of and response to the liberal-communitarian debate is both highly perceptive and substantially accurate, it is my contention that his pragmatic approach to truth and defence of democratic practice is insufficiently critical.
This chapter will proceed in five stages. First, I will present Stout’s reading of the hierarchical form of tradition found in the work of traditionalist authors such as Milbank, MacIntyre and Hauerwas and its correlative account of and rejection of modernity. Second, I will examine his contention that MacIntyre’s wider and reflexive conception of tradition is compatible with an appropriately chastened conception of democratic discourse and individuality. Third, I will contrast his account of secularized ethical and political discourse with the rigidly secularist proposals of Rawls and Rorty, noting how his alternative shapes different understandings of public reason and the relationship between the right and the good. Fourth, I will examine Stout’s contextual account of justification and pragmatic account of truth and his claim to avoid relativism and walk a middle-ground between metaphysical realism and antirealism. Fifth, I will highlight several of the strengths in Stout’s attempt to transcend the liberal-communitarian debate and point toward one major limitation.

4.1 New Traditionalism’s Diagnosis and Rejection of Modernity

According to Stout, the first of two conceptions of tradition in the work of authors such as John Milbank, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stanley Hauerwas underlies their shared rejection of modernity. Each of these authors argues in similar albeit significantly different ways that the social practices constitutive of premodern traditions presuppose two main features. Traditionalism requires participants’ ‘deferential submission to authoritative texts and authoritative interpreters of texts’ and an institutional structure ‘capable of securing agreement on a doctrine of the human good.’ In a distinctively premodern context, deference to the Christian community’s formative narratives, ‘significant examples’ or ‘exemplary lives’ and

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officially sanctioned authorities condition the possibility of moral development.\(^3\) From this perspective, successful socialization is oriented to the development of character, of precisely those virtues, habits and or stable dispositions of feeling, thinking and choosing that support the realization of salvation, the Christian community’s shared *telos* or end.\(^4\)

According to Stout, traditionalists and classical liberals correlate the genesis of modernity with the breakdown of this distinctively premodern notion of tradition. The eclipse of premodern forms of tradition gives rise to the Enlightenment project’s signature ‘antitraditionalist’ or ‘foundationalist’ quest for ‘genuinely universal, tradition-independent norms.’\(^5\) Conceiving the moral subject in transcendental or ahistorical and asocial terms, proponents of classical liberalism trade an ‘ethics of character’ focused on the cultivation of virtue for what Hauerwas calls ‘quandary ethics.’ This distinctly modern brand of ethical decision-making starts with quandaries or ethical dilemmas – ‘thinned out cases’ or ‘situation[s]…that…can be described in perfectly general terms’ – to which abstract and universally valid norms can be applied.\(^6\)

According to traditionalists, at the heart of this purportedly context-independent picture of ethical and political discourse lies a contingently grounded ‘secularist ideology.’ This alternative ‘anthropology of individual *dominium*’ and concomitant ‘*mythos* of salvation’ conceives moral principles as rules capable of grounding the cooperation of self-interested monads.\(^7\) In

\(^3\) Stout, *Democracy*, 168, 171-172.
\(^4\) Ibid, 2, 136, 145.
premodern contexts, piety contributed to ‘docility’ – an ‘individual’s deference to a hierarchy of powers on which social life depends’ – ‘which in turn permitted an individual’s character to be shaped by tradition and community toward virtue.’\(^8\) By destroying the deferential respect for ‘the social structures that have long been taken to be among the sources of our existence and progress through life,’ proponents of traditionalism argue that modern democratic societies are intrinsically impious.\(^9\)

According to Stout, traditionalists correctly note that the Enlightenment project’s attempt to underwrite modern democracy through appeal to foundational principles acceptable to all interlocutors fails to achieve the standpoint it explicitly avows and is therefore ‘indefensible.’\(^10\) In the absence of shared conceptions of the good necessary for distinguishing between morally praiseworthy and blameworthy actions, traditionalists claim that modern ethical theory devolves into a form of ‘emotivism.’\(^11\) From this perspective, the ‘interminability of moral debate’ intrinsic to modern democratic society testifies to the fundamental incoherence of modern ethical and political discourse.\(^12\)

Based on this highly critical diagnosis of modernity, traditionalists advocate a rejection of democratic practice and commend a retrieval of Christian particularity. Traditionalists such as Hauerwas tend to regard the church as a counter-cultural ‘community of peaceable virtue’ that is ‘in the world’ poisoned by modern individualism but ‘not of it.’\(^13\) The result is what Stout regards as a ‘rigid church-world dualism’ that combines MacIntyre’s tradition-modernity


\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.\(^1\) Stout, “Commitments,” 42. Stout, *Democracy*, 145-146, 163; 129-130: “liberalism is in fact one tradition among others. Liberalism then is a tradition but one whose necessarily frustrated project is to cease being what it is.” MacIntyre, 346.


\(^12\) Ibid.

dichotomy with a controversial tendency to link authentic virtue to the practices constitutive of
the visible church.\textsuperscript{14} What follows are several implications for Christian theology. First,
traditionalists criticize theologians ‘who have dedicated themselves to social justice and sought
to make the church safe for democratic aspirations’ for inappropriately allowing ‘liberalism…to
shape the agenda, if not the very life of the church.’\textsuperscript{15} In a similar way, traditionalists criticize
natural law theorists who mimic secular philosophy’s ill-fated search for context-independent
moral principles in ways that render Christian particularity irrelevant \textit{a priori}.\textsuperscript{16} In contrast with
both of these conciliatory approaches, traditionalists encourage Christians to opt out of
democratic discourse and to identify with the church whose formative narrative and concomitant
conception of salvation are diametrically opposed to modern democracy.\textsuperscript{17}

4.2 Reflexive Traditionalism and Democratic Individuality

According to Stout, new traditionalism’s diagnosis and rejection of modernity is
grounded on a truncated definition of tradition that regards the premodern concern for virtue as
intrinsically incompatible with democratic practice. Stout correctly notes that MacIntyre and
Hauerwas seem to waver between this ‘narrow’ or hierarchical variation of tradition and a
second definition of a tradition as an ongoing argument or enduring discursive practice.
Specified primarily in the context of MacIntyre’s model of rational debate outlined in the closing
chapters of \textit{Whose Justice, Which Rationality}?., he argues that the latter form is congruent with
his own efforts to rethink ‘the idea of tradition democratically and dialogically.’\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Stout, \textit{Democracy}, 26, 103-104, 110, 112, 115, 147, 149, 154, 156. Stout criticizes both Milbank and Hauerwas
for taking an approach that \textit{a priori} “condemns the world outside the church to utter darkness.”
\textsuperscript{15} Stout, 115, 140, 153, 300. Stanley Hauerwas, \textit{A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism,
\textsuperscript{16} Stout, \textit{Democracy}, 104, 145-146.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 12.
\textsuperscript{18} Little, 288-289. Stout, 11, 136; 203-204: “an antitraditionalist conception of modern democracy as a tradition.”
Pavel Hejzlar, “Beyond Foundationalism and Relativism in Social Theory: MacIntyre, Stout and Walzer,”
\textit{Communio Viatorum} 47 (2005), 310.
The key to Stout’s reconceptualization of democracy lies in his distinction between prereflexive and reflexive forms of practice. He develops an expressivist account of ethics that, in sharing much with Rorty’s pragmatism, conceives norms as initially implicit in the various social practices constitutive of a particular community. In prereflexive ethical communities individuals lack the expressive resources to make explicit in the form of claims, what Stout, following Robert Brandom, calls the ‘material-practical inferential commitments’ implicit in a particular practice. Practical reasoning in at least implicitly democratic contexts presupposes the individual’s capacity to objectify such commitments, a capacity that sets the conditions of possibility for the ongoing evaluation or contestation of norms both within and between traditions. Although this capacity for critical distance is foreign to MacIntyre and Hauerwas’ restrictive notion of tradition, it is compatible with the actual process of intra- and inter-communal debate that is frequently portrayed in MacIntyre and Hauerwas’ work. Stout’s own work in *Democracy and Tradition* can be read as an attempt to objectify the norms that are implicit in the practices of critical reflection and reason-exchange themselves.

At the heart of democracy stands a process or practice of ‘giving and asking for reasons,’ an ongoing and contingently-grounded tradition or culture that modifies the way in which individuals relate to their own particular communities and to those who stand differently committed. In other words, the democratic tradition is constituted by those practices in which individuals hold both insiders and outsiders of any particular community accountable for their commitments. Socialization within a distinctively democratic context contributes to the formation of certain distinctive ‘habits, attitudes and dispositions,’ such as tolerance, humility, openness, mutual respect, and critical reflection that condition the character of this process.19

Since democratic norms are the product of contingent social practices, Stout, like Rorty, argues against positing a common form of human reason or morality capable of underwriting the democratic project. In other words, democratic ethical norms, when made explicit, are defeasible and open to contestation in much the same way that MacIntyre conceives of Thomism. By extension, like Rorty, Stout must argue that the role-independent obligations and rights advanced within liberal societies are universal only in aspiration or are role-specific in the sense that they apply to those who already engage in democratic practice.

By reconceiving democracy as a tradition that objectifies the norms implicit in the process of reason-exchange Stout is also able to rehabilitate modern individualism in ways that are congruent with traditionalism’s wider notion of discourse. According to Stout, proponents of the narrow form of tradition correlate the rise of modern ethical and political discourse with a non-deferential and intrinsically impious form of individualism that destroys the conditions of possibility for the development of genuine virtue. Stout rejects both the liberal view that conceives individuality ‘as essentially atomistic and possessive’ and the traditionalist position that correlates an individual’s ‘just…response to the sources of one’s existence and progress through life’ with her ‘deference toward…hierarchical powers.’ In contrast with these extreme options, Stout argues that it is possible to combine a distinctively modern emphasis on ‘self-respect and self-reliance’ with a traditionalist emphasis on piety.20 Drawing on the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, Stout emphasizes a ‘relative’ form of ‘autonomy.’ More specifically, Stout argues ‘self-reliant democratic individuals’ stand in a unique position to ‘make something of their inheritance’ by drawing on ‘whatever traditional stories, exemplary lives,21 communal structures, poetic images and critical arguments prove valuable’ in the

21 Stout, Democracy, 163-166, 172-173; 171: “the essay and novel represent forms of moral inquiry that constantly frustrate the desire for characters that straightforwardly personify abstractions just as they frustrate the desire for
cultivation of character.\textsuperscript{22} From the perspective of democratic self-reliance, Stout rejects both the traditionalist emphasis on ‘extrinsic authority’ – ‘authority based on position or power’ – and liberal ‘antiauthoritarianism’ (with its correlative ‘foundationalism’). In line with his notion of reason-exchange Stout argues that all claims to authority are ‘defeasible’ or open to contestation, a move that envisions authority as an ‘entitlement’ earned insofar as one expresses ‘judgments that withstand critical scrutiny in a discussion open to all.’\textsuperscript{23}

4.3 \textbf{Reason-Exchange, Second-Generation Liberalism and Secularization}

Stout also defines his own positive account of democratic discourse or reason-exchange between free and equal individuals against the restrictive approaches of second generation liberals. In his discussion of second generation liberalism, Stout introduces and critiques two prominent accounts of political deliberation: John Rawls’ revised social-contract theory and Richard Rorty’s pragmatic appeal to the ‘Jeffersonian Compromise.’

On the one hand, the later Rawls conceives the conception of justice as fairness as a ‘free-standing political conception,’ a ‘thin conception of the good’ acceptable to individuals who stand committed to alternative comprehensive doctrines.\textsuperscript{24} According to Rawls, the ‘principle of justice as fairness’ that sets the conditions of possibility for social cooperation is selected by citizens from behind a ‘veil of ignorance.’ a standpoint that prescinds from all factors stories that straightforwardly illustrate morals....these genres explore a world in which things are too complicated, morally speaking for the culture of paideia to be sustained in its original form.” M. Cathleen Kaveny, “Between Example and Doctrine: Contract Law and Common Morality,” \textit{Journal of Religious Ethics} 33 (2005), 670.


that contextualize an individual’s life.\textsuperscript{25} The result is a ‘social contract’ structured by those ‘ideals and principles that no reasonable person could reasonably reject.’\textsuperscript{26} Stout criticizes this type of approach for appealing to a restrictive notion of public reason that correlates unreasonableness with an individual’s decision to reason from premises that presume the validity of a distinctively thick conception of the good.\textsuperscript{27} Although Rawls’ ‘proviso’ tempers this notion of public reason, he continues to demand that the conclusions arrived at on the basis of comprehensive claims be complemented by an appeal to purely contractual concerns.\textsuperscript{28} In doing so, Stout argues that Rawls effectively restricts the religious believer’s right to freely express and appeal to her most fundamental commitments as a basis for ethical and political reasoning.\textsuperscript{29} Stout contrasts the ‘contractarian’ program’s ‘moralistic’ account of ‘restraint,’ its appeal to the privileged epistemic perspective associated with the ‘veil of ignorance,’ with Rorty’s pragmatic or prudential argument for privatization in ‘Religion as a Conversation-stopper.’\textsuperscript{30} Appealing to the ‘Jeffersonian compromise,’\textsuperscript{31} Rorty argues that the introduction of reasons derived from religious traditions is ‘likely to bring a potentially productive democratic conversation grinding to a halt.’\textsuperscript{32} According to Stout, traditionalist critiques of liberal democracy inappropriately presuppose the adequacy of these overly restrictive accounts of political deliberation.\textsuperscript{33}

Although Stout commends both Rawls and Rorty for conceiving democratic practice as a form of ‘conversation,’ he criticizes both authors for inappropriately defining the character of

\textsuperscript{25} Stout, Democracy, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{26} Stout, Democracy, 64-65, 67.
\textsuperscript{27} Stout, Democracy, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{29} Sherlock, 634, 635. Stout, Democracy, 64, 70.
\textsuperscript{31} Rorty, 169. Stout, Democracy, 86.
\textsuperscript{32} Stout, Democracy, 86, 89-90. Rorty, 171, “we weren’t discussing your private life; we were discussing public policy.” Stout, “Presidential,” 354-355.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 77.
democratic dialogue and debate in ways that exclude religious premises. By affirming ‘the contingency or accidental character of one’s basic norms and convictions,’ Stout sides with traditionalists in arguing that Rawls’ attempt to found political deliberation on a contractarian basis acceptable to all individuals is ‘epistemologically dubious.’ According to Stout, Rawls’ conceptions of epistemic entitlement and public discourse remain wed in certain inappropriate ways to Kantian moral theory. On the one hand, Stout argues that Rawls neglects the way in which an individual’s ‘collateral commitments’ – those context-dependent ethical norms that structure communal ‘social practices’ – entitle her to espouse alternative answers to ‘basic political questions.’ On the other hand, he argues that Rawls’ notion of public reason is insufficiently dialogical in character, focused as it is on a collection of purportedly context-independent norms. Stout argues similarly that Rorty’s pragmatic ‘compromise’ unwittingly engenders the very conversational road-blocks that the latter tends to associate primarily with the introduction of religious reasons in the public square. According to Stout, although individuals may be epistemologically entitled to hold a particular belief, much less frequently are individuals successful in offering arguments that justify that belief to others, a fact that tends to ‘create a potential impasse in conversation.’ If Rorty’s exclusion of religious premises from public discourse stems from the potential they have for creating precisely this type of dialogical gridlock, consistency demands that other non-shared premises (including non-religious commitments) ought to be restricted as well. The reality, as Stout argues, is that ‘reasons

35 Stout, *Democracy*, 67-68.
38 Ibid, 87-88.
39 Ibid, 87-89.
actually held in common do not get us far enough toward answers to enough of our political questions’: Rorty’s ‘policy itself would be a conversation-stopper.’

In developing his own positive account of ‘what transpires between people engaging in public discourse,’ Stout distinguishes the rigidly ‘secularist’ proposals of Rawls and Rorty from a relatively benign process of ‘secularization.’ According to his narrative account of modernity’s genesis, secularized ethical discourse arises as a ‘prudential’ response to the fact of pluralism. Since citizens in a modern democratic society do not ‘share all the same religious, cultural and ethical perspectives,’ no participants engaged in public ethical and political discourse are in a position to presuppose that their own standpoint is ‘shared by all.’ Stout affirms a more ‘permissive notion of epistemic entitlement’ that regards ethical norms as ‘creatures’ of the ‘social practices’ constitutive of a particular community or culture. From this perspective, he reconceives secularized democratic discourse as an open-ended discussion capable of admitting the introduction of premises from any particular narrative-tradition. More specifically, Stout conceives democratic practice as a genuinely ‘dialogical’ and ‘dialectical’ process whereby citizens who possess different commitments explicate their reasons for affirming a particular conclusion in an atmosphere of ‘mutual recognition’ and ‘respect.’ Denying the restrictive Rawlsian notion of ‘public reason,’ he correlates a participant’s ‘reasonableness’ with her willingness to meet another’s position on its own terms and to practice ‘immanent criticism.’ The latter refers to a technique whereby each participant attempts to

40 Ibid, 89-90.
41 Ibid, 93-102.
43 Helfand, 100-101. Stout, Ethics, 188. Talisse and Clanton, 357-358.
persuade those who stand differently committed to adopt one’s position by appealing to the other’s own premises.\textsuperscript{46}

In this way it becomes possible for Stout to reconceive the relationship between the right and the good and, by extension, the relationship between public and private, along lines that respect the contingency and historicity of human development. Although Stout drops Rawls’ talk of the priority of the right over the good, I believe that the norms of democratic reason-exchange he articulates function in a way analogous to the right in Rawls’ political liberalism. More specifically, democratic norms provide a contingently-grounded thin conception of the good that guides and governs unconstrained dialogue between individuals capable of contesting each other’s commitments. From this perspective, the distinctive virtues that socialization in democratic contexts help generate serve as means to the end of this thin conception of the good. At the same time, these norms and the virtues that support their realization in particular contexts provide the basis for shaping the character of the various thick conceptions of the good embedded in particular traditions. In other words, they play a role analogous to Rawls’ political conception of justice insofar as they delimit the shape of permissive thick conceptions of the good. To speak of the public realm or sphere is to speak of the process whereby individuals share what formerly would have been considered strictly private and ultimately arbitrary reasons in an environment of mutual respect and openness. The public domain thus remains, at least so far as Stout is concerned, unsullied by but not inhospitable to the various metaphysical commitments constitutive of the particular traditions that enter democratic debate.

\textsuperscript{46} Stout, \textit{Democracy}, 71, 73-74, 81-83; 90-91. As Stout notes, it is precisely this conception of conversation as a “kind of discursive exchange in which ‘our focus shifts…to the relation between alternative standards of justification’ that has the potential to move participants beyond the potential impasses that arise when individuals express conflicting commitments.” Fergusson, 185.
4.4 Truth and Justification in Pragmatic Perspective

At the same time, Stout is concerned to address the charge that by precluding appeal to a purportedly ‘common morality’ his account of democratic discussion leads to skepticism or relativism. The former denies that individuals ‘are justified in believing whatever moral truths there may be’ and the latter ‘abandons the idea that we can justifiably apply moral propositions to people outside our own culture.’ According to Stout, the skeptic typically argues that the justification of any particular claim is a function of argumentation rooted in universally compelling principles. In responding, Stout distinguishes between being entitled to a belief and justifying that belief via argument and argues in contrast with the skeptic that both are contextually specific.

First, in line with his take on epistemic entitlement, Stout argues that different environments of socialization entitle individuals to hold alternative commitments even in the absence of justificatory arguments provided those individuals ‘are doing the best that could be done under the circumstances.’ Instead of leading to skepticism, Stout claims that this position ought to generate ‘humility’ or ‘fallibilism’ with respect to one’s own commitments and a form of charity that respects the other’s equal entitlement to alternative commitments given her own particular context. Second, Stout argues that even in instances where justificatory arguments are offered, since the ‘relevant reasons’ are specific to a particular ‘audience,’ it makes no sense to aim at offering justifications that would be compelling to an audience of all ‘rational agents.’

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48 Ibid, 231-234.
50 A ‘fallibilism’ that leaves individuals open to the possibility that contextual change will precipitate a revision of one’s own commitments.
52 Stout, Democracy, 234-237.
At the same time Stout argues that this context-dependent account of entitlement and justification is compatible with a ‘nonrelativist’ conception of truth. 53 Stout develops this point by making reference to Rorty’s ‘cautionary use’ of the word true: although ‘we may be justified nowadays in believing P…P might not be true,’ a claim that helps ‘preserve a spirit of self-critically open-ended inquiry.’ 54 In other words, Stout distinguishes between an individual’s entitlement to a particular claim – something that may be altered through a change of epistemic context or conversation – and the enduring truth-value of that claim. 55 By retaining this distinction between entitlement or justification and truth – thereby resisting the relativist’s penchant for explaining genuine conflict away – Stout is able to argue that when two individuals hold opposed claims each is entitled to believe that the other is wrong. 56 From this perspective, he conceives the ‘moral law,’ not as an ‘ideal system’ of ‘axioms’ that is ‘already functioning’ as a ‘criterion for deciding which moral claims are true,’ but as an ‘imaginative projection.’ The latter allows him to emphasize the ‘gap between the concepts of truth and justification, between the content of an ideal ethics and what we are currently justified in believing.’ 57

According to Stout, the adoption of an ‘absolute’ or ‘nonrelative’ notion of truth need not imply a distinctively ‘Platonizing kind of moral realism.’ This type of ‘metaphysical’ approach defines or ‘explains’ truth as a relation of correspondence between ‘a moral proposition and a culturally-transcendent…realm of moral values.’ 58 Stout criticizes metaphysical realists of this type for falsely presuming that individuals have unmediated and intuitive access to an ahistorical

54 Stout, Democracy, 249, 253.
55 Ibid, 240, 254-255. “Truth pertains to the conceptual content of a claim, not the epistemic responsibility of the person who accepts or asserts it.”
56 Ibid, 239.
57 Ibid, 240, 243, 245.
and culture-transcendent moral law that functions as a standard for assessing the relative truth of any particular moral proposition. In addition, he argues that proponents of this view fail to actually ‘explain’ the concept of truth in a meaningful way: ‘saying that a proposition corresponds to the facts is…just another way of saying that the proposition is true, not a way of explaining its truth.’ Stout characterizes his own alternative middle-ground approach as a form of ‘minimalism’ or ‘modest pragmatism’ that avoids both ‘pejorative’ forms of metaphysical realism and ‘post-modern’ antirealism. He argues ‘most ordinary people’ – contrary to what the metaphysically inclined believe – ‘exhibit a practical grasp of what truth is in their day-to-day speech….by mastering paradigmatic uses of [the word] true.’ More specifically, he claims that it remains possible to affirm ‘an ethos of fallibility and self-criticism’ essential to the ‘cautionary’ use of the word true ‘without adopting a theory that makes moral facts or the moral law capable of explaining what it is for true moral propositions to be true.’

4.5 Critical Reflections on Stout’s Democratic Middle-Ground

Stout’s attempt to forge a middle-ground approach to modern ethical and political reasoning is to be commended on many fronts. First, he rightly criticizes second-generation liberals and traditionalists for misconstruing the nature of democratic practice. Second, his own alternative approach succeeds in combining traditionalist respect for historicity, narrative, and virtue with liberal emphases on self-determination and reason-exchange in a novel and compelling way. By refashioning democracy as a collection of practices that shape the way in which individuals relate to their heritage and to outsiders, Stout successfully reconceives

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60 Proponents of the latter tend to conceive of ‘truth-talk as implicitly committed to realistic metaphysical ideas that are incoherent.’
62 Stout, *Democracy*, 25, 248; 253: “If the point of realism is simply to stress that whether a given proposition is true or false depends not only on its conceptual content but also on the objects, properties, relations and values and so forth being referred to, then again I have no problem accepting the point.”
democratic discourse as a form of conversation that respects an individual’s rights to express her thick commitments. In contrast with Catholic authors who criticize Stout’s emphasis on democratic ‘self-reliance’ for eroding respect for the hierarchical authority of the magisterium, I consider Stout’s retrieval of democratic individuality to be one of the most significant accomplishments of his work.63 By conceiving the modern subject structured by democratic reason-exchange as uniquely self-reflective, Stout avoids both liberal attempts to evade historicity and broadly communitarian approaches that regard the subject as subordinate to her inheritance.

At the same time that I commend Stout for defending a notion of democratic individuality that appears tied to a viable account of post-conventional living, I follow several authors in questioning the epistemological status of his pragmatic alternative. According to Stout’s account, ethical norms and obligations – including democratic commitments – are internal to the various social practices constitutive of a particular culture or community. The problem with this position is that it tends to reduce the moral subject to a product or function of social practices, a result that even Stout’s notion of democratic individuality does not appear to avoid.64 Since democratic commitments govern a collection of contingent social practices, it does not appear possible to argue that the ‘self-reliant’ subject fashioned by Stout is normative for anyone who does not already stand committed to a democratic notion of tradition.65 If all he wants to say is that the conceptualization of democratic norms implicit in the process of reason-exchange are context-dependent but that the practices of which they are explications are transculturally normative, then

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63 Schindler, 26: “any Christian body that recognizes Scripture, the ecumenical councils, classical Christian ethics, and other sources as authoritative will ultimately run afoul of what he considers the discursive demands of the democratic ethos.”


I would have little quarrel with Stout’s account. The reality, however, is that Stout – particularly in his rejection of ‘metaphysics’ – appears to be making the stronger claim that there is no ‘self-reliant’ moral subject to discover or that there are only subjects constructed by the roles constitutive of a particular culture. This commitment ironically commits Stout to a metaphysical claim about the nature of human subjectivity. By denying certain defenders of democracy a more robust moral foundation, Stout appears to be left with next to no philosophical basis – beyond immanent criticism\(^{67}\) for commending democracy in contrast with other traditions including those that he rightly rejects as being pejoratively hierarchical.\(^{68}\) However, this leaves Stout in exactly the same position that MacIntyre is left in when he can provide no transcendental basis for commending Thomism as a tradition that structures reason-exchange. If the democratic norms that govern reason-exchange are constitutive of just one tradition among others, then Stout appears incapable of avoiding the stronger skeptical and or relativist implications he fights hard to avoid. The question remains: why ought an individual commit herself to democratic norms of tolerance and reason-exchange in the first-place?

### 4.6 Conclusion to Part I

Part I of this dissertation examined and conducted an immanent critique of two prominent paradigms in the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate. Authors on both sides of this debate share a common cognitive and evaluative critique of classical liberalism grounded in certain shared post-modern presuppositions. Although both sides criticize the Enlightenment project for its rationalism and narrow individualism, they develop radically different responses to the breakdown of the modern project. On the one hand, Alasdair MacIntyre regards the rise of

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67 Immanent criticism is itself partisan. See the debate between historicism and transcendental norms in Chapter 1.
modern individualism and foundationalism as irredeemable instances of civilizational decline and advocates, in response, a social teleological or tradition-constituted retrieval of Aristotle and Aquinas. On the other hand, contemporary liberals such as John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout take seriously the communitarian critique of Enlightenment foundationalism and liberalism. All three authors develop consciously post-metaphysical retrievals of modernity compatible with postmodern respect for historicity. It has been my contention that all four authors’ commitments to a collection of post-modern presuppositions lead to a series of tensions in their work that hinder their capacities to critically ground their basic claims or to combine complementary insights present on both sides. Drawing on the work of Bernard Lonergan, Part II of this dissertation aims to trace an alternative narrative of decline and retrieval. The former will situate post-modern historicism’s limitations within a series of methodological oversights. The latter will aim at providing a constructive alternative that integrates and sublates insights from both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate.
Part II: Bernard Lonergan’s Alternative Narrative of Decline and Retrieval

Chapter 5

The Structure of the Human Good and the Evolution of Human Meaning

5. Introduction

Part II of this dissertation shifts the focus from the liberal-communitarian debate to an alternative account of decline and retrieval inspired by the work of Bernard Lonergan. The first step in Part II’s multi-stage argument is concerned with articulating a heuristic framework for investigating the various authors in my narrative of philosophic development. This framework focuses on the relationship between two main features: (a) a heuristic account of the evolution of human meaning; and (b) the way in which methodological presuppositions shape the subject’s response to or negotiation of the former.

Lonergan’s account of the evolution of human meaning is expressed in two closely related ways. Throughout his work, he develops a ‘formal’ \(^1\) and open \(^2\) account of the human good constituted by a ‘general invariant structure’ \(^3\) or ‘universal phenomenon’ \(^4\) relevant to all human societies and cultures at any stage of human development. \(^5\) According to Lonergan, this structure includes three historically-successive and interrelated patterns or modes of human operating: sensitive spontaneity, practical intelligence and culture. \(^6\) In other locations, he

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Although the earliest account of the human good is found in *Insight*, Lonergan’s most differentiated schematization of this structure is found on page 47 of *Method in Theology*. I have reproduced this schema below:
distinguishes between spontaneity and ‘levels of integration’\(^7\) or ‘plateaus’\(^8\) in the development of human meaning. This latter way of speaking includes the three levels of the human good but incorporates two additional stages. The resulting expanded historical narrative distinguishes between four stages: the emergence of society via intellectual development; the emergence of classical culture via reflective development; the modern turn to the subject; and the rise of historical consciousness. The latter two achievements represent further differentiations of the control of meaning that recognize first, the priority of epistemology over metaphysics, and second, the reality of historical development and diversity. In what follows, I shall trace the emergence and interrelation of these levels or stages in the evolution of human meaning beginning with sensitive spontaneity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potentiality</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Actuation</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>capacity, need</td>
<td>operation</td>
<td>cooperation</td>
<td>particular good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plasticity, perfectibility</td>
<td>development, skill</td>
<td>institution, role, task</td>
<td>good of order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liberty</td>
<td>orientation, conversion</td>
<td>personal relations</td>
<td>terminal values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Line one is roughly correlative with the reality and effects of human spontaneity. Line two is roughly correlative with the reality and society constituting effects of practical intelligence. Line three links the relative authenticity of culture – itself responsible for negotiating the demands of spontaneity and practical intelligence – to the orientation or basic horizon of the subject.

\(^7\) See Lonergan, “Differentials,” 73-78. Lonergan names four levels: undifferentiated common sense, differentiated common sense, classicism, and historical consciousness.

\(^8\) Lonergan, “Natural Right,” 176-179. Lonergan distinguishes between three plateaus: civilization, classical culture and interiority. The distinction between the turn to the subject, historical consciousness and the resulting need for self-appropriation are not clearly distinguished here. For the purposes of my heuristic framework I shall distinguish an initial turn to interiority in the modern rise of epistemology and its commitment to the classical control of meaning from the subsequent rise of probabilistic science and historical consciousness. Lonergan hints at this in “Natural Right,” 178-180, where he speaks of a second plateau negotiation of the exigencies proper to the third plateau.
5.1 Spontaneity and Primitive Community

According to Lonergan, the first level of the human good is at least partly constituted by the subject’s sensitive and vital spontaneity. Sensitive spontaneity includes those predispositions or instinctual drives, tendencies and or urges that propel individuals to procure the variety of particular goods required for sustaining and generating life. At this most ‘elementary’ or premoral level, he associates the good with the object of spontaneous desire and the satisfaction of such desire with bodily pleasure or enjoyment. Lonergan further distinguishes between two primordial orientations constitutive of the spontaneous subject. On the one hand, he argues that individuals are naturally oriented to seek and secure precisely those particular goods that satisfy fundamental biological needs. On the other hand, he denies that the individual’s appetite for self-preservation leads to a ‘monadic’ or atomistic view of the subject. Equally primordial is the subject’s ‘spontaneous intersubjectivity,’ a collection of naturally arising pro-social emotions and predispositions that ground primitive forms of cooperation. These spontaneous feelings of ‘belonging together’ – typified by the affective bonds that link kin members to one another – motivate elementary forms of ‘mutual aid’ that sublate the individual’s concern for self-preservation. In other words, ‘prior to the ‘we’ that results from the mutual love of an ‘I’ and a ‘thou’ there is the earlier ‘we’ that precedes the distinction of subjects and survives its

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14 Ibid.
oblivion.\textsuperscript{15} Such ‘vital unity’ supplies the affective groundwork for ‘primitive’ and all subsequent variations of community.\textsuperscript{16}

On the one hand, the operating and cooperating of non-human animals can be accounted for by appealing to their perceptions and concomitant instinctive responses in the absence of higher cognitive functions. On the other hand, these sensitive and vital spontaneities supply a ‘coincidental manifold’ capable of higher integration or sublation by human intentionality.\textsuperscript{17}

More specifically, Lonergan argues that a fully human notion of the good is dependent upon spontaneous and distinctively human capacities for understanding, reflection, deliberation and choice. These physiologically-grounded capacities usher individuals out of the realm or ‘world of immediacy’ constituted exclusively by prehuman instinct and into the constantly developing ‘world mediated by meaning’ constituted by human intelligence and language.\textsuperscript{18}

The initial benefits of instrumental reason emerge for humans at the first level of the human good as primitive humans develop tools and concomitant skills for facilitating the satisfaction of biological needs.\textsuperscript{19} Common sense knowledge or practical intelligence moves in cyclic fashion from situation or problem to the generation, evaluation and actualization of ideas

\textsuperscript{15} Lonergan, \textit{Method}, 57.
that transform the situation \textit{ad infinitum}.\textsuperscript{20} Lonergan argues that the interventions of practical intelligence at this level remain largely ‘incidental’ to the rhythms of spontaneous living typical of intersubjective hunter-gatherer communities whose ‘schemes of recurrence are simple prolongations of prehuman attainment.’\textsuperscript{21} Building upon the primitive predispositions that ground spontaneous cooperation, the development of practical intelligence culminates in the transition from the customs of primitive communities to the conventionally-driven structures constitutive of civilized societies.\textsuperscript{22}

5.2 \textbf{Practical Intelligence and Civil Community}

At this second level of the human good,\textsuperscript{23} the primary focus shifts from the isolated satisfaction of particular needs to the ‘good of order’ that sets the conditions of possibility for the recurring satisfaction of particular needs.\textsuperscript{24} Constituted by the variety of intelligently-designed institutional frameworks or patterns of cooperation, the good of order is ‘not the object of any single desire, for it stands to single desires as system to systematized, as universal condition to particulars that are conditioned.’\textsuperscript{25} The ongoing functioning of such schemes or structures is facilitated by the specialization of individuals within civil community or society. By exploiting the developing child’s ‘plasticity’ and ‘perfectibility’ – capacities that condition the higher

\textsuperscript{23} The second level of the human good is roughly correlative with Lonergan’s second ‘level of integration’ and the first ‘plateau.’
integration of sensitive spontaneity – socialization contributes to the development and execution of the various ‘skills’ and ‘tasks’ demanded by institutional roles.26

According to Lonergan, the ongoing development of technological innovations, economic schemes, and political structures constitutive of civil community or society are paradigmatic examples of the good of order.27 The first dimension in this threefold structure focuses on the invention, production and utilization of mechanical and technological devices. These inventions range from rudimentary implements such as spears and nets to modern supercomputers that are ‘produced…not because they themselves are desired but because they expedite and accelerate’ the satisfaction of spontaneously-arising needs.28 Since the continuous implementation of practical ideas and material innovations requires the cooperation of individuals, the emergence of technology and the formation of capital generate a division of labour and concomitant differentiation of skills and correlative tasks.29 Such ‘material progress’ and the developing cooperative schemes it engenders lead to the emergence of an economic system. Lonergan defines the latter as ‘some procedure that sets the balance between the production of consumer goods and new capital formation, some method that settles what quantities of what goods and services are to be supplied, some device for assigning tasks to individuals and for distributing among them the common product.’30 Since each stage in the ongoing process of technological and economic development generates disagreements

27 Lonergan, “Role,” 109. Lonergan traces the development of technology-economy-polity in Insight, 232-247. Lonergan does not restrict the good-of-order to the triad of technology-economy-polity. On more than one occasion he suggests that wherever there is a particular need that recurs, a cooperative scheme will arise to meet it.
29 Ibid, 234: “concrete realization of new practical ideas….invites men to specialize in the skillful use of particular tools and the expeditious performance of particular tasks.” Ibid, 247, “in its technological aspect the social order generates the distinctions between scientists and engineers, technicians and workers, skilled and unskilled labour.”
30 Ibid, 234; 247, “in its economic aspect [the social order]…differentiates the formation of capital from the production of consumer goods and services, distinguishes income groups by offering proportionate rewards to contributions and organizes contributors in hierarchies of employees, foremen, supervisors, superintendents, managers and directors.”
concerning the suitability and realization of new ideas, civil communities typically cannot function in the absence of the ‘polity.’” The ‘political specialization of common sense’ includes those skills of persuasion possessed by charismatic leaders who are responsible for generating agreement and cooperation amidst a diversity of opinion.

The mutually conditioning relationship or dialectical conjunction of sensitive spontaneity and practical intelligence that begins to predominate with the emergence of civil community is not without its tensions. Although sensitive spontaneity typically propels human beings to seek their own and others preservation, the interference of such primordial desires with the ongoing unfolding of human intelligence can distort the development of common sense knowledge in ways that jeopardize the common good. Lonergan specifically names two forms of bias that reflect disordered forms of interaction. The first – individual bias or personal egoism – arises when the spontaneous drive for self-preservation overcomes spontaneously arising pro-social emotions and co-opts practical intelligence in service of its own particular good. The second – group bias or collective egoism – arises when spontaneous intersubjective feelings generate ‘us vs. them’ mentalities that lead social groups to skew the formation and operation of the good of order to serve the particular needs of their limited membership. It is this tension between spontaneity and practical intelligence that sets the context for Lonergan’s discussion of culture as a potentially higher integration of these linked but opposed principles.

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31 Ibid, 234; 247, “in its political aspect [the social order]…distinguishes legislative, judicial, diplomatic, and executive functions with their myriad ramifications, and it works some system in which the various offices are to be filled and the tasks performed.”

32 Ibid, 234.

33 Lonergan, *Insight*, 242-243: “there will be a dialectic if (1) there is an aggregate of events of a determinate character, (2) the events may be traced to either or both of two principles, (3) the principles are opposed yet bound together, and (4) they are modified by the changes that successively result from them.” According to Lonergan, the tension between spontaneity and practical intelligence constitutes the ‘dialectic of community.’


5.3 The Control of Meaning and Cultural Community

At this third level of the human good the focus shifts from isolated instances of desire or need and the institutionalized ‘schemes of recurrence’ that ensure the ongoing satisfaction of the former, to the higher integration of practical intelligence in service of spontaneity effected by culture. The key here lies in grasping the distinction between the social and cultural dimensions of living. The former refers to a community’s ‘way of life’ or those frameworks that condition the possibility of ‘orderly’ and ‘predictable’ cooperation highlighted in section 5.2. The latter arises as humans aim to ‘discover and express the appropriateness, the meaning, the significance, the value and the use of their way of life as a whole and in its parts.’ This ‘complex web of meanings and values which make a way of life worth living, and a society worth belonging to’ supply the criteria for assessing the relative value of any particular good and the institutional frameworks that serve their recurrent satisfaction. Culture supplies the horizon – correlative with a community’s conception of human fulfillment – within which individuals affirm those ‘terminal values’ that condition the selection, development and revision of spontaneous desires and the broader goods of order that serve them.

Lonergan draws a further distinction between ‘lower’ or pre-critical and ‘higher’ or reflexive forms of culture. Pre-critical cultures are structured by an ‘everyday’ or ‘common-sense’ level of ‘values and meanings’ constituted primarily by those spontaneous or immediate

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'affective responses’ shaped via the appropriation of communal ‘rituals, stories, legends, [and] myths.' At this stage in cultural development individuals lack the reflexive techniques required for them to objectify and evaluate the various meanings and values implicit in everyday common sense living in more than rudimentary ways. Lonergan associates the movement from lower to higher or superstructural forms of culture with the emergence of ‘classical culture,’ the ‘second plateau’ correlative with the ‘the emergence of individualism,’ ‘the intellectual pattern of experience’ or the ‘Greek achievement’ c. 500 BCE. This shift bears with it the technical precision of theoretical knowledge that sets the conditions of possibility for open-eyed control of everyday meaning and value.

5.4 The Modern ‘Turn to the Subject’

Associated with the work of both early modern empiricists such as Locke and rationalists such as Descartes and Kant, the modern ‘turn to the subject’ shifts the basis of philosophical reflection from the ‘object of philosophy to the philosophizing subject.’ The emergence of a further stage in the development of human meaning and consciousness occurs initially in the

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42 Ibid.


early modern period. Lonergan argues that the Enlightenment in general and the scientific revolution (c. 1680) in particular mark a transition from Aristotelian metaphysics and essentialism in natural philosophy to the distinctively modern concern for empirical science and epistemological inquiry. The rise of epistemology as an independent philosophical pursuit precipitates a distinctively modern turn from a metaphysical account of human knowing and choosing based on an analysis of the soul’s faculties, to an emphasis on subjectivity or consciousness.

5.5 The Rise of Probabilistic Science and Historical Consciousness

The final development is associated with the interrelated emergence of probabilistic science and historical consciousness. The former development trades classical science’s fixation with necessity, permanence and universality for ‘probability’ or ‘de facto intelligibility.’ This shift, from the static workings of deductive logic to a method of ‘observation, experimentation and…empirical verification,’ allows modern science to remain ‘intrinsically open to ever new discoveries.’ As a result, science shifts from ‘an unchanging

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46 One might speak of a subdivision within the third plateau here. The initial response to the epistemological turn occurs on the second plateau or the third level of integration.
49 This final development may be interpreted as a subdivision of the third plateau or as the fourth level of integration.
system’ to an ‘ever-ongoing process.’ The corresponding rise of historical consciousness is typically associated with the 19th century birth of ‘critical history.’ From the perspective of ‘historical scholarship’ culture ceases to be conceived as ‘normative’ or absolute and instead comes to be viewed in ‘empirical’ terms as ‘a particular manifestation of the creative self-constitution achieved by a particular people at a particular point in their history.’ Together, the emergence of probabilistic science and historical consciousness initiate the contemporary crisis of meaning, the search for an alternative higher level control of meaning in the wake of classical culture’s breakdown.

5.6 The Dialectic of History

According to Lonergan, each of these stages represents a structural achievement, a genuine instance of progress in the evolution of human meaning. At the same time, the way in which individuals respond to or navigate these structural developments varies widely. More specifically, it is my contention that at the root of dialectically-opposed responses to such achievements stand mutually exclusive accounts of human knowing, choosing and religious experience. An analysis of the conjunction between these stages in the evolution of human meaning and the subject’s basic horizon or fundamental orientation yields a version of what

52 Ibid.
54 McPartland, Historiography, 137-138. Lonergan, “The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical Mindedness,” in A Second Collection, 2, “there are two positions. One may be named classicist, conservative, traditional; the other may be named modern, liberal, perhaps historicist.” Lonergan, Method, 325, “briefly, the theoretical premises form which there follows the historicity of human thought and action are (1) that human concepts, theories, affirmations, courses of action are expressions of human understanding, (2) that human understanding develops over time and, as it develops, human concepts, theories, affirmations and courses of action change, (3) that such change is cumulative and (4) that the cumulative change in one place or time are not to be expected to coincide with those in another.”
Lonergan terms the ‘dialectic of history.’ In what follows, I intend to develop a selective narrative of what Lonergan calls ‘philosophic development,’ an exemplification of the dialectic of history that focuses, in particular, on the relationship between these basic commitments and the stages of human meaning. In chapter 6 I will introduce two methodological oversights that will form the backdrop for my narrative of decline that culminates in the post-modern presuppositions shared in similar albeit significantly different ways by authors on both sides of Part I’s debate. In chapter 10, I will articulate an alternative account of democratic practice designed to transcend these oversights in general and post-modern overreactions to them in particular.

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57 Lonergan, “Differentials,” 50-57, 71-78. Lonergan, “Natural Right,” 180. My effort is in line with what Lonergan terms the ‘critique of our historicity.’ The focus will be on exploring the relationship between methodological presuppositions and the modified four-stage ‘basic division of the materials’ I have outlined above. Another way of naming this relationship is through reference to Lonergan’s distinction between cultural and personal values. The former refers to the criteria that select terminal values responsible for ordering sensitive spontaneity and the goods of order it serves. The latter refers to the subject’s fundamental orientation or horizon – constituted by her basic cognitive, evaluative and religious stances – proximately responsible for directing the ongoing development of culture. On the relationship between cultural and personal values see: Lonergan. Method, 50, 359; 51: “correlative to terminal values are the originating values that do the choosing.” Lonergan, “Differentiations,” 39. Lonergan, “Human Good and Values,” 499. Lonergan, “The Subject,” 69.


60 Chapter 10 will blend features of Lonergan’s fourth, fifth and sixth functional specialties – dialectic, foundations and doctrines respectively. On ‘Foundations’ see chapter eleven of Method in Theology, 266-294. See Lonergan, Method, 268: “at its real root then foundations….is a decision about whom and what you are for and against. It is a decision illuminated by the manifold possibilities exhibited in dialectic. It is a fully conscious decision about one’s horizon, one’s outlook, one’s worldview.” See also Method, 365-366. Here Lonergan argues that dialectic may function as an “instrument for the analysis of social process and the social situation” and, more specifically, that “corresponding to doctrines, systematics and communications in theological method, integrated studies would distinguish policy making, planning, and… execution.”
Chapter 6

Intuitionism and Voluntarism in Classical Liberalism: A Lonerganian Narrative of Decline

6. Introduction

According to Lonergan, certain expressions of modern political philosophy represent intermediate stages in a series of historically successive methodological aberrations whose roots are proximately traceable to the late medieval work of John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. It is my contention that a selective articulation of this series of errors provides the basis for understanding the emergence and subsequent expression of classical liberalism in the work of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Immanuel Kant. This narrative of decline distinguishes between two major and interrelated components: (a) an intuitionist account of human knowing; and (b) a voluntarist account of divine and/or human freedom. Intuitionism combines two cognitional oversights, an overemphasis on propositional first principles and deductive logic with a naïve realist or confrontational view of reality conceived as ‘already out there now.’ The former oversight finds expression in intrinsically closed or pejoratively ‘classicist’ forms of culture that remain constitutionally incapable of negotiating the demands associated with the rise of probabilistic science and historical consciousness. This construal of knowledge as certitude combines in different ways with ‘picture-thinking’ to shape the methodological presuppositions that underlie classical liberalism in thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Immanuel Kant.

1 Although my narrative focuses on tracing the emergence and evolution of a series of methodological oversights, it would be unfair to claim that there are no redeemable qualities in any of the authors investigated in chapters 7-9. As Lonergan is fond of noting, history is always a mixture of progress and decline, a fact that authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate sometimes neglect. One way of highlighting this point would be to distinguish certain achievements such as the modern turn to the subject and the scientific revolution from insufficiently critical responses to such developments. At the same time, the phrase ‘narrative of decline’ usefully highlights the way in which such oversights evolve and shape future truncations of human knowing and choosing.
In rejecting the eudaimonistic orientation of an Aristotelian-Thomist account of human choosing in the wake of the condemnations of 1277, voluntarist reinterpretations of the relationship between intellect and will tend to conceive divine and or human freedom as ‘unfettered’ choice. This shift, in combination with intuitionist presuppositions, conditions the possibility of both: (i) Hobbesian-Lockean forms of individualism that prioritize self-interest and instrumental reason; and (ii) Kant’s attempt to transcend the cognitive, ethical and political limitations of Hobbes and Locke through reference to a transcendental account of human knowing and willing. The expressions of liberalism in Hobbes and Locke represent intermediate stages in the ‘longer cycle of decline’ initiated by ‘general bias,’ a truncation of the human good that tends to negate the independence of cultural values. Kant’s twofold rejection of hypothetical imperatives and divine command ethics underlies an alternative objectification of liberalism.

Kant’s novel approach combines an emphasis on the human will as source of ethical norms with the late medieval emphasis on the categorical nature of obligations. It is this Lonerganian-inspired narrative of liberalism’s emergence and evolution in the work of these particular authors that provides the context for understanding post-modern attempts to retrieve the premodern and the modern respectively.

As prolegomena to this narrative I shall outline the basic features of intuitionism and voluntarism, paying particular attention to the relations between intuitionism and classicism and between voluntarism and general bias. It is my contention that the roots of both noetic phenomenological shifts and their related cultural expression are inspired, at least in part, by the condemnations of 1277.

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2 This is another way of highlighting the distinction I drew in chapter 5 between stages in the evolution of the human meaning and the subject’s methodological presuppositions.
6.1 The Condemnation of 1277 and the Rise of Intuitionism and Voluntarism

It is my contention that the roots of both errors are in certain significant respects traceable to the ‘Augustinian-Aristotelian controversy’ and the related condemnations in 1270 and 1277 of certain theologically dubious propositions by Stephen Tempier, Bishop of Paris. Prior to the 13th century, Christian theologians operated within a worldview shaped primarily by philosophical presuppositions derived from Aristotle’s logic and certain Neoplatonic texts. The introduction of Latin translations of Aristotle’s broader catalogue and the work of Arabic commentators such as Averroes presented medieval theologians with a ‘full-fledged natural cosmology, which explained the world in non-Christian terms. According to the ‘ecclesiastical authorities’ in Paris, the uncritical appropriation of Aristotelian doctrines by members of the arts faculty contradicted Christian teaching by proposing an independently valid standard of truth. At the same time, Tempier’s condemnations extended to certain emphases in the work of Thomas Aquinas that manifested a more balanced attempt to fuse Aristotelian categories with Christian teaching. In what follows I will offer a brief introduction to the themes of intuitionism and voluntarism and their relation to both classicism and general bias.

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4 Leff, *Dissolution*, 25.
6 Leff, *Dissolution*, 25.
7 Ibid, 8.
8 These members are typically named ‘Latin Averroists.’
10 Leff, *Paris and Oxford*, 229; 238: “Thomism was nipped by the same frost that blighted heterodox Aristotelianism. All Thomas’ polemics against the Latin Averroists had not saved some of his own propositions from inclusion, and he shared in the subsequent discredit into which pagan philosophy fell.”
6.2 Intuitionism, Naïve Realism and Classicism

In Lonergan’s estimation, the rise of intuitionism at the level of understanding at least partly stems from the rejection of Aristotle’s substantive works in ‘physics, biology, psychology and metaphysics’ that occurs in the wake of the condemnations.\(^\text{11}\) Although subsequent medieval authors retain Aristotelian psychological and metaphysical categories in their writings, it is Lonergan’s contention that this outward appearance of continuity belies a truncation of the Aristotelian heritage. Speaking of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham in particular, Lonergan notes that both authors ‘accepted Aristotle’s logical works. His other writings they discarded as merely pagan. As a result, they took the *Posterior Analytics* at face value.’\(^\text{12}\) One of the results of this inattention to the complexities of Aristotle and Aquinas’ respective cognitional theories is a neglect of what Lonergan regards as direct and reflective acts of understanding or insight. Direct insights or acts of understanding are those pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual ‘a-ha’ or ‘eureka’ events that mediate between questions that intend intelligibility and the subsequent procession of an inner word or concept.\(^\text{13}\) Neglecting the source of concepts in direct insight, late medieval intuitionists tend to conceive the act of understanding in mechanistic terms as an intellectual perception of a spontaneously-produced conceptual content.\(^\text{14}\) Their inability to identify the intelligent source of mental words in direct acts of understanding confines them to producing conclusions within an excessively abstract and historically-immobile conceptual system.\(^\text{15}\) By conceiving judgment as a tool for the demonstration of conclusions from the conjunction of concepts, intuitionists must typically appeal to some form of naïve realism to guarantee that


\(^{15}\) See for example: Bernard Lonergan, “The Subject,” in *A Second Collection*, 70-75.
concepts correspond with concretely existing objects. This subsequent neglect of reflective insight or of reflective acts of understanding that mediate between questions that intend truth or reality and the proceeding judgments of fact reveals a second dimension to the intuitionist conviction that knowing is analogous to ‘looking’ or ‘seeing.’ In my judgment, the methodological presuppositions of Hobbes, Locke and Kant suffer, in similar albeit significantly different ways, from an oversight of direct and reflective insight.

A useful way to highlight some of the implications of an intuitionist account of human knowing and choosing in Scotus and Ockham is to focus on the distinction that Lonergan draws between the classical control of meaning and its subsequent ‘classicist’ degeneration. According to Lonergan, the medieval expression of the classical form of culture that emerges in the wake of the ‘Greek discovery of mind’ shares five features: ‘(1) control of meaning and expression by a logic; (2) scientific inquiry of the Aristotelian type; (3) the metaphysical soul;...(4) a fixed and unchanging human nature; and (5)...a foundation consisting of propositions that are to be regarded as self-evident, necessary first principles.’ At the heart of the classical control of meaning lies the Aristotelian notion of science conceived as a quest for certitude. Modelled after geometry’s ‘method of demonstrating conclusions about its objects based on antecedently established principles,’ the Aristotelian conception of science conceives reasoning as a ‘matter of deducing necessary conclusions from self-evident principles.’ Although the modern

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16 See for example: Lonergan, *Verbum*, 192.
17 Mark D. Morelli, “Obstacles to the Implementation of Lonergan’s Solution to the Contemporary Crisis of Meaning,” in *The Importance of Insight: Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin*, ed. John J. Liptay and David S. Liptay (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007), 30. This rendering of the features is taken from Morelli’s article. For Lonergan’s own more detailed account of these features see for instance: Bernard Lonergan, “The Future of Thomism,” in *A Second Collection*, 50.
18 This ideal is articulated in the *Posterior Analytics*.
scientific revolution and correlative ‘turn to the subject’ shifts the starting-point of inquiry from metaphysics to epistemology, scientific theory in the early modern period retains a conception of knowledge as universal and certain.21 This commitment to a superstructural level of culture shaped by propositional first principles, deductive logic and the search for certitude links premodern with modern forms of culture and sets both of them apart from post-modern historicism. The result, in all of the above variations, is a static and excessively abstract form of cultural absolutism or ‘normative’ notion of culture that fails to adequately account for the historicity of human meaning.

At the same time, Lonergan and many of his interpreters typically distinguish the de facto differentiation of pre-critical from ‘classical’ culture correlative with the birth of the cultural superstructure22 from the ‘haute vulgarization’ of theory. The latter contributes to a degeneration of the classical ideal that Lonergan came to describe in pejorative terms as ‘classicist.’23 Although proponents of the classical ideal and its classicist degeneration both share in the structural limitations of the classical control of meaning, it is Lonergan’s contention that classicist variations remain intrinsically incapable of transcending these constraints.24 In other words, a pejoratively ‘classicist’ form of culture remains constitutionally incapable of responding

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22 This differentiation represents a genuine achievement or instance of progress in the history of thought.


to the challenges associated with the rise of probabilistic science and critical history. In my judgment, the key to distinguishing between classicist variations of the classical control of meaning and alternatives that remain at least implicitly open to the challenges associated with the rise of modern science and history lies in their respective cognitional theories. More specifically, it is my contention that the emergence of classicist aberrations of the classical control of meaning are intimately tied to the rise of a distinctively intuitionist account of human knowing. In chapter 7, I shall examine the presence of intuitionism and its effects in the work of Scotus and Ockham. In chapter 8 and 9, I shall trace the evolution of these themes in the work of Hobbes, Locke and Kant.

6.3 Voluntarism, General Bias and the ‘Longer Cycle of Decline’

The second major shift precipitated by the condemnation of 1277 that marks successive stages in modern political philosophy concerns the issue of divine sovereignty and, by extension, the character or nature of human freedom. Rather than conceiving God as the ‘immediate creator and conserver of the universe,’ Aristotelian cosmology conceived God as an ‘indirect first mover who did no more than set in motion an eternal process of cause and effect.’ In response to this perceived threat to God’s sovereignty, theologians such as Scotus and Ockham placed significantly more emphasis on the traditional distinction between God’s absolute and ordained power. By tending to prioritize God’s will over God’s intellect, Scotus and Ockham’s voluntarist conception of divine freedom reduced the limitations on God’s absolute power to the principle of contradiction. In a correlative way, Scotus and Ockham inaugurated a voluntarist interpretation of human freedom that prioritized human will over intellect. This shift was motivated by a desire

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25 Leff, Dissolution, 27. See also Leff, Dissolution, 28-29. Leff mentions the relevance of propositions 187, 188, 196 from the condemnation of 1277 in particular.

to safeguard human freedom against a teleological reading of the relationship between intellect and will that regarded the latter as ‘necessitated by knowledge,’ much as ‘beasts are by their appetites.’ The result is what Servais Pinckaers calls a ‘freedom of indifference’ that sets certain key conditions of possibility for early modern liberalism. The combination of voluntarism, classicism and a shared commitment to natural law in the work of Scotus and Ockham generates inconsistencies that Hobbes, Locke, and Kant will seek to resolve in a variety of ways. In Hobbes and Locke, the voluntarist aberration combines with intuitionist presuppositions to generate what Lonergan regards as the ‘general bias of common sense.’

The general bias of common sense is typically the result of both individual and group bias. It refers, in the first instance, to a truncation of the human good that arises insofar as practical intelligence’s concern for the concrete and the immediately practical illegitimately blocks the realization of ‘ideas…that suppose a long view or that set up higher integrations or that involve the solution of intricate and disputed issues.’ Roughly synonymous with the negation of culture’s independent role in providing criteria responsible for negotiating the dialectic of community, this ‘major surrender on the speculative level’ does not negate the reality or utility of theory. On the contrary, Lonergan argues in several places that a distorted ‘adaptation of theory to practice’ – where ‘practice means whatever happens to be done’ – lies

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29 Lonergan, *Insight*, 250-251, 254, 262, 255-256; 253: “common sense has to aim at being subordinated to a human science that is concerned…not only with knowing history but also with directing it. For common sense is unequal to the task of thinking on the level of history….it needs to be guided but it is incompetent to choose its guide.” Bernard Lonergan, “Human Good and Values,” in *Early Works*, 508.

30 Lonergan, “The Role of the Catholic University,” 110. Lonergan, *Insight*, 651. See also *Insight*, 262: “in the limit, culture ceases to be an independent factor that passes a detached yet effective judgment upon capital formation and technology, upon economy and polity. To justify its existence it had to become more and more practical, more and more a factor within the technological, economic, political process, more and more a tool that served palpably useful ends.” Ibid, 256-257: “the succession of less comprehensive viewpoints has been a succession of adaptations of
at the heart of the ‘longer cycle of decline.’ In other words, the distorted forms of practical intelligence engendered by general bias co-opt theory to support the ongoing truncation of the human good by manufacturing a shared ‘conviction that other forms of human knowledge are useless or doubtfully valid.’ As a result, the distorted ‘social situation’ perpetuates itself by forming individuals who are incapable of recognizing the need for a higher integration.

According to Lonergan, this process culminates in the totalitarian viewpoint, the ultimate triumph of practicality where ‘every type of intellectual independence, whether personal, cultural, scientific, philosophic, or religious has no better basis than nonconscious myth.’

Lonergan himself does not correlate any particular historical figures with each stage in this cycle of decline but he is rather clear in tracing the emergence of this series to the late medieval work of Scotus and Ockham. Chapter 7 is devoted, at least in part, to examining the roots of decline in Scotus and Ockham. Chapter 8 traces the emergence and evolution of general bias in the classical liberalism of Hobbes and Locke. Despite their differences, it is my contention that both expressions represent intermediate stages in the longer cycle of decline.

Rather than tracing this cycle to its natural conclusion in totalitarianism, chapter 9 presents Kant’s work as an alternative to the general bias present in Hobbes and Locke. Although Kant’s

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31 The longer cycle of decline refers to ‘the succession of less comprehensive viewpoints’ initiated by ‘general bias.’ For Lonergan’s narrative summary of this cycle see *Insight*, 256-257. For slightly different renditions of this account see also: Lonergan, “Differentials and Integration,” 65 and Lonergan, “Dimensions,” 110. Although my account differs in detail from Lonergan’s summary I do believe it accurately reflects much of Lonergan’s intent.


33 Lonergan, *Insight*, 256-257, “The time has come for the conscious myth that will secure man’s total subordination to the requirements of reality. Reality is the economic development, the military equipment and the political dominance of the all-exclusive state. Its ends justify all means. Its means include not merely every technique of indoctrination and propaganda, every tactic of economic and diplomatic pressure, every device for breaking down the moral conscience and exploiting the secret affects of civilized man, but also the terrorism of a political police, of prisons and torture, of concentration camps, of transported or extirpated minorities and of total war.” Lonergan labels the compounding nature of general bias’ distortive effects on a particular social situation the ‘social surd.’ Lonergan, “Differentials,” 65. Lonergan, “Role,” 110.

34 The negative implications stemming from Hobbes’ absolutist conception of political authority border on totalitarian.
variation of liberalism transcends many of the deficiencies present in Hobbes and Locke, alternative expressions of voluntarism appear in his work.
Chapter 7

Conceptualism, Nominalism and Voluntarism in Scotus and Ockham

7. Introduction

The first stage of my argument centers on the notions of abstractive and intuitive cognition and on the voluntarist construal of the relationship between intellect and will in Scotus and Ockham. In both authors, a conceptualist account of abstractive cognition or concept formation contributes to a classicist construal of science and culture. By extension, both authors conceive intuitive cognition as a confrontation of intellect with material reality. Finally, the tendency to read divine and human choosing in voluntarist terms leads to reinterpretations of divine sovereignty, natural law and human freedom. It is my contention that the evolution and combination of these intuitionist and voluntarist themes set important conditions of possibility for early modern liberalism in Hobbes, Locke, and Kant. To a more detailed account of Scotus and Ockham I now turn.

7.1 Scotus’ Common Nature and the Notion of Abstractive Cognition

At the heart of Scotus’ account of human knowing lies the notion of ‘common nature.’ Following Avicenna, Scotus argues in quasi-Platonic fashion that common natures possess an ‘esse quidditativum’ or ‘positive reality’ prior to any subsequent modification. For a common

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2 Ibid.
nature to be instantiated in any particular material object it must be ‘contracted to the mode of individuality.’  
Unlike Aquinas who correlates individuation with the ‘quantification of a universal species’ by the principle of matter, Scotus correlates this mode with a ‘quasi-essential’ entity or ‘individual form’ known as ‘haecceitas’ or ‘thisness.’ Thus, in any material object two formal features combine, a common nature that delimits a particular species – i.e. humanness – and an individual formal characteristic or haecceitas that delimits the specificity of the individual – i.e. Socrates’ ‘Socraticity.’ Since the common nature never exists in concrete reality apart from the haecceitas, the two features are functionally identical and yet at least ‘formally distinct.’ Scotus defends the latter as something more than a ‘notional’ but less than a ‘real’ distinction, where the common nature and haecceitas denote ‘different moments or aspects of the same thing.’

As a result of the union of soul and body in via, Scotus argues that intellection must begin with sense experience, a capacity shared by humans and animals that ‘consists essentially in a

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Buzzeti, 550-551. Chapp, 51-52. “Individuation is not a composite addition to form, creating the concrete entity, but a formal determination within the essence itself.”


Buzzeti, 550-551.


Buzzeti, 550-551. Harris, 94-95. Peters, 3-4. Scotus describes the formal distinction as something more than a ‘notional’ but less than a ‘real’ distinction. The common nature and haecceitas denote ‘different moments or aspects of the same thing.’

Harris, 94-95.
modification of the organs that is produced by the action of an external body upon them."\(^\text{13}\)

Motivated by the singularized common nature, the senses produce a ‘sensible species’ that the imagination and common sense synthesize and manipulate to produce a phantasm that functions as a ‘representation’ of the particularized quiddity contained therein.\(^\text{14}\) Properly human cognition begins when the possible or passive intellect receives this ‘imaginative mental image.’\(^\text{15}\) Next, the agent or active intellect transforms the singularized depiction of the common nature in the phantasm into an ‘intelligible species’ or concept that functions as a universalized representation of the common nature in the mind.\(^\text{16}\) Within the possible intellect, the presence of this specifically intellectual representation, ‘shorn and divested of all singularity’\(^\text{17}\) prefigures the act of understanding conceived as an intuition of conceptual content.\(^\text{18}\) From this universal perspective, the human mind considers objects or quiddities without regard to whether they exist in concrete reality or not.\(^\text{19}\) The objectivity of such universal knowledge is secured by the

\(^{13}\) Bettoni, 94-95. See also John Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. III (Paris: Vivès), *Quaestiones super libros Aristotelis De Anima*, q. 18, 594b-595a. Harris, 29-30; 271-272, “thought…is impossible without sensation. The sensuous nature of our cognition, the necessity for the sensuous phantasm is not, however, absolute in the nature of things; it is the consequence of the union of the soul with the body…and will be transcended in the beatified state.” Dumont, “The Role,” 618-619. As Dumont notes, “It would be incorrect to assert…that the intellect considered precisely as an intellective power would always require a phantasm in order to think. For this would bind it to a phantasm in the hereafter when it is separated from the body….It does not pertain to the intellect as such to employ sensible images in the pursuit of its own activity, since in the instance when the soul survives the body there can be no commerce between the two.”

\(^{14}\) Dumont, “Role,” 626-628: 630-631, “what is the imagined is the quiddity or common nature under the mode of singularity, i.e. under the aspect of ‘this’; it is not the singularity of the ‘thisness’ itself which is imagined.” Peters, 6-7. Harris, 18-19, 266, 268-269, 270-271. Ingham and Dreyer, 107-108. Bettoni, 95. Perler, 164. Bettoni, 97-98.

\(^{15}\) Ingham and Dreyer, 26. See also Peters, 6-7. Bettoni, 94-95.


\(^{17}\) Dumont, “Role,” 627-628.


isomorphism that obtains between concepts and the common nature existing in material objects.\textsuperscript{20}

By emphasizing the metaphysical priority of the common nature, Scotus attempts to walk a middle ground between the Aristotelian emphasis on sense experience as the ‘source of all thought,’ and the Platonic emphasis on the ‘autonomy of the intellect’ as oriented toward the ‘suprasensible.’\textsuperscript{21} Notice that for Scotus the proper object of the human intellect is not ‘the nature existing in corporeal matter’ – as in Aristotle and Aquinas – but the essence or common nature ‘taken absolutely.’\textsuperscript{22} Although the difference might at first seem negligible, Scotus does not believe that the agent intellect grasps the intelligible or the universal in the sensible, because there is simply no universal content to be grasped in the phantasm which is by its nature particular.\textsuperscript{23} In order to safeguard the possibility of scientific knowledge focused on the universal, Scotus feels compelled to reject the claim that phantasms are the ‘principle of intellection’\textsuperscript{24} or, in other words, what Lonergan regards as ‘insight into phantasm.’\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{20} Ingham and Dreyer, 24, “concepts exist in a relationship to reality that is best understood as isomorphic.” Leff, Dissolution, 42, “the primacy of common natures guaranteed the reality of our concepts.” Harris, 34, 51; 10, “the fundamental postulate of knowledge is that there exists in things a real entity identical with the universal, standing to it, as the modern realist might say, in a one-to-one relation.” Harris, 37, “we must postulate a pre-established harmony between thought and things, which lies in the correspondence of the universal in re and in intellectu.” Peters, 3-4; 5, “Scotus insists that the common nature must precede the activity of the intellect, lest our concepts be mere fictions.”

\textsuperscript{21} Dumont, “Role,” 627.


\textsuperscript{24} Dumont, “Role,” 621-625, 627.

\textsuperscript{25} Lamb, 205. Peters, 6-7.
Since the agent intellect does not ‘work on the phantasm’\textsuperscript{26} per se, but on the common nature represented by the phantasm, the resulting transformation is perhaps best described as a process of universalization. This process transfers the common nature from the mode of particularity to the mode of universality.\textsuperscript{27} Commentators describe this process of universalization that terminates with the production of an intelligible species – an inner, mental word or concept – in various ways as ‘unconscious,’ ‘blind,’ ‘mechanical,’ and or ‘automatic.’\textsuperscript{28} Concomitant with sense experience and the production of a sensible species or phantasm, the agent intellect spontaneously produces a concept that represents the common nature as universal.\textsuperscript{29} The production of this concept and its simultaneous intuition provides the conscious starting-point of all thought or intellection. Conceptualization, in other words, must always precede the act of understanding.\textsuperscript{30} Outer words or conventional language signify this pre-linguistic inner word or intelligible species.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} Peters, 7-9.
\textsuperscript{27} Dumont, “Role,” 627-628. Bettoni, 95, 98, 100; 96-97, “in order that the illuminating action of the agent intellect may be able to universalize, one must admit that there already exists in the thing the universal as such. The fact that the universal is there in a more or less hidden state, so that it can be brought to light only by the revealing action of the intellect.” Perler, 164. Burrell, “Creation, Will,” 182-184. Peters, 6-9.
\textsuperscript{30} Ingham and Dreyer, 26; 104, “the object of the intellect is prior by nature to the act by which it is understood, for the object is the cause of the act.” Dumont, “Role,” 627; 621-622, “it is this intelligible species, then, which is the sufficient principle of intellection.’ Peters, 9, 11-12. Lamb, 205.
\textsuperscript{31} Perler, 166-167, “Thus a word like ‘tree’ signifies the representational content of a species, that is, what is cognitively present to us when we think about a tree. But this word does not signify the species considered merely as a thing made of ‘mental stuff.’"
7.1.1 Scotus and the Aristotelian Scientific Ideal

Scotus’ notion of scientific discourse remains heavily indebted to the Aristotelian ideal articulated in the Posterior Analytics.  

Designed to transcend the limitations associated with contingent or accidental states of affairs, the Aristotelian notion of science conceives reasoning as a deductive or demonstrative process of deriving ‘universal and necessary’ conclusions from self-evident principles.  

From this perspective, concepts – the products of an unconscious process of abstraction that refer to possible rather than actual existents – function as the building blocks of scientific discourse and the ‘rules of logic’ supply the basic norms that govern their manipulation.  

The intellect naturally combines terms to form self-evident or a priori judgments or propositions composed of subject and predicate whose truth derives solely from the analytic relation of their constitutive terms.  

Scotus draws a further distinction between inductive and deductive knowledge. The former refers to the recognition of ‘patterns in experience,’ the regularity or certainty of which is itself grounded in the a priori principle that regards ‘every phenomenon which has been repeatedly experienced and which depends on a cause that is not

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33 Harris, 41-42.

34 Leff, Dissolution, 49. Harris, 41-42.


37 Ingham and Dreyer, 49-50.
free...[as] a natural effect of that cause." The latter refers to a deductive process that represents the ‘form of science par excellence.’ Self-evidently true principles supply the necessary premises that form the basis or ‘presuppositions’ of those further deductions that relate necessary premises to produce necessary and eternal conclusions via the method of ‘syllogistic’ reasoning. In other words, just ‘as the act of understanding for Scotus is a kind of automatic mechanical process,’ so too science becomes nothing more than the mechanical ‘unfolding or explication’ of the implications or conclusions that may be drawn deductively from the ‘object of science.’ The results tend toward a static form of ‘essentialism’ that conceives truth primarily as ‘logical rather than existential.’

### 7.1.2 Scotus on Intuitive Cognition

Since abstractive cognition and its correlative notion of science abstract from all existential claims concerning objects, Scotus must appeal to a distinctively ‘intuitive’ form of cognition capable of grounding knowledge of particular existents. The primary argument for

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39 Harris, 41-42; 47-48, “Suggestive as this doctrine [of inductive knowledge] is, Scotus was too engrossed in the scholastic logic of his age to break through the Aristotelian tradition of apodeitic demonstration with its emphasis on the deductive aspect of the logical process, and he was not destined to become the founder of a new theory of induction.”


41 Peters, 19.


43 Peters, 13.

44 McGrath, 100.

45 Leff, *Dissolution*, 48.

46 Ingham and Dreyer, 30; 32, “while the act of abstraction can explain the conceptual framework required for scientific knowledge, it is the act of intuition that grounds such science in an objective, extra-mental order.” Day, 73; 83-84, “it is necessary for what we would call ‘subjective verification’ of contingent truths.” Peters, 19-21.
the possibility of intuitive cognition is rooted in Scotus’ claim that the ‘intellect as a more perfect power can do whatever the senses as a less perfect power can do.’\(^{47}\) Just as the senses possess a capacity for intuition that grasps the ‘singular in its concretion’ or existential ‘instantiation,’\(^ {48}\) so too, Scotus argues, the intellect must possess a concomitant capacity to know the singular.\(^ {49}\)

According to Scotus, although the intellect possesses a per se capacity to know the singular in its singularity, as a consequence of the intellect’s present reliance on the imagination it remains limited to grasping the singular as present and existing.\(^ {50}\) In intuitive cognition the ‘immediate presence’\(^ {51}\) of the common nature or quiddity as existing ‘is the direct moving cause of the cognitional operation of intuition.’\(^ {52}\) Although the prototypical instance of intuitive cognition remains the intellectual grasp of sensible particulars, Scotus argues that intuitive cognition also applies to ‘immaterial singulars.’\(^ {53}\) More specifically, intuitive cognition construed as introspection provides a ‘basis for certitude regarding psychological facts’\(^ {54}\) or an ‘immediate awareness’ of the individual’s own acts of ‘sensing, intellection and willing.’\(^ {55}\)


\(^{50}\) Dumont, “Scotus’ Intuition,” 51-53, 55-57; 61-62, “as a matter of actual intuitions in the present life, the intellect like the senses can attain to the singular – which is the equivalent of attaining the existential – but it cannot know the singularity in its singularity.” Day, 119. Pasnau, 297, “In effect, Scotus is arguing for the theoretical possibility of some form of extrasensory perception.”

\(^{51}\) Peters, 2.

\(^{52}\) Peters, 2. See also Pasnau, 299. Leff, *Dissolution*, 40-41. Dumont, “Scotus’ Intuition,” 63. Ingham and Dreyer, 28. Day, 68, 80-81, 85-86, 91-92, 101, 122. Tachau, 75. Peters, 21. n. 24, “as opposed to abstractive cognition in which there is a ‘mediating’ representation ‘between’ the intellect and the object, namely, the intelligible species or concept, in the case of intuitive cognition there is no such mediation; rather, the quidditas as existing is somehow directly present to the intellect through some kind of intellectual vision.”

\(^{53}\) Day, 122.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ingham and Dreyer, 30. See also: Scotus, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XX (Paris: Vivès), *Quaestiones in quartum librum Sententiarum*, d. 45, q. 3, n. 17. Harris, 26, “we are directly conscious of the facts of our psychic life; they are to us immediate and self-evident.” Day, 87; 126-128, “the starting point of introspective psychology is our direct knowledge of the acts of the soul. Obviously, unless direct cognition of immaterial singulars can be justified, this
7.1.3 Scotus on the Relationship between Intellect and Will

Scholars are in general agreement that Scotus’ theories of divine and human freedom are not only intimately related but take the condemnations of 1277 as their primary point of departure. The two main interpretations of the relationship between intellect and will differ primarily on the scope of Scotus’ commitment to voluntarism.

Beginning from the divine perspective, scholars are in agreement that the divine will is limited by at least one independently valid practical claim. According to Scotus, God must necessarily love God’s self.\textsuperscript{56} Such necessity need not compromise God’s freedom when the latter’s perfection is conceived as ‘steadfastness,’ ‘constancy,’ or ‘firmitas’ in self-loving.\textsuperscript{57} A divergence arises when scholars disagree on the relationship between this first, purely formal or analytic claim and those precepts of ‘justice’ typically associated with the second table of the Decalogue.\textsuperscript{58} One prominent reading emphasizes the ‘highly consonant’ or ‘harmonious’ relation between the self-evident first principle and the secondary precepts and, by extension, argues that there is an intrinsic ‘teleological’ relation between the latter and union with God in love.\textsuperscript{59}


\textsuperscript{59} Ingham and Dreher, 119. Irwin, 693-694, “in saying that some rules are highly consonant with natural law, he seems to mean that their observance promotes its aims better than other would.” Irwin, 695, “the primary principles are not fixed by God’s free choice and their content, rather than God’s choice, determines what is more or less consonant with them….even though the correct secondary principles do not follow necessarily from the higher principles, rational inquiry can discover their special consonance with the higher principles. In that case God could
Although the secondary precepts are not necessarily connected with the first principle, the former are nonetheless in some way rationally connected with the latter. From this perspective, God’s justice extends in some way to God’s sanction of secondary precepts that are consonant with human nature. Here the appeal to God’s ‘firmitas’ or constancy in loving is used to explain the coherence of this consonance with divine freedom.

A second approach to the relationship between divine freedom and the secondary precepts of the natural law stresses the voluntarist strain of Scotus’ thought. Proponents of this alternative emphasize that compliance with the secondary precepts is not a necessary condition for the realization of humankind’s final end. In addition, scholars note that God’s absolute power allows God to create a world in which the secondary precepts that are presently consonant with human nature need not obtain. From this perspective, consonance or God’s extended sense of justice is interpreted in strongly voluntarist terms as referring to whatever God chooses to

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have practical knowledge of the secondary principles, contrary to Scotus’ view. Since practical reason can establish them, God could not reject them without willing injustice….the second table…is guided by aims and principles that are independent of God’s legislation.” Thomas Williams, “The Unmitigated Scotus,” [http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/archiv.pdf](http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/archiv.pdf), 11. Hannes Mohle, “Scotus’ Theory of Natural Law,” in The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus, 316.

Ibid.


61 Williams, “Unmitigated,” 9-10. Yet, as Williams notes, in order for Scotus’ voluntarism to be consistent he must argue that “this is a matter of ‘generosity not justice.’” Henrik Syse, Natural Law, Religion and Rights: An Exploration of the Relationship between Natural Law and Natural Rights, with Special Emphasis on the Teachings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 60-61, “for the sake of human beings…there [is]…something we can call an ‘ordinary course of events’….But this is not so because God is bound by eternal ideas in a Platonic sense or by a highest reason or telos (goal) in an Aristotelian sense. It is because God wills it – because of his love for creation.”

62 John Duns Scotus, Opera Omnia, Vol. VII.2 (Lyons: Durand), Libri tertii Sententiarum distinctiones 26-40, d.37, q.1, n.5 (p. 898). Irwin, 688, 693-694; 695, “This claim might mean two things: (1) we can achieve the final good even if we violate these rules in every case. (2) We can achieve the final good even if we violate them in some cases. The second claim but not the first allows us to believe that the rules are highly consonant with natural law. The first claim but not the second, allows us to believe that God exercises some free choice in prescribing the observance of these rules and in dispensing us from it.” Thomas Williams, “The Libertarian Foundations of Scotus’ Moral Philosophy,” The Thomist 62 (1998), 214.

63 Irwin, 693, “our beliefs about the content of justice do not tell us what justice requires in all possible worlds; they tell us only about the situation that is maintained by God’s ‘directed’…power, not about the situations that are possible within God’s unqualified…power.” Anthony J. Lisska, “Right Reason in Natural Law Moral Theory: Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham,” in Reason, Religion and Natural Law, 167. Longeway, 689. Irwin, 698. Cross, 183. Bertram Crowe, 198, 200-201.
legislate, where such legislation is not limited in any independent way by the divine intellect.\footnote{65}{For strongly voluntarist statements in Scotus see for example: Scotus, \textit{Opera Omnia}, Vol. VII.1 (Lyons: Durand), \textit{Libri tertii Sententiarum} distinctiones 1-25, d. 19, n.7 (p. 417). Williams, “Unmitigated,” 2, translates this famous statement in the following way: “everything other than God is good because it is willed by God and not vice versa.” See also Scotus, \textit{Opera Omnia}, Vol. X (Lyons: Durand), \textit{Libri quarti Sententiarum} distinctiones 43-50, d.46, q. 1, n. 7 (p. 252). For a translation see: Williams, “Unmitigated,” 11-12, “The divine will has no rectitude inclining it determinately to anything but its own goodness...for to any other object it is related only contingently, in such a way that it can (tend) equally to that object or to its opposite.” See also Scotus, \textit{Opera Omnia}, Vol. XI.2 (Lyons: Durand), \textit{Reportata Parisiensia}, d.46, q.4, n. 8, 11 (p. 877b, 878b). For a translation see: Williams, “Unmitigated,” 12, “in virtue of the fact that something agrees with the divine will, it is right....But nothing that does not involve a contradiction is absolutely repugnant to the divine will. Therefore, whatever God causes or does will be right and just, and so God’s justice will be every bit as extensive as his power....This justice of god does not restrict him to one possibility more than another, as justice in you and me restricts us to doing this or that, for instance, to perform the acts that God has commanded. For it would be unjust [for us] not to perform the commanded acts, but the divine justice is not restricted to one thing or another.” Thomas Williams, “From Metaethics to Action Theory,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus}, 338. Leff, \textit{Dissolution}, 54-55, “making God’s will the sole arbiter of good and bad by reference only to what he wills, Duns effectively...began the slide to ethical relativism.” Gilson, 461. Syse, 53-54. Irwin, 688, 693-694. Heinrich Rommen, \textit{The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy}, trans. Thomas R. Hanley (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), 58. Bertram Crowe, 197-198. Williams, “Unmitigated,” 9-11, 14-15. Lonergan, \textit{Early Latin}, 567, 569, 571.}\n
Rather than claiming that Scotus is committed to one position or the other, it might be more accurate to argue that both positions find support in his writings and that the result is a tension that successors will resolve in one way or another.\footnote{66}{Irwin, 695; 698-699, “the claims about consonance moderate his voluntarism. But if they conflict with the voluntarist claims he accepts, they suggest that his version of voluntarism is difficult to maintain....to make his position consistent, he has to interpret justice as simply the product of God’s exercise of unqualified power in preferring one type of requirement over another.”}\n
From a human perspective, scholars agree that the first principle of practical reason specifies that ‘God ought to be loved,’ an analytic proposition produced through the combination of concepts derived from reflection on the highest good.\footnote{67}{Ingham and Dreyer, 119, 126-128. Harris, 288, 315-316. Lisska, 167. Syse, 53-54. Cross, 175. Bertram Crowe, 199. Mohle, 316, 318. Leff, \textit{Dissolution}, 54-55.}\n
Human access to the secondary precepts can also be conceived in strong or weak ways. Proponents of both positions argue that such precepts are ‘written on the human heart’ and that right reason, rather than revelation, supplies the standard for human choosing.\footnote{68}{Thomas Williams, “How Scotus Separates Morality from Happiness,” \textit{American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly} LXIX (1995), 437-438. Irwin, 688. Williams, “Unmitigated,” 22-23. Maurer, 534.} The parties diverge when it comes to the way in which knowledge of such secondary principles arises. Mechtild Dreyer seems to imply that although the secondary precepts of practical reason are themselves not self-evident, they stand in
a demonstrative relation to the basic claim that ‘God ought to be loved.’ Presumably Dreyer is implying that secondary precepts may be derived as necessary conclusions by ‘way of division’ from the first practical principle in conjunction with knowledge about human nature. On the other hand, Thomas Williams argues that it is impossible to derive the secondary precepts of the natural law from a conjunction of facts about human nature and the basic claim that ‘God ought to be loved.’ Williams conceives knowledge of the secondary precepts as ‘free-floating,’ presumably abstractive cognitions that arise spontaneously in situations that demand ethical decision-making. Again, the result appears to be an inconsistency. Either natural law remains natural in some strong sense or the interpreter takes Scotus’ voluntarism at face value.

A third and final tension in Scotus’ ethical thought surrounds the relation between right reason and human freedom. Again, there are at least two prominent interpretations, one Anselmian and the other strongly voluntarist. Parties on both sides of the divide tend to agree that Scotus’ ethics marks a significant point of departure from Aristotelian-Thomist versions of eudaimonism.}

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69 Ingham and Dreyer, 118-120; 128, “this science is both learned and can be understood to form a coherent and consistent body of knowledge that expresses the first practical principles. It stands between the two domains of ultimate moral principles and concrete moral decision. The truths of moral science are necessary truths about contingent states of affairs.” Irwin, 695, 698. Cross, 175-176.

70 Ingham and Dreyer, 129, “with its twofold acts of abstraction and intuition, the intellect is able to understand a present situation reflectively, to identify the moral demands that are present and to conclude to the best course of action. Reasoning back and forth among principles, the scientific body of moral knowledge and the present situation, the moral agent can conclude with certainty to what should be done.” Ingham and Dreyer, 190, “in the judgment of prudence, the intellect’s two cognitional acts (abstraction and intuition) inform moral reflection.” Ingham and Dreyer, 118. Ingham and Dreyer, 120, “because the moral foundations are so stable, practical moral judgments appear as scientific conclusions that can admit a high level of certainty.” Ingham and Dreyer, 120. “It is the intellect, with its powerful cognitive acts of abstraction and intuition, which mediates this movement from the highest level of principle to the judgment immediate to choice.” See also Harris, 315-316.

71 Williams, “How Scotus,” 437-438, “Scotus regards the role of reason in ascertaining moral norms as very limited....much of this restriction arises from his high view of God’s freedom in establishing the moral law.” Williams, “How Scotus,” 442-443, “looking to human nature for moral directives is a waste of time, since we simply do not live in a world in which moral norms are written into human nature.” Irwin, 693, 698. Cross, 183. Mohle, 316.

72 Williams, “How Scotus,” 441-442. See also Lisska, 167. Syse, 53-54.

73 Incandela, 255.

appetite’ necessarily oriented to the realization of human happiness reduces the will to a ‘natural agent,’ thereby denying the possibility of freedom necessary for moral living.\(^75\) From an Anselmian perspective, Scotus develops a distinction between the will conceived along Thomistic lines as an ‘affectio commodi’ or concern for self-interest\(^76\) and as an ‘affectio iustitiae.’ The latter denotes a non-teleological inclination to comply with the purely categorical claims of right reason.\(^77\) The affection for justice is characterized as a precondition for the exercise of freedom insofar as it provides the basis necessary for siding with justice against the desire for happiness: ‘the will is free inasmuch as it has the affection for justice.’\(^78\) Sometimes Scotus argues in much stronger fashion that the affection for justice is freedom itself: ‘the affection for justice is that liberty which is native or innate to the will.’\(^79\) The latter interpretation moves toward a conception of freedom as ‘firmitas’ or ‘the ability to keep the rectitude of the will for its own sake’\(^80\) discussed in the context of God’s self-love above.\(^81\)

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\(^77\) Irwin, 664, 682-683; 670, “against eudaimonism Scotus argues that a free rational will chooses by reference to an impartial standard that is distinct from and not subordinate to, one’s own happiness….we might then understand him as a non-eudaimonist intellectualist who assigns to the affection for justice the place that Aquinas assigns to the desire for happiness.” Williams, “How Scotus,” 439, “the affection for justice has to do with objects under the descriptions ‘commanded’ and ‘forbidden.’” Williams, “How Scotus,” 428-429, 437-438, 443-444. Incandela, 250. Mohle, 312. Harris, 318-319. Williams, “From Metaethics,” 335-336, 344-345.


\(^80\) Incandela, 250. See also Harris, 315-316, 322. Virtue refers to habits conducive to acting in conformity with right reason.
The second position that finds ample support in Scotus’ writings is a libertarian notion of freedom that emphasizes the will’s radical capacity for ‘self-determination’ or its ‘active indifference’ to any particular object presented by the intellect. Conceived as ‘self-moving,’ or, as an ‘ability and opportunity to do other than what one does in every choice one confronts,’ the libertarian notion of freedom allows the moral agent to ‘step back and control all the attachments and attractions presented by the intellect.’ Although the intention is to preserve the possibility of moral responsibility, the reality is that when freedom is conceived as indifference or ‘auto-determination,’ it becomes difficult to avoid charges of arbitrariness. Despite Scotus’ efforts to claim that intellect remains a ‘partial cause’ of volitions, since the will itself possesses no intrinsic criterion or motivation for choosing between conflicting objects it remains unclear how Scotus can avoid construing the will as irrational. From this libertarian

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81 Frank, 84-85. Messerich, 643-644.
82 Incandela, 232-233; 230, “the most popular reading of Scotus on human freedom – the libertarian interpretation.” See for example: Scotus, *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 18, n.24, “although this (free) power involves both intellect and will, it is only the will, I say, that can completely account for the indifference or indeterminacy as regards the alternative – the indifference, namely, that consists in the fact that the action which occurred might not have occurred or vice versa…” See also Scotus, *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 16, n. 42-43, the will is “a freely active principle,...in such a way that it determines itself to action...” Scotus, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XIV (Paris: Vivès), Quaestiones in tertium librum Sententiarum, d. 17, q. unica, n. 4. For a translation see Incandela, 233, “every will is the master of its own act.” John Duns Scotus, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, trans. and ed. Allan B. Wolter (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1986), p. 159; “for who would deny an agent is more perfect the less it is determined, dependent and limited in its action or effect?”
84 Burrell, “Creation, Metaphysics,” 216. See also Ingham and Dreyer, 98-99, “the human will can, however, also be ordered toward the contrary simultaneously...this contingency is called synchronic contingency.” And Williams, “From Metaethics,” 347.
85 Incandela, 233.
86 Ibid, 234.
89 Mohle, 323-324. Incandela, 238-239. Messerich, 632, “the activity of such partial causes are simply subject to the sovereignty of the will. They exercise no necessitating influence on the free act of the will.”
90 Incandela, 238-240. Mohle, 326. Irwin, 661; 663, “the voluntarist conception of freedom is self-defeating; since it rejects determination by the ultimate end, it rejects determination by reason.” Williams, “Libertarian,” 213-214, “where there are competing considerations in favour of incompatible courses of action, the conflict cannot be
perspective, the lack of a *eudaimonistic* account of the relationship between intellect and will seems to reduce the first principle of practical reason to a command one might be motivated to obey primarily out of fear rather than genuine affection.\(^{91}\) Finally, from the perspective of the two affections, the affection for justice might be construed as incompatible with the conception of freedom as ‘unfettered choice’\(^ {92}\) since any inclination, even a non-teleological one, represents a restriction on the agent’s freedom.\(^ {93}\) Either freedom is reducible to indifference, in which case the unpalatable charges of arbitrariness and fear of divine punishment loom large, or freedom is conceived as ‘firmitas’ in ways that appear to conflict with Scotus’ commitment to voluntarism.

### 7.2 Ockham on the Relationship between Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition

Although Ockham’s account of human knowing takes as its point of departure Scotus’ distinction between abstractive and intuitive cognition, Ockham’s alternative differs in certain key ways from his predecessor’s. Unlike Scotus, Ockham regards intuitive cognition as prior to any abstractive cognition of the same object.\(^ {94}\) According to Ockham, human knowing begins with the ‘immediate awareness of an object caused by that object’\(^ {95}\) or the ‘immediate perception resolved by reason. It can be resolved only by an act of will by which I decide to regard certain considerations as having a claim on me.” Burrell, “Creation, Metaphysics,” 216-217. Messerich, 629-630, “it is fruitless to seek a reason that actually compels the will to make a particular choice of ends.” Irwin, 670, 686, 674, 683.

\(^ {91}\) Burrell, “Creation, Metaphysics,” 217, citing Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 136, 151. “Once Scotus had effectively ‘detached the will from the lure of the good...Christian virtue itself was being redefined as obedience to authority.” Cross, 193-194, “Scotus usually spells out this coercive force in terms of the threat of punishment.”

\(^ {92}\) Incandela, 233.\(^ {93}\) Irwin, 704, “if freedom consisting in acting from the affection for justice, it seems to consist in a certain kind of determination, not in the absence of determination.” Irwin, 670; 671. “While Scotus sometimes identifies the freedom of the will with the affection for justice, he cannot identify the two if he also maintains his broader objection to eudaimonism. Freedom seems to require the ability to reject justice no less than the ability to reject happiness.” Irwin, 673. Incandela, 255-6. Williams, “From Metaethics,” 347.

\(^ {94}\) Leff, *Dissolution*, 57-59. “individual knowledge was the source of all proper knowledge….the foundation of all other knowledge.”

\(^ {95}\) Torrance, 301-302.
of an existing thing." \(^{96}\) Intuitive cognition subdivides into two types: (a) sensitive intuition of sensible objects, a spontaneous process that requires no additional appeal to a sensible species; \(^{97}\) and (b) a concomitant and spontaneously produced intellectual intuitive cognition. \(^{98}\) Such ‘apprehensions’ \(^{99}\) may include both the perception of ‘non-complex’ or singular objects and ‘complex’ intuitions that grasp the relation between singular objects in the form of a proposition. \(^{100}\) At the same time, intuitive cognition is not limited to the apprehension of sensible or material objects, Ockham argues that the human mind is also capable of intuiting ‘intelligible objects, such as…acts of knowing and willing, and of mental states such as joy and sadness.’ \(^{101}\)

In both cases, intuitive cognition or apprehension provides the sufficient basis for a subsequent act of ‘evident assent.’ \(^{102}\) The latter refers to the distinctively intellectual operation of judgment \(^{103}\) whereby the mind affirms a contingent object or proposition as present and existing. \(^{104}\) Unlike Scotus, however, Ockham is not in a position to argue that there is a necessary connection between intuition and the existence of any particular material object.

Strengthening the Scotistic emphasis on divine omnipotence, Ockham argues that ‘the real

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\(^{98}\) Karger, 207. Day, 52, “the first thing known by the external senses is also known, whole and entire and under the same aspect, by the intellect.” Day, 197-198. Maurer, 478, “we have sensory intuitive cognition of sensible things, immediately followed by intellectual intuitive cognition of the same things.”

\(^{99}\) Pelletier, 20. Through this apprehension the subject, ‘cognizes the existence and material conditions of a present and existing object.’

\(^{100}\) Maurer, 473. On acts of apprehension see Karger, 206. See also Snell, “Overcoming,” 3. Day, 148, “Intuitive cognition of the terms of a contingent proposition is necessary if we are to have evident knowledge of such a proposition.” Day, 154, “simple knowledge of *incomplexa* which enables us to give evident assent to a proposition formed from a combination of these *incomplexa*.”


\(^{103}\) Tachau, 122-123, “sensitive intuitions are not sufficient; in addition, there must be intellectual intuitive cognitions, because as an intellectual operation, judgment cannot have as its immediate proximate cause an act of the sensitive part of the soul.” Maurer, 472. Pelletier, 20.

existence of the object is not absolutely required as an essential cause of intuitive cognition.\footnote{105}

Since God’s ‘absolute power’ allows God to contravene the natural order and to act independently of ‘secondary’ or ‘creaturely’ causes, it is possible for God to directly produce or cause an intuitive cognition in the human intellect the object of which does not exist.\footnote{106}

According to Ockham, all abstractive cognitions depend upon concomitant intuitive cognitions.\footnote{107} Ockham argues that in conjunction with the intellect’s intuitive cognition of an ‘extra- or intramental’ object,\footnote{108} the intellect spontaneously produces an abstractive cognition or a ‘general and common cognition’ called a concept or mental word.\footnote{109} This first abstractive cognition or ‘act of understanding’ provides a ‘habitus or disposition’ that grounds all subsequent use of the concept ‘in the absence or non-existence of the object.’\footnote{110} Like Scotus, Ockham argues that the process of concept formation is the result of a ‘deterministic psychophysical’\footnote{111} process whose mechanism is ‘occult’ or blind\footnote{112} and whose product is simply taken-for-granted.\footnote{113}

\footnote{105} Maurer, 479-480.
\footnote{107} Day, 52. Gilson, 495. Pelletier, 79.
\footnote{108} Pelletier, 79.
\footnote{109} William of Ockham, \textit{Opera Philosophica}, Vol I. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute), \textit{Summa logicae}, 557: 14-22. See also Pelletier, 78-80, 94; 75, “every intuitive cognition is accompanied by an abstractive cognition of that object.” Pelletier, 81-82, “Two theories that Ockham developed on what concepts are, that is on their kind of being or mode of existence. The first, called the \textit{fictum} or objective existence theory, postulates that concepts are thought-objects that have a non-real mode of being. The second, called the \textit{actus} or mental act theory, argues that concepts are intellectual acts – abstractive cognitions – that are real beings. Concepts are characterized as similitudes or representations of objects in both theories.” Pelletier notes that in ‘Ockham’s mature thought on concepts he held firmly to the \textit{actus} theory.” Maurer, 14-15, 496. Gilson, 495. Snell, \textit{“Overcoming,”} 3. Day, 200.
\footnote{111} Pelletier, 93. See also Pelletier, 90.
\footnote{112} Gilson, 495, “universalis, therefore is self-producing in thought, under the natural action of individual things, without the intellect having to produce it; it is ‘nature’ which produces universals in us, in a way that is occult and whose effects only are known to us.”
\footnote{113} William of Ockham, \textit{Opera Theologica}, Vol. II, \textit{Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum}, 231.21-22. For Maurer’s translation see 495, “nature works secretly in the matter of universals.” Pelletier, 79, “concepts are the inexorable products of a psycho-causal process. Assuming that our psychological capabilities are functioning correctly, namely our sensory and intellective powers, concepts naturally arise through our immediate and direct
their function as signs in radically different ways from Scotus. At the heart of this reinterpretation lies Ockham’s rejection of common natures. In order to safeguard God’s omnipotence and sovereignty, Ockham denies the reality of common natures or eternal forms in the divine mind and, as a result, commits himself to the claim that only individuals exist. From this ontological perspective, universal concepts cease to signify ‘essences or natures in some way distinct from individuals’ and instead come to be conceived as purely mental signs that signify ‘sufficiently similar’ individuals. In other words, concepts function as signs that exist only in the human mind for the purposes of classification and logical manipulation. Ockham therefore agrees with Scotus that the intelligible is not grasped in the particular, but whereas Scotus argues this point by distinguishing between the sensible and the intelligible orders, Ockham advances this claim by construing intelligibility as a construction of the mind.

7.2.1 Ockham and the Aristotelian Scientific Ideal

As ‘natural’ and spontaneously arising signs that are prior to conventional language, concepts or mental words are nevertheless ‘strongly similar’ and ‘identically organized.’ This claim distinguishes Ockham’s ‘conceptualism’ from later forms of ‘nominalism’ that conceive general terms as arbitrarily-assigned conventional words. Following Scotus, Ockham argues

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115 Maurer, 24.
116 Pelletier, 71, 77.
118 Leff, Dissolution, 35-36, 58-59, 60, 71. Chapp, 55; 54, “what can only be described as an instrumentalist view of reason.” Panaccio, 65-66. Lamb, 206. Maurer, 63-64.
119 Panaccio, 53. See also Panaccio, 54-55. Pelletier, 90; 94, “It is the natural and linguistic sign of human beings. The spoken and written words of conversational languages are not natural signs.” Maurer, 15, “concepts are the primary and natural signs of things; oral and written terms are secondary and conventional signs of the same things….they ‘belong to no tongue’ and therefore they cannot change their meaning at someone’s pleasure.” Maurer, 63-64, “in our day nominalism usually (but not always) means the doctrine that universals are words, in
that concepts provide the essential building blocks of mental propositions or language.\textsuperscript{120}

Arguing that science in the ‘strictest sense’\textsuperscript{121} excludes ‘knowledge of contingent truths,’\textsuperscript{122} Ockham follows Scotus in adopting a ‘demonstrative’ account of scientific knowledge that is concerned with the deduction of conclusions from necessary premises in syllogistic fashion.\textsuperscript{123}

Scientific investigation begins with the mind’s apprehending the constitutive components of a necessary ‘mental sentence’ or proposition. He distinguishes between the intellect’s apprehension and assent to analytic propositions known to be true \textit{per se}\textsuperscript{124} and the intellect’s grasp of necessary propositions that, ‘known through experience,’ depend on ‘God’s establishment of the natural order.’\textsuperscript{125} Constructed through the combination of concepts, the resulting principles are manipulated via syllogistic or demonstrative reasoning to produce the necessary and universal conclusions of scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{126} Unlike Scotus who claims that scientific conclusions are objective or that concepts stand in an isomorphic relationship with extra-mental common natures, Ockham argues that universal scientific conclusions are possible because concepts stand in propositions for singular things.\textsuperscript{127} As a result, ‘the relation of metaphysical being to physical being thereby becomes logical instead of ontological, with the consequence that metaphysics lost any defined area not occupied by logic.’\textsuperscript{128} Ockham’s denial contrast to conceptualism, which identifies universals with concepts. In these terms, he is more aptly called a conceptualist, for he thought a universal is primarily a concept.” Maurer, 86. Gilson, 491, “a natural sign is in fact a concept. It is what a human intellect has in mind when, even before designating it by an uttered word, it knows a thing. The proof of the fact that such signs are natural is that they are the same in all human minds. Men do not speak the same language but they all have the same notions in mind.”

\textsuperscript{120} Pelletier, 71, 81-82, 90. Maurer, 23.
\textsuperscript{121} Maurer, 135.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 136.
\textsuperscript{123} Maurer, 135-136, 205. Pelletier, 12, 24-25. Longeway, 132-133. Leff, \textit{Dissolution}, 78.
\textsuperscript{124} Pelletier, 20-22. Longeway, 132-133.
\textsuperscript{125} Maurer, 132-133. See also, Pelletier, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{126} Longeway, 116. Maurer, 13, “Ockham conceived of logic as an art whose rules govern the advancement of all the sciences.”
\textsuperscript{127} Pelletier, 51. Snell, 3.
\textsuperscript{128} Leff, \textit{Dissolution}, 82, “logic became the universalizing science standing above particular knowledge. Far from displacing metaphysics by nominalism, logic is the guarantee that the universal meaning of what is known can be reconciled with the individual nature of what exists. In that lay the beginning of a new approach which in the end
of common natures and correlative individualist ontology leads him to claim that scientific conclusions must be conditional in nature. Since all existence is contingent, propositions such as ‘man is an animal’ must be reformulated to read ‘if a man exists, he is a rational animal.’ This ‘real science’ – i.e. natural philosophy – differs in nature from purely ‘rational sciences’ – i.e. logic – whose constitutive terms or concepts are signs, not of concretely existing objects, but of ‘other signs.’

7.2.2 Ockham on the Relationship between Intellect and Will

Ockham’s account of practical reason and its relation to human choosing adapts and expands voluntarist themes already present in the work of Scotus. Again, the central issue that divides interpreters of Ockham’s ethical work concerns the relative scope of his commitment to voluntarism. The difficulty stems from Ockham’s purported commitment to both ‘positive moral knowledge’ – ‘human and divine laws...commanded by a superior’ – and ‘nonpositive moral knowledge’ which ‘directs human actions without any precept from a superior, as principles that are either known per se or by experience.’ This tension between a divine-command ethic and a natural law approach is complicated by the different emphases in Ockham’s work itself. In Ockham’s ‘earlier academic writings,’ the ‘only immutable and objective standard of morality’ is God’s arbitrary will, and human conformity with its commands represents ‘the only stable and

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was to displace the medieval outlook.” Snell, 3, “end of a realist logic. Of course, since universals do not exist universal concepts cannot correspond to any extra-mental reality and logic becomes merely a logic of concepts....the middle term will always be an abstractly mental picture and thus fictive. Logic as a means of organizing science and propositions is merely a mental organization, a housekeeping of concepts.”

Pelletier, 56. See also, Longeway, 131-132, “necessary propositions about contingent things must be conditional, or, if they are categorical, as truly scientific propositions are, they must be about the existing realities in question considered merely as possible things.” Leff, Dissolution, 14-15, 80.

Pelletier, 51, 54.

subjective criterion of goodness.' In Ockham’s later ‘political and polemical writings,’ the emphasis seems to shift to a conception of law as ‘the natural dictate of reason,’ ‘absolute, immutable and admitting of no dispensation.’ Most authors involved in this debate agree that a credible account of Ockham’s ethical thought must take seriously both emphases. Following certain authors, I shall argue that although Ockham retains an emphasis on natural law, the priority given to divine sovereignty results in a reinterpretation of the former.

The standard divine-command approach to Ockham’s ethics begins with a strongly voluntarist reading of divine sovereignty or freedom. In line with this voluntarism and Ockham’s related commitment to an individualist ontology, Ockham argues that the divine will is not restricted by God’s own essence or by any independent practical principles linked, for example, to human nature. Since God is not constrained by the intrinsic goodness of any particular act or by any prior rational concerns, God’s decision to command or prohibit certain actions is arbitrary and, by extension, constitutive of their rightness or wrongness. Although God may


133 William of Ockham, Dialogus I, VI, cap. 100 in Monarchia Sancti Romani Imperii, ed. Melchior Goldast (Frankfurt, 1668), 2:629, lines 45-46. See also Oakley, Laws, 75.

134 Oakley, Laws, 75.

135 Oakley, Laws, 73-74. At one end of the spectrum are those who argue that Ockham is a divine-command theorist with no theory of natural law. At the other end of the spectrum are those who claim that there is no difference between, for example, Aquinas and Ockham’s variations of natural law. I think the answer is somewhere in between. See also Maurer, 537-538; 9, “both have a place in his ethics and neither should be neglected in presenting a balanced account of it.” Osborne, 1.


have chosen to regard actions such as theft, adultery and murder as morally deficient, the legal force of such prohibitions obtains only in the current order determined by God’s ordained power.\textsuperscript{139} Since there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of the above actions, God could, by his absolute power, command the very opposite of such prohibitions.\textsuperscript{140} The most radical expression of this power is revealed in Ockham’s discussion of humankind’s love for God. Some authors argue that Ockham follows a straightforwardly Scotistic account of the claim that ‘God ought to be loved,’ a reading that regards this action as immutable and ‘intrinsically virtuous.’\textsuperscript{141} Other authors argue that the obligation to love God is contingent and stems from a prior command that God be obeyed. From this perspective, God’s sovereignty allows at least in principle, a command that dictates humankind hate rather than love God.\textsuperscript{142} The logical result of this strongly voluntaristic reading of Ockham’s ethics is a divine positivism. Faced with an ‘inscrutable will,’\textsuperscript{143} human beings have no natural access to divine commands but must rely on revelation to discern the rightness and wrongness of any particular action.\textsuperscript{144} From this perspective, although the abstractly universal moral principles revealed in scripture are not self-
evidently true, they might nevertheless function as presuppositions or premises from which additional conclusions might be deduced.\(^\text{145}\)

This strongly voluntarist reading separates faith from reason and is regarded with suspicion by most scholars today. Most authors recognize that Ockham regards right reason as an independently valid standard constituted by self-evidently true principles or principles known evidently through experience that are therefore accessible to non-believers.\(^\text{146}\) Self-evidently known first principles include purely formal claims such as ‘the will ought to conform itself to right reason’ and also claims that refer to particular actions such as ‘murder is wrong’ and ‘theft is wrong.’\(^\text{147}\) Presumably the product of apprehension and assent to the conjunction of abstractive cognitions, such principles form the bedrock of a ‘non-positive’ demonstrative moral science modelled along Aristotelian scientific lines.\(^\text{148}\) Some authors regard such principles and the

\(^\text{145}\) Pinckaers, 249, 347, 250, 345-346; 347, “an important role was also assigned to reason, for deduction was required to make explicit the content of Scripture….set within the context of the logical reasoning of scholasticism and would be viewed as universal and relatively abstract principles.”


\(^\text{147}\) Scholars disagree on the scope of such principles: On the one hand, see Clark, “Voluntarism,” 76, 78; 83-85, “The formal aspects of moral theory concern those principles of practical reason and those exigencies of human nature which are operative regardless of the present divine and civil precepts. Notice that the practical principles...have an a priori or formal character; principles such as ‘the will ought to be conformed to right reason’ ‘all evil is blameworthy and to be avoided’ ‘all good should be loved’ ‘everything honest should be done’ give little information about concrete actions. These propositions are true but they are also ‘contentless.’” On the other hand, see King, 228-229. “Now there seem to be two kinds of ethical principles knowable per se. On the one hand, some principles connect fundamental ethical notions at a high level of abstraction: everything should be pursued and everything wrong should be avoided; the will should conform itself to right reason. On the other hand, some principles classify kinds of wrongful acts...,theft, adultery, murder and the like are by definition not to be done....Murder for instance, is wrongful killing. Hence principles such as ‘murder is wrong’ or ‘theft is wrong’ are knowable per se. Nonpositive morality then, includes principles that are analytically true: one should do the right and avoid the wrong, not commit murder and the like. But these principles, though discoverable by reason, do not tell us what the right is, or whether a given instance of killing is murder, and so do not provide us with any substantive moral content.” See also Osborne, 6, 18; 16. Panaccio, 88. Maurer, 519-520. Irwin, 714, “principles of non-positive morality are not specific precepts at the level of the second table of the Decalogue. But they are not all as tautologous or analytic as ‘the will ought to conform itself to correct reason’ seems to be. Hence Ockham seems to allow more content than Scotus allows to natural law in the strict sense.”

\(^\text{148}\) Pinckaers, 348, citing G. de Lagarde, La naissance de l’esprit laique au declin du moyen age, vol. 6, l’individualisme ockhamiste (Paris, 1946), 46-47, “the reason that gives commands is incapable of justifying them.
conclusions that are deduced from them as grounded in ‘natural goodness’ but it is my contention that there are reasons to question the independent status of such principles. First and foremost, since Ockham denies that any action is intrinsically right or wrong prior to the divine will it makes sense to argue that such principles, far from being grounded in the nature of reality, take their authority from a prior divine command. From this perspective, the claim that right reason ought to be obeyed is the purely rational and functional equivalent of the principle that God ought to be obeyed. When one moves past this purely formal first principle one is faced with the fact that claims regarding the second table of the Decalogue are themselves contingent commands and thus, by extension, in principle revisable. God may have chosen to use right reason as a means of communicating God’s commands in the present order but in all cases the latter is the true norm of ethical obligation. As a result, there is ‘no natural law that inwardly governs the positive law. Positive and natural law, which indeed is also positive law, stand likewise in no inner relation to each other.’

This interpretation of Ockham’s voluntarism combines with his notion of human freedom in ways that closely resemble Scotus’ understanding of the relationship between human intellect and the will. Following Scotus, Ockham regards freedom as ‘indifference’ or as a capacity ‘to choose between contraries, independently of all other causes except freedom of the will itself.’

One must accept them as indemonstrable postulates analogous to those we find at the threshold of any science.”

Osborne, 6. Maurer, 519.

149 Osborne, 7-8, cites McCord Adams, 248-249, 265. McGrade, 286.

150 Osborne, 6, 10-11; 2-3, contra Adams, “right reason merely indicates that an act should be done; it is not a reason for the rightness of an act in the way that a divine command can be.” Irwin, 715-716, 718, 720-721. Oakley, Laws, 77-78, 82; 84-85, “‘right reason merely indicates that an act should be done; it is not a reason for the rightness of an act in the way that a divine command can be.’ Pinckaers, 348. Oakley, “Medieval,” 66, 70. Syse, 74-75. Rommen, 59. McGrade, 276-277, “I suggest natural law can indeed be understood as divine command, but as tacit divine command….I offer the concept of tacit command as a way of spelling out how God writes to us in nature.” Rommen, 59-60.

By denying the Thomistic notion of will as ‘an attraction toward the good,’ Ockham follows Scotus in conceiving the natural inclination to happiness as a biologically-grounded instinct or sensibility independent of and therefore subject to human freedom. This rejection, coupled with Ockham’s claim that moral commands are in no way connected to human nature, leads him to agree with Scotus that obligations are categorical in nature, commands that stem from the will of God that are not connected with human flourishing. Drawing the Scotistic emphasis on freedom as radical self-determination to its natural conclusion, Ockham distances himself from Scotus’ alternative understanding of the will as affection for justice.

The resulting problems are much the same as those that arise in conjunction with a libertarian reading of Scotus on human freedom. Either obligation is a function of divine command, in which case the motivation for compliance is reducible to fear of divine punishment, or else obligation is a function of practical reason alone, in which case there does not seem to be any real motivation to comply. As Pinckaers notes, this emphasis on obligation conceived as command in the absence of teleology anticipates modern positivist conceptions of law and ethics that focus less on the cultivation of character and more, in casuistic fashion, on isolated actions. Furthermore, although Ockham continues to argue that the intellect is a ‘partial cause’ of all action and that right reason submits obligations to the will, the lack of a criterion internal to the will, appears to reduce the basis for compliance to arbitrary choice.
provide a starting-point for early modern voluntarists who – in separating intellect from will more consistently – end up conceiving the will as a passion or as motivated by a non-intellectualist form of sensitive spontaneity.\textsuperscript{160}

makes all choices equally undetermined by considerations adduced by reason, it cannot draw the appropriate distinction between deliberate and impulsive (sudden) actions, and cannot explain why the distinction matters.” Pinckaers, 340-341. Ockham, “Voluntarism,” 148, “the motive for contingent action is simply personal preference. ‘I did it because I wanted to do it.’”\textsuperscript{160} Irwin, 708.
Chapter 8

Empiricism and Early Modern Liberalism in Hobbes and Locke

8. Introduction

Lonergan argues that the Enlightenment in general and the scientific revolution (c. 1680), in particular, mark a transition from Aristotelian metaphysics and essentialism in natural philosophy to the modern concern for empirical science and epistemological inquiry.\(^1\) The rise of epistemology as an independent philosophical pursuit precipitates a distinctively modern turn from a metaphysical account of human knowing and choosing based on an analysis of the soul’s faculties to an emphasis on subjectivity or consciousness.\(^2\) Despite these innovations, early modern empiricists such as Hobbes and Locke develop accounts of human knowing and choosing that remain indebted to certain methodological trends shared by late medieval intuitionism and voluntarism.

Lonergan notes that the starting point of early modern empiricist philosophy is the cognitional myth – shared by Scotus and Ockham – that correlates epistemic objectivity with ‘taking a good look’ and that, by extension, regards ‘the real as a subdivision of the already out there now.’\(^3\) While Hobbes and Locke do not employ categories such as intuitive and abstractive cognition, intuitionist analogues of both modes of knowing appear in their work. In both authors, a neglect of direct and reflective insight contributes to the conception of ideas as pictures or representations of external objects whose correspondence with physical reality is guaranteed by

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\(^2\) Lawrence, “Lonergan’s Postmodern Subject,” 107-108.

an uncritical form of isomorphism. General ideas or concepts are constructions of the mind to which outer words are conventionally-assigned for the purposes of classification and deductive manipulation. The bifurcation between knowledge of fact achieved via the senses and knowledge of truth derived from demonstrative reasoning mirrors the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition in Scotus and Ockham. At the same time, Hobbes and Locke also expand and transform earlier voluntarist themes. The result, in brief, is a sensitive or experiential criterion of ‘good’ that mirrors the empiricist commitment to naïve realism and a voluntarist conception of obligation that conceives laws as constructions that superimpose limiting-conditions on individual egoism. In what follows I will trace the expression and combination of these themes in the early modern empiricism of Hobbes and Locke.

8.1 Hobbes on Human Knowing

Hobbes’ account of human knowing and choosing begins with the pre-empirical claim that reality is constituted, in the most fundamental sense, by atoms or matter in motion. Dispensing with the need for sensible species, he conceives sensing in general as the product of motion, both external and internal. According to Hobbes, the motions of matter constitutive of external objects initially press the organs of sense. This pressure – mediated by ‘nerves and other strings and membranes of the body’ – continues to the brain where it causes a ‘resistance’ or ‘counter-pressure,’ a correlative internal motion that produces a ‘representation’ or what Hobbes calls a ‘seeming’ or ‘fancy.’ When such representations or ‘appearances’ are produced by the motion of objects pressing the eyes, the result are ‘thoughts,’ functionally equivalent to pictures, that emerge in the mind. The presence or memory of such representations in the absence of the

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
original external motion is a product of the imagination. The distinctively human capacity for speech transfers mental discourse – the train or succession of thoughts or pictures in the mind – into verbal discourse – the train or succession of words or names that stand as ‘signs’ for thoughts – for the purpose of communication. Hobbes further distinguishes between proper and common or universal names. The former are signs of one particular individual thing, such as ‘Peter, John, this man, this tree,’ while the latter refer to conventionally-appointed names that function as signs of similar individual things. The subsequent emergence and intuition of any thought or picture in the mind by the use of proper or general names or signs is correlative with the act of understanding: ‘understanding being nothing else, but conception caused by speech.’

According to Hobbes, truth and falsity are ‘attributes of speech, not of things….where speech is not, there is neither truth nor falsehood.’ More specifically, he conceives truth as a function of the proper conjunction of names or of subjects and predicates in propositions or ‘affirmations.’ By extension, reason or ‘reckoning’ refers to the ‘adding and subtracting’ of the ‘consequences of generall names’ or with the syllogistic manipulation of propositions via deductive logic. Following the procedures of Aristotelian science, Hobbes argues that reasoning begins with the proper signification or definition of words. Reasoning proceeds by an ‘orderly method’ from the ‘elements, which are names, to assertions made by connexion of one of them to another; and so to syllogism, which are the connexions of one assertion to another, till

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7 Ibid, I. 2.
8 Ibid, I. 3, 4.
9 Ibid, I. 4. “In response of all which together, it is called an universall; there being nothing in the world universall but names; for the things named, are every one of them individual and singular. One universall name is imposed on many things, for their similitude in some quality or other accident: and whereas a Proper name bringeth to mind one thing onely; universals recall any one of those many.”
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid, I. 4-5.
we come to a knowledge of all the consequences of names.\textsuperscript{14} The subsequently derived conclusions – called ‘general rules...theoremes or aphorismes’ – are coextensive with what Hobbes calls ‘science’ in the technical sense.\textsuperscript{15} Oriented to the ‘benefit of [hu] mankind,’ scientific truth differs from the knowledge of fact linked to sense perception and memory by virtue of its commitment to abstract syllogistic reasoning.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{8.1.1 Hobbes on Human Choosing}

The heart of Hobbes’ distinctive notion of the human good lies in his particular view of sensitive spontaneity. According to Hobbes, when the motions produced by present or merely imagined objects continue from the eyes and other sense organs to the heart, the result is a distinctive internal motion that he labels ‘endeavor.’\textsuperscript{17} When this motion is towards the object that causes it, the result is what he terms appetite or desire – the appearance of which he names ‘delight’ – and when this motion is away from the object that causes it, the result is what he calls aversion.\textsuperscript{18} In line with empiricist and nominalist positions on knowing in general, Hobbes denies the reality of a \textit{sumnum bonum}, an ultimate end or \textit{telos} that sublates and directs the linked but opposed principles of sensitive spontaneity and practical intelligence.\textsuperscript{19} This move reduces the meaning of the words good and evil in the state of nature to the criteria associated with the first level of the human good, pleasure and pain respectively.\textsuperscript{20} From this perspective,

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, I. 5. Hobbes regards geometry as a paradigmatic example of science.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, I. 5, 9.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, I. 5, 7, 9. Hobbes’ mechanist and materialist reduction of all sensing, desiring and thinking to matter in motion does not negate the fact that human living can be understood in relatively traditional ways as epiphenomena of more basic atomic interactions. However, the disjunction between ‘knowledge of fact’ and ‘knowledge of reality as it is’ does seem to introduce an inconsistency between Hobbes’ epistemology and metaphysics.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, I. 6.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, I. 11.
\textsuperscript{20} Lonergan, \textit{Insight}, 626; 647-648. Lonergan links the cognitional counterposition that regards “the real as a subdivision of the already out there now, of objectivity as extroversion” with its ethical correlate. For the empiricist, ‘the good is identified with objects of desire while the intelligible good of order and the rational good of value are regarded as so much ideological superstructure that can claim to be good only inasmuch as it furthers the attainment of objects of desire.” See also ibid, 629-630, “hedonist or sentimentalist….he must claim that the meaning of the
passions – the ‘first internal beginnings of voluntary motion’ – support the continued vital motion or basic life processes of the individual.\textsuperscript{21}

Hobbes describes the way in which appetite co-opts practical intelligence in service of happiness by relating the notions of deliberation and discourse.\textsuperscript{22} According to Hobbes, the alternation of appetites and aversions ‘continued until the thing be done or thought impossible is called deliberation’ and the ‘last appetite or aversion immediately adhering to the action or to its omission is what we call the will.’\textsuperscript{23} This process of deliberation regulated by the individual’s passions is supported by mental or verbal discourse.\textsuperscript{24} The individual uses discourse to seek the causes of or means to produce an imagined or desired effect or, alternatively, to determine the possible effects or consequences of an action.\textsuperscript{25} At no point in this process does culture in Lonergan’s technical sense play a role in specifying ends that represent a higher integration of sensitive spontaneity and its related instrumentalization of practical intelligence. The third level of the human good comes to be constituted by the various conceptual objectifications of the sensing, desiring and calculating agent, together with the manipulation of these concepts that generate, for example, the Hobbesian science of politics I will examine below.

\subsection{Hobbes’ Science of Politics}

Hobbes’ rejection of a higher level control of meaning combines with individual bias and its correlative denial of primitive intersubjectivity to shape his account of the state of nature. The latter is described as a site of perpetual competition between radically asocial agents seeking

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, I. 3, 6.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, I. 6, 7.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, I. 7. See also Ibid, I. 3. ‘look upon what you would have as the thing that directs all your thoughts in the way to attain it.’ Ibid, I. 8. ‘the thoughts are to the desires as scouts and spies, to range abroad and find the way to things desired.’
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, I. 3.
power defined as the present means to obtain some future object of desire.\textsuperscript{26} This shared inclination creates a competitive atmosphere that pits individuals against one another in a perpetual war of all against all, a condition that consists not only in actual battle but in the period of time where the will to mutual domination is known.\textsuperscript{27} According to Hobbes, each individual who exists in this state possesses what he calls the ‘right of nature,’ a liberty to perform all that conduces to the preservation of one’s own life.\textsuperscript{28} Since the criteria of good and evil in the state of nature are private passions, there exists no such thing as justice or injustice and, by extension, there can exist no true notion of property: ‘every man has a right to everything, even to another’s body.’\textsuperscript{29}

In the absence of independently-valid cultural norms, Hobbes argues that sensitive spontaneity and practical intelligence must combine to push individuals out of the state of nature and into a civil society correlative with what Lonergan regards as the good of order.\textsuperscript{30} First, the individual’s fear of death – the correlative of her desire for self-preservation that sets the conditions of possibility for felicity – inclines individuals to seek peace or respite from the war of all against all.\textsuperscript{31} Second, reason in its instrumental capacity guided by passion discovers certain precepts or prudential conclusions that specify the long-term conditions necessary for

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, I. 13.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, I. 14.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, I. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, I. 14. The claim that there are no independent cultural standards in the state of nature might at first seem controversial. Hobbes is on occasion clear that the prudential judgments of practical intelligence associated with the label ‘natural law’ are in fact also divine commands that oblige \textit{in foro interno}. However, whether or not God is the author of such precepts, they might nevertheless be conceived, not as higher integrations of spontaneity and practical intelligence, but as judgments designed to serve narrow self-interest in the long-term. Such judgments oblige but not in any genuinely moral way. Here one might speak of a pejorative ‘adaptation of theory to practice,’ a Christian cover-story designed to sanction a truncated account of the human good. See also Henrik Syse, \textit{Natural Law, Religion and Rights: An Exploration of the Relationship between Natural Law and Natural Rights with Special Emphasis on the Teachings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke} (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 163; 175-179.
securing the preservation of the individual.\textsuperscript{32} Hobbes’ ‘first law of nature’ combines this dictate of reason\textsuperscript{33} with the individual’s natural right to self-preservation.\textsuperscript{34} A second and related law of nature states that insofar as a mutual desire to seek peace exists, individuals ought to mutually transfer or lay down their right of nature, a reciprocal action that limits an individual’s liberty to that which does not interfere with another’s right to self-preservation.\textsuperscript{35} However, in the absence of a common power capable of tying individuals by fear of punishment to the performance of such a contract, the breaking of covenants is inevitable.\textsuperscript{36} The key therefore to the transition from the state of nature or war to political society or commonwealth lies in the institution of a sovereign authority capable of forcing individuals to uphold their contractual commitments through fear of punishment.\textsuperscript{37}

Only under sovereign authority are private good and evil – terms specified by the disparate appetites of individuals in the state of nature – replaced by the categories of justice and injustice.\textsuperscript{38} More specifically, Hobbes argues that the sovereign’s authority as legislator transforms the long-range prudential precepts of individually-biased practical intelligence into civil laws that delimit the liberties and obligations pertaining to subjects in a commonwealth. Such civil laws constitute a second level legal system that commands obligation through fear and prudential self-interest and that sets the conditions of possibility for cooperative ventures that serve the narrow self-interests of individual citizens.\textsuperscript{39} As author of such laws, the sovereign authority is not personally subject to them.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, since subjects of the commonwealth are

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid, I. 14. ‘Every man ought to seek peace as far as he has hope of obtaining it.’
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid, I. 14. ‘When peace is not an option, retain your right to defend oneself in any manner necessary.’
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid, I. 15, 16; II. 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid, I. 15-16; II. 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid, II. 18, 26.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Lonergan, “Invariant,” 42, “in the sensate civilization or culture, attention concentrates on the particular goods; the good of order is a means to the attainment of the particular goods.”
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, II. 18.
\end{itemize}
collective authors of all that a sovereign decrees and since sovereign authority consists in the
aggregation of each individual’s right of nature, sovereigns can never be accused of committing
unlawful injury against subjects.\textsuperscript{41} For this and other reasons, legitimate sovereign authority is
absolute in nature. Although it is designed to serve the purpose of furthering the preservation of
the multitude, sovereign authority itself is not limited by any independent criteria.

\section{8.2 Locke on Human Knowing}

Designed to determine ‘the origin, certainty and extent of human knowledge, together
with the ground and degrees of belief,’ Locke’s \textit{An Essay Concerning Human Understanding} is a
prime example of the modern turn to the subject and its correlative emphasis on epistemological
inquiry.\textsuperscript{42} Locke’s investigation of human knowing begins with a discourse on the origin of ideas
or the ‘immediate object[s] of perception, thought or understanding.’\textsuperscript{43} Like Hobbes, Locke
develops an ‘imagistic’ account of human knowing that conceives ideas as mental images or
pictures and that correlates the ‘act of understanding’ with the perception of ideas.\textsuperscript{44} Since the
human mind is a \textit{tabula rasa}, ‘a white paper void of all characters,’\textsuperscript{45} all of its ideas and
subsequent knowledge must be derived \textit{a posteriori} through a twofold process of sensory and
reflective or internal observation.\textsuperscript{46} As Locke argues, the human mind is fundamentally
‘passive’\textsuperscript{47} in character; it produces ideas spontaneously or ‘by impulse.’\textsuperscript{48} Simple or

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, I. 16; II. 18, 20, 24.
\textsuperscript{42} John Locke, \textit{An Essay Concerning Human Understanding}, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996),
intro, 1-3.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 2.8.8.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 2.9.1, 3; 2.21.5. See for example: Michael Ayers, \textit{Locke: Epistemology & Ontology} (NY: Routledge, 1991),
44-51.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 2.1.1.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 2.1.1-3.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 2.1.25.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 2.8.11.
‘unmixed’ ideas of sense result from a confrontation with or experience of sensible objects. Like Hobbes, Locke argues that these ideas are produced by the operation of ‘insensible particles’ or ‘imperceptible bodies’ that travel from the objects of sense ‘to the seat of sensation, there to produce in our minds the particular ideas we have of them.’ Locke further distinguishes between primary or ‘real’ and secondary qualities of bodies that depend upon the former. ‘Utterly inseparable from the body,’ primary qualities refer to an object’s ‘solidity, extension, figure and motion.’ They produce corresponding simple ideas of ‘solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest and number’ in the mind. Secondary qualities of sensible objects denote ‘nothing in the objects themselves’ but a power to produce ideas such as ‘colours, sounds, tastes’ in the mind by virtue of the configuration of primary qualities.

Other simple ideas are derived from reflection, a corresponding interior form of observation or ‘internal sense’ that refers to the ‘perception of the operations of our mind.’ Such ideas include ‘perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing’ and all other operations of the mind ranging from ‘discerning,’ ‘comparing,’ ‘compounding,’ ‘naming,’ and ‘abstraction.’ From this perspective, consciousness and introspection are conceived along intuitionist lines as the ‘perception’ of images or pictures that ‘pass…in a man’s own mind.’ In addition, personal identity depends, not upon substance, but upon

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49 Ibid, see 2.2.1. “Though the qualities that affect our senses are, in the things themselves, so united and blended, that there is no separation….yet…the ideas they produce in the mind enter by the senses simple and unmixed.”
50 Ibid, 2.1.3.
51 Ibid, 2.8.12; 2.9.3.
52 Ibid, 2.8.8-10.
53 Ibid, 2.8.9-10.
54 Ibid, 2.8.9.
55 Ibid, 2.7.13. 2.8.14. 2.8.15.
56 Ibid, 2.1.4.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid, 2.11.1; 2.11.4-9.
59 Ibid, 2.1.19.
According to Locke, ‘consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self….and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person.’

According to Locke, the human mind is capable of manipulating the simple ideas that the mind passively receives and perceives or understands to create compound or complex ideas. Complex ideas further subdivide into three types: ideas of substances, ideas of modes and ideas of relations. Ideas of substances are constituted by a combination of simple ideas, ideas of primary and secondary qualities that stand for or represent ‘distinct particular things subsisting by themselves.’ The general term or idea of substance refers to the unidentified ‘substratum’ that supports, stands under or upholds those qualities perceived to be joined together in particular sensible objects. The idea of substance in general is closely related to Locke’s distinction between real and nominal essences. In line with Locke’s commitment to a corpuscular account of reality, the real essence of a substance denotes the insensible and microscopic configuration of primary qualities that remains inaccessible to the human mind. An object’s nominal essence refers to the collection of simple ideas produced by sensible primary and secondary qualities – themselves dependent on the substance’s real essence – that may be combined to form an abstract idea or concept that stands for individuals of a particular species or type. Nominal essences or abstract ideas of species are produced as the mind separates the ideas constitutive of a nominal essence from the ‘circumstances of time and place, and any other ideas that may...

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60 Ibid, 2.27. 1, 9, 16-18, 26.
61 Ibid, 2.27.9.
63 Ibid, 2.12.3.
64 Ibid, 2.23.9.
65 Ibid, 2.12.6.
66 Ibid, 1.3.19.
67 See for example: Greg Forster, John Locke’s Politics of Moral Consensus (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 78.
68 See for example Locke, Essay, 2.31.6; 3.9.12.
69 Ibid, 3.3.15; 3.6.2, 29.
The inability to access the internal constitution of substances at least partly explains Locke’s shift from a focus on the substance of the human person – the metaphysical soul inaccessible to the human mind – to an emphasis on consciousness in line with the modern ‘turn to the subject.’

Second, ideas of modes ‘contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves but are considered as dependences on, or affections of substances.’ Unlike abstract ideas of substances that purport to be ‘ectypes’ or copies of externally existing objects, the abstract ideas of mixed modes are ‘archetypes’ whose existence are dependent upon the mind’s ‘voluntary combination of…a precise collection of simple ideas.’ Since archetypes do not represent patterns ‘existing and made by nature,’ the nominal and real essences of mixed modes are identical. According to Locke, the vast majority of mixed modes denote ‘moral actions…regarded…absolutely, ‘human actions’ whose ‘various ends, objects, manners and circumstances…are framed into distinct complex ideas’ to which general names are annexed, such as ‘murder, incest, stabbing, theft,’ ‘obligation, drunkenness, a lie.’

Finally, ideas of relations refer to the ‘consideration and comparing [of] one idea with another’ and to the process whereby individuals give ‘one or both of them some appellation from that comparison and sometimes give even the relation itself a name.’

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70 Ibid, 3.3.6; 2.11.9; 2.12.1. Locke is not altogether clear how this process of abstraction occurs. See Ibid, 2.11.9, “such precise, naked appearances in the mind, without considering how, whence, or with what others they came there, the understanding lays up…as the standards to rank real existence into sorts.”

71 Ibid, 2.23.5, 30.

72 Ibid, 2.12.4.

73 Ibid, 2.31.13-14.

74 Ibid, 2.32.12.

75 Ibid, 2.32.1. Archetypes are arbitrarily created by the human mind.

76 Ibid, 3.5.14.

77 Ibid, 2.28.15.

78 Ibid, 2.28.4.

79 Ibid, 3.5.6; 2.12.5; 2.22.1; 2.22.2, 4-5, 12, “a dictionary of the greatest part of the words made use of in divinity, ethics, law and politics, and several other sciences.”

80 Ibid, 2.12.7; 2.25.1.

81 Ibid, 2.25.7.
argues that ‘any of our ideas may be the foundation of relation,’\textsuperscript{82} he pays particular attention to the way in which relation gives rise to our ideas of cause and effect\textsuperscript{83} and to moral claims whereby ‘voluntary actions’ are judged to be in ‘conformity or disagreement’ with a moral rule or law to which they may be related.\textsuperscript{84}

If knowledge stems from the ‘perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas,’\textsuperscript{85} it is Locke’s contention that the relation of different types of ideas generates ‘intuitive,’ ‘demonstrative’ and ‘sensitive’ forms of knowledge.\textsuperscript{86} Intuitively grasped and demonstratively derived universal conclusions constitute knowledge or science in the strict sense. Roughly correlative with self-evidence, intuition refers to the mind’s capacity to ‘perceive…the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves without the intervention of any other.’\textsuperscript{87} According to Locke, intuitive knowledge – the ‘clearest and most certain [form of knowledge] that human frailty is capable of’\textsuperscript{88} – sits at the foundation of all further scientific knowledge that may be derived through demonstration. Although Locke argues that intuitive knowledge need not be limited to certain vacuous self-evident first principles or maxims such as the law of non-contradiction,\textsuperscript{89} his emphasis on intuition as foundational for scientific reasoning is analogous to the classicist emphasis on propositional first principles. Building on this intuitive knowledge, demonstration or ‘reasoning’ refers to the mind’s capacity to ‘perceive agreement or disagreement’ through the ‘the intervention of other ideas.’\textsuperscript{90} Each stage in the chain of argument or demonstrative process relies on intuitive knowledge ‘of that agreement it seeks with the next

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 2.25.1.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 2.26.1.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 2.28.4.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 4.1.2.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 4.2. The capacity for generating certitude distinguishes knowledge broadly construed from ‘probability’ or ‘opinion.’
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 4.2.1.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 4.7.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, 4.2.2.
intermediate idea which it uses as a proof." Paradigmatic examples of demonstrative knowledge are linked to the manipulation of abstract mixed modes in disciplines such as mathematics, ethics, and politics and may also include knowledge of God’s existence. Again, although Locke argues that demonstrative knowledge need not employ formal syllogistic logic, his account of demonstration is roughly analogous to the focus on deductive manipulation that lies at the heart of classicist accounts of culture. Likewise certain, albeit non-universal in scope, sensitive knowledge appears to fall foul of Locke’s stated definition of knowledge. Sensitive knowledge refers, not to the perception of agreement or disagreement of two ideas, but to the existential claim that at least some of the ideas that arise in the mind correspond with or are produced by external objects present to the senses.

Locke distinguishes all three forms of genuine knowledge from the probabilities or opinions produced in ‘natural philosophy.’ Unable to access the corpuscular composition or real essence of substances, the human mind remains incapable of generating scientific knowledge of ‘natural bodies’ or of discovering ‘general, instructive, and unquestionable truths concerning them.’ Unlike the demonstrative knowledge produced through the relation of general words that stand for mixed modes whose nominal and real essences coincide, knowledge of substance is limited to the abstract ideas of nominal essences. As a result, the human mind remains incapable of generating anything more than fallible or probable judgments about

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91 Ibid, 4.2.7.
92 Ibid, 4.3.18.
93 Ibid, 4.17.4-6.
94 Ibid, 4.2.14; 4.3.21; 4.11.1-3.
95 Ibid, 4.12.10.
96 Ibid, 4.3.25, 26.
particular objects. According to Locke, faith conceived as religious claims associated with revelation also fall into this latter category.

8.2.1 Locke on Human Choosing

Locke’s account of moral knowing and choosing begins with a denial of innate moral principles and a sumnum bonum or ultimate end towards which humans are naturally oriented. Following Hobbes, Locke admits the universality or naturalness of a sensitively spontaneous inclination or appetite for the good or happiness, an agent-relative orientation that correlates the basic meanings of the words good and evil with pleasure and pain respectively. The product of both sensation and reflection, the simple ideas of pleasure and pain that are ‘mixed with’ or accompany the perception of other ideas provide the motivational matrix for human action. In other words, the desire for happiness or ‘uneasiness of the mind for want of some absent good’ – whether of body or of mind – ‘determines the will’ or provides the motivation or ‘spring’ for action. Although the ‘most pressing uneasiness’ typically ‘determines the will,’ humans possess a capacity – ‘the source of all liberty’ or ‘free will’ –

97 Locke may retain characteristically classicist emphases on universality and certainty but he limits the scope of such scientific knowledge to the manipulation of abstract ideas of mixed modes. See 4.17.17, “judgment is the thinking or taking two ideas to agree or disagree, by the intervention of one or more ideas, whose certain agreement or disagreement with them it does not perceive, but hath observed to be frequent and usual.”
98 Ibid, 4.28.
99 Ibid, 1.2.
100 Ibid, 2.21.55-56.
101 Ibid, 2.21.55-56; 2.20.2; 2.21.43, “what has an aptness to produce pleasure in us that we call good and what is apt to produce pain in us we call evil.”
102 Ibid, 2.7.1-2.
103 Ibid, 2.7.2.
104 Ibid, 2.21.31; 2.21.42-3.
105 Ibid, 2.21.31.
106 Ibid, 2.21.31, 33-34.
107 Ibid, 2.21.41.
‘to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires’\textsuperscript{109} and to proceed with ‘caution, [and] deliberation…in the direction of their particular actions.’\textsuperscript{110}

8.2.2 Locke on Natural Law and Civil Society

It is from within this empiricist perspective that Locke develops a voluntarist account of law and obligation.\textsuperscript{111} As he argues, moral obligations depend upon the existence of laws and all forms of law presuppose a lawmaker.\textsuperscript{112} If good and evil in the absence of law are ‘nothing but pleasure and pain,’ law sets the conditions of possibility for moral good and evil construed as ‘conformity or disagreement of voluntary actions to some law, whereby good or evil is drawn on us’ in the form of ‘reward and punishment.’\textsuperscript{113} Locke further distinguishes between three forms of law, all of which are in some basic sense designed to place restrictions on the agent’s quest for pleasure and happiness.\textsuperscript{114} Since Locke denies the reality of a \textit{summum bonum} inscribed in human nature, the ‘law of opinion or reputation’ that specifies right or wrong in terms of virtue and vice and that conceives reward and punishment in terms of social esteem and disgrace is inadequately context-specific.\textsuperscript{115} The real debate among Locke scholars therefore centers on the relationship between divine or natural and civil laws. On the one hand, interpreters tend to agree that Locke’s account of the state of nature and political legitimacy side-steps many of the deficiencies that mark the work of Hobbes. On the other hand, scholars disagree about the relative priority of natural rights and natural laws or obligations in Locke’s political theory.\textsuperscript{116} At

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 2.21.48, 53.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 2.21.53.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 1.2.12-3; 1.3.8.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 2.28.5
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 2.28.7.
\textsuperscript{116} Take for example Michael Zuckert, Natural Rights and the New Republicanism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 274-286; Michael Zuckert, Launching Liberalism: On Lockeian Political Philosophy (Lawrence,
the heart of this debate rests a disagreement concerning the relative priority of divine and civil law.

The ‘only true touchstone of moral rectitude,’ divine law, alternatively known as ‘the law of nature,’ refers to a series of divine commands accessible to human beings through revelation or natural reason. According to Locke, knowledge of the divine law allows individuals to conceive reward and punishment in reference to life after death. Those who live in fidelity to that law will be rewarded with eternal happiness – the highest form of pleasure – and those who break that law will suffer eternal punishment or pain. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke hints that the content of divine law or the law of nature is accessible to human reason through a series of demonstrative or deductive proofs. The chain of reasoning proceeds from the idea of a ‘supreme being, infinite in power, goodness and wisdom, whose workmanship we are, and on whom we depend’ in conjunction with knowledge of human inclinations and rational capacities. Although Locke never develops a demonstrative argument to this effect, he does point to a relationship between the quest for happiness and divinely-
ordained duties designed to govern the relations between fundamentally self-interested individuals.\textsuperscript{122}

Locke is somewhat clearer in the \textit{Second Treatise of Government}. Here the argument in support of divine or natural law begins with the unproven supposition that human beings are the ‘workmanship’ or property of God. Humankind’s creaturely status entails two divinely-ordained obligations: (a) humans ought to preserve themselves; and (b) when such self-preservation is not impeded by others, they ought to preserve the rest of humankind.\textsuperscript{123} These divinely-ordained and rationally apprehensible duties provide the ethical ground for deriving, in demonstrative fashion, individuals’ equal rights to life, liberty, property and happiness. Thus, whereas Hobbes’ so-called laws of nature are merely prudential guidelines designed to temper an individual’s natural right to everything, Locke’s pre-political state of nature appears to be governed by epistemically prior obligations that delimit the individual’s lawful liberties. Since these obligations impinge upon the agent’s liberty in the state of nature and, by extension, delimit the bounds of legitimate political authority, Locke is able to avoid the absolutist implications of Hobbes’ notion of sovereignty.

This approach to divine or natural law is not without its own tensions however. First, since law depends upon knowledge of a legislating authority and upon knowledge of its sanctions, it is unclear how accessible this law is when Locke explicitly rejects the possibility of demonstrating the immortality of the soul.\textsuperscript{124} Second, it remains unclear how Locke justifies the movement from demonstratively generated claims about the existence and attributes of God to knowledge of God’s will – the content of divine law – conceived in voluntarist terms. From this second perspective it might be argued that Locke co-opts theory to serve liberal practice or, in

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 1.2.6; 1.2.13.
\textsuperscript{123} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, II.6
other words, ‘Christianizes’ an independently hedonistic and self-interested account of the human good.\footnote{125}

Third, when attention is paid to Locke’s characterization of the state of nature the issues concerning divine sanctions and knowledge of the divine will arise in a different way. In the state of nature, first characterized as a state of equality, peace, good-will and mutual assistance, Locke argues that individuals possess what he calls the executive law of nature, a this-worldly substitute for divine reward and punishment.\footnote{126} This executive power allows individuals in the absence of government to be judges in their own cases, to punish those who attempt to injure or infringe upon their freedom and to seek reparation for injuries incurred from those same individuals.\footnote{127} If Locke’s account of the state of nature ended here one would be hard-pressed to provide reasons why there is a need for civil laws or political authority. The reality however is that Locke’s description of the state of nature in the Second Treatise quickly morphs into something that much more closely resembles the Hobbesian state of perpetual war. More specifically, Locke argues that individuals fail through lack of study to grasp the natural law as given, a fact that typically biases the execution of their executive power in favor of their own self-interest.\footnote{128} This combination of ignorance and individual bias compels Locke to argue that in the state of nature there lacks both an ‘established, settled, known law’ capable of supplying the basis for governing interactions between individuals and a ‘known and indifferent judge’ with authority to settle cases and execute punishments when necessary.\footnote{129}

\footnote{125} This claim is made by a wide variety of authors. See for example: Syse; Zuckert, \textit{New}; Zuckert, \textit{Lauching}; Hittinger; Kennington; Herbert; and Strauss.
\footnote{127} Ibid.
\footnote{128} References to humankind’s inability to acknowledge let alone heed the natural law are peppered throughout Locke’s eight \textit{Essays}. See also Locke, \textit{Second}, II. 12; III; IX. In the \textit{Essays on the Law of Nature} and in the \textit{Essay Concerning Human Understanding}, Locke contrasts a voluntarist conception of natural law with the individuals’ spontaneous self-interest and laments the fact that the vast majority of individuals live in ignorance of this higher level control of meaning.
\footnote{129} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise}, XI. 123-126.
From this latter perspective, the breakdown of Locke’s voluntarist notion of natural law seems to reduce the starting-point for Lockean ethics from divinely-ordained duties to the Hobbesian combination of spontaneous self-regard and long-range prudential intelligence.\(^{130}\) Thus, just as for Hobbes, the purpose of civil society is to formulate second level positive or civil laws conducive to the preservation of property and to the fair resolution of controversies. Both conditions are essential to securing the recurring satisfaction of self-interest.\(^{131}\) Rather than starting with a series of divinely ordained obligations and their relevant sanctions, Locke’s pre-political agent might just as well start with her right to self-preservation and her capacity to suspend immediate gratification in exchange for long-range security in civil society. In other words, the divine law is not only ineffective, it is ‘superfluous’ or ‘redundant.’ Practical intelligence can generate natural law-like precepts that compel individuals to consent to political arrangements.\(^{132}\) The result is a demonstrative argument that need not appeal to questionable theological presuppositions.\(^{133}\)

At the same time, the failure of the ‘workmanship’ argument need not imply that Locke’s account of political legitimacy is the same as Hobbes’. The key to recognizing the difference lies in the way Locke grounds the right to self-preservation through reference to self-ownership:

‘every man has a property in his own person…this nobody has any right to but himself.’\(^{134}\) This notion of natural property – grounded in the identity constituting capacities of human consciousness\(^ {135}\) – not only excludes the right of anyone else to one’s person, it also provides a

\(^{130}\) Herbert, 107; Kennington, 268; Hittinger, 105, 109, 120-124; Zuckert, New, 272-275.
\(^{131}\) Locke, Second Treatise, IX. Lonergan, “Invariant,” 42.
\(^{132}\) Hittinger, 110, 121-122.
\(^{133}\) Locke, Human Understanding, 4.3.18. Here appeal might be made to notions of self-interest, liberty, government, property etc.
\(^{134}\) Locke, Second Treatise, V.27.
\(^{135}\) Locke, Human Understanding, 2.27.
pre-political criterion for assessing the relative legitimacy of any particular political system.\textsuperscript{136} The self-ownership thesis points to the reality of natural duties – correlative with though ultimately derivable from natural rights – that fall afoul of Locke’s account of moral good and evil in the \textit{Essay}.\textsuperscript{137} Only when these natural duties become codified in civil society is it possible to speak of genuine law and obligation and only when duly promulgated laws and effective sanctions exist is it possible to ascribe genuine protection to natural rights or property.


\textsuperscript{137} It is unclear how Locke can claim that where there is no property there is no possibility of injustice and yet claim that in the state of nature there exists natural property without the existence of a superior who promulgates and enforces laws or obligations.
Chapter 9

Idealism and Early Modern Liberalism in Kant

9. Introduction

Kant’s investigation of the nature and limits of human knowledge in the Critique of Pure Reason takes seriously the modern ‘turn to the subject.’¹ In the first Critique Kant attempts to walk a fine line between two extreme and uncritical options: rationalist metaphysics and empiricist skepticism.² On the one hand, Kant argues that although rationalists rightly affirm the possibility of the a priori, they overemphasize innate knowledge and overextend its range to include morality and the existence of God.³ On the other hand, Kant argues that although empiricists rightly recognize the sensory starting-point of all knowledge, they tend to deny the possibility of both necessary scientific claims and metaphysical commitments concerning human freedom, morality and the existence of God.⁴ Kant’s critical alternative seeks to retain a classicist emphasis on the possibility of scientific knowledge⁵ and a modified commitment to traditional metaphysical concerns.⁶ At the heart of Kant’s solution lies his distinction between phenomena

¹ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 20. AVIII, “demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, that of self-knowledge and to institute a court of justice….this court is none other than the critique of pure reason.”
² Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 2-3.
⁴ See Kenneth P. Winkler, “Kant, the Empiricists, and the Enterprise of Deduction,” in The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique, 41-73.
⁵ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 2, 20; 2-3, “defend a priori knowledge….because no knowledge derived from any particular experience, or a posteriori knowledge, could justify a claim to universal and necessary validity.”
⁶ Ibid, 20, AXV, “The critique of reason thus finally leads necessarily to science; the dogmatic use of it without critique, on the contrary, leads to groundless assertions, to which one can oppose equally plausible ones, thus to scepticism.”
or appearances and noumena or things-in-themselves. Knowledge of noumena—the representation of objects ‘as they are’—would be the product of a ‘non-sensible’ or purely intellectual ‘intuition.’ Unlike Scotus, Ockham, and Kant’s rationalist predecessors who defend the possibility of such intuition, he argues that genuine knowledge of things-in-themselves is not available to human subjects. Insofar as sensible intuitions are shaped, filtered and or organized by certain a priori forms of sensibility and understanding, human cognition is limited to knowledge of mere appearances or phenomena. These ‘transcendental’ features of the human mind provide the basis for certain ‘synthetic’ as opposed to ‘analytic’ a priori judgments that allow Kant to retain the classicist scientific ideal in disciplines such as mathematics and natural science. By restricting the scope of human knowledge to the realm of ‘possible experience,’ Kant’s idealist alternative denies the extension of speculative knowledge to questions concerning human freedom, moral obligation, the existence of God etc., precisely ‘in order to make room for faith.’ Kant’s focus on autonomy or freedom of the will and his modification of certain voluntarist themes present in Scotus and Ockham provide an alternative to an empiricist account.

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10 Ibid, 6-7; A12/B26, “I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general. A system of such concepts would be called transcendental philosophy.”
11 Ibid, 6. See in general: A7-10/B11-14. Kant distinguishes between analytic and synthetic judgments. See in particular: A6/B10, “In all judgments in which the relation of a subject to the predicate is thought...this relation is possible in two different ways. Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A as something that is (covertly) contained in this concept A; or B lies entirely outside the concept A, though to be sure it stands in connection with it. In the first case I call the judgment analytic, in the second synthetic.” Kant further distinguishes between synthetic a posteriori judgments that appeal purely to experience for the connection of subject and predicate and synthetic a priori judgments, such as ‘everything that happens has its cause.’ See also: A9/B13, “the concept of a cause indicates something different from the concept of something that happens, and is not contained in the latter representation at all. How then do I come to say something quite different about that which happens in general and to cognize the concept of cause as belonging to it even though not contained in it? What is the X here on which the understanding depends when it believes itself to discover beyond the concept of A a predicate that is foreign to it and that is yet connected with it? It cannot be experience, for the principle that has been adduced adds latter representations to the former not only with greater generality than experience can provide, but also with the expression of necessity, hence entirely a priori and from mere concepts.” On the synthetic a priori judgments ‘contained as principles’ in mathematics and natural science see: B14-18.
12 Ibid, BXXIX-BXXX. See also: 21.
of the human good and contribute to a distinctive brand of liberalism. In what follows, I will explore this collection of claims in more detail.

9.1 Kant on Human Knowing

Kant’s account of human knowing distinguishes between the ‘reception of representations’ through sensitive intuition and the ‘faculty for thinking of objects’ or the mind’s spontaneous capacity for understanding sensible representations through concepts. According to Kant, both capacities are indispensable to properly human knowing: concepts in the absence of intuitions lack content or are ‘empty’ and sense impressions in the absence of understanding lack form or are ‘blind.’ Kant further distinguishes between empirical or a posteriori and pure or a priori intuitions and concepts, where the latter ‘occur absolutely independently of all experience.’ Transcendental philosophy is concerned with identifying the a priori ‘rules of sensibility’ and the a priori ‘rules of understanding’ that condition the possibility of empirical intuitions and concepts respectively and the combination of the latter through judgements.

Kant investigates the distinction between the empirical features or ‘matter’ of intuition and the a priori features or ‘form’ of intuition in the ‘transcendental aesthetic’ or the ‘science’ of ‘sensitive cognition.’ The matter of intuition is correlative with sense impressions or representations produced by the faculty of sensibility. The form of intuition includes the pure or a priori representations of space and time that ‘constitute the conditions under which objects are

13 Ibid, A51/B75.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid, A51-52, 92/B75-76, 125.
16 Ibid, A51-52/B75-76.
17 Ibid, B3. See also A51/B2, 75.
18 Ibid, A52: 57/B76; 82. The division corresponds to the ‘transcendental aesthetic’ and ‘transcendental logic’ respectively.
19 Ibid, 4.
According to Kant, the *a priori* representation or intuition of space is a constitutive feature of the human mind that conditions the possibility of all outer appearances or *a posteriori* impressions by allowing the mind to represent external objects ‘as in different places.’ The pure character of this intuition grounds synthetically *a priori* and apodictically certain geometrical propositions. Like space, time is an *a priori* representation that precedes and structures empirical intuition and that allows the mind to ‘represent that several things exist at one and the same time (simultaneously) or in different times (successively).’ Whereas space supplies the formal condition of ‘all outer intuitions,’ time functions as the form of ‘inner sense’ or the ‘intuition of our self and inner state’ that ‘determines the relation of representations’ in the mind. Since all outer intuitions and their correlative representations fall under inner sense, Kant argues that time is the *a priori* condition of ‘all appearances in general.’ The pure character of this intuition supplies the basis for additional synthetic *a priori* principles associated with the ‘general theory of motion.’ Kant affirms the ‘empirical reality’ of space and time as ‘subjective conditions’ for all outer and inner experience. At the same time, since the ‘objective validity’ of space and time are limited to the ‘human standpoint,’ neither pure intuition represents properties attributable to things-in-themselves and are thus merely

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21 Ibid, B38. See also A23-24/B39, 41
23 Ibid, A30. See also A31.
24 Ibid, A43.
25 Ibid, A33.
26 Ibid, B50.
27 Ibid, A43.
28 Ibid, B49.
29 Ibid, A49.
30 Ibid, A28/B44.
31 Ibid, A26/B42.
‘transcendently ideal.’ Since the subject can only intuit herself via the transcendentally ideal form of inner sense she may only cognize herself as an appearance.

Kant then shifts his focus from the *a priori* forms of sensibility that shape the ‘receptivity of impressions’ through sensible intuition to the faculty of thinking or the human mind’s spontaneous capacity for understanding through concepts. From the perspective of understanding, he draws a distinction between ‘empirical and pure thinking of objects’ or between cognitions or concepts whose matter is empirically derivable and those pure concepts ‘by means of which we think objects completely *a priori*.’ Kant labels this ‘science of pure understanding’ ‘transcendental logic’ and distinguishes further between transcendental analytic and dialectic. In the transcendental analytic, he aims to identify and justify the *a priori* concepts or formal rules that govern the formation and manipulation through judgment of empirical concepts. Just as the pure intuitions of space and time cannot be separated from one another in practice, so in the analytic Kant argues that the pure concepts – ‘the first seeds and predispositions’ – of understanding ‘lie ready, until with the opportunity of experience they are finally developed and exhibited in their clarity.’

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32 Ibid, 7. See also: B44/A28.
33 Ibid, B156, “we must also concede that through inner sense we intuit ourselves only as we are internally affected by our selves, i.e. as far as inner intuition is concerned we cognize our own subject only as appearance but not in accordance with what it is in itself.”
34 Ibid, A51-52/B75-77. See also: A68/B93. If sensitive intuition is grounded on the passive ‘receptivity of impressions,’ the formation of concepts is linked to the spontaneity of human understanding.
35 Ibid, A57/B81
37 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A66/B91. See also: B119, “we can search in experience, if not for the principle of their possibility, then for the occasional causes of their generation, where the impressions of the senses provide the first occasion for opening the entire power of cognition to them for bringing about experience, which contains two very heterogeneous elements, namely a matter for cognition from the senses and a certain form for ordering it from the inner source of pure intuiting and thinking, which, on the occasion of the former are first brought into use and bring forth concepts.”
According to Kant, the *a priori* concepts or categories of the understanding applicable to ‘objects of intuition in general *a priori*’ may be derived from an analysis of the formal structure of all possible judgments. In other words, just as judgments ‘can only be made in a fixed variety of logical forms,’ so in a similar way the concepts that supply the terms of any particular judgment are structured or shaped by certain *a priori* forms or categories. In this way, Kant argues that just as the *a priori* representations of space and time supply the conditions of possibility for all intuition, so in an analogous way the *a priori* categories or concepts of understanding set the conditions for thinking any intuited object.

According to Kant, understanding through concepts is made possible by a spontaneous and largely unconscious process of ‘combination’ or ‘synthesis’ whereby the manifold of intuition is ‘taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it.’ Kant traces the remote ground of this synthesis to what he calls ‘pure’ or ‘original apperception,’ the ‘transcendental unity of self-consciousness,’ distinct from empirical self-consciousness, that is the source of the categories or the formal rules of synthesis by which

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39 Ibid, A70/B95. “If we abstract from all content of a judgment in general, and attend only to the mere form of the understanding in it, we find that the function of thinking in that can be brought under four titles, each of which contains under itself three moments.” Those four headings are: 1. **quantity of judgments**: universal, particular, singular; 2. **quality**: affirmative, negative or infinite; 3. **relation**: categorical, hypothetical, or disjunctive; and 4. **modality**: problematic, assertoric, or apodictic. See also: A66/B91. See also: B129, “categories…are concepts of an object in general, by means of which its intuition is regarded as determined with regard to one of the logical functions for judgments.”
41 Ibid, 120-121. See also: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A79-80/B105-106, “the same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding…..there arise exactly as many pure concepts of the understanding, which apply to objects of intuition in general *a priori*, as there were logical functions of all possible judgments in the previous table.” Kant’s ‘Table of categories’: 1. **of quantity**: unity, plurality, totality; 2. **of quality**: reality, negation, limitation; 3. **of relation**: of inherence and subsistence, of causality and dependence, of community; 4. **of modality**: possibility-impossibility, existence- non-existence, necessity-contingency.
44 Ibid, B132. See also: B130-132.
intuitions are related to ‘the logical function of judgments.’ In this way, the ‘original synthetic unity of apperception,’ the ‘I think’ by which the manifold of intuition is ‘united in one consciousness,’ functions as the ‘objective condition of all cognition’ or the ‘supreme principle of all intuition in relation to the understanding.’ In other words, ‘empirical consciousness of a given manifold of one intuition’ necessarily ‘stands under’ or is filtered by ‘a priori self-consciousness.’ Kant further distinguishes between this ‘purely intellectual’ synthesis of the understanding and the ‘transcendental synthesis of the imagination,’ a ‘figurative synthesis’ that he correlates with the ‘productive’ imagination’s role in ‘determining the sensibility a priori.’ Productive imagination mediates between sensibility and the unity of apperception by bringing the unity of apperception that is the seat of the categories to bear on sensitive intuition. Kant argues further that since space and time are not simply forms but also

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46 Ibid, B136.
48 Ibid, B138.
49 Ibid, B136-137.
50 Ibid, B145. This concludes the first stage in the transcendental deduction. “In the above proposition therefore the beginning of a deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding has been made, in which, since the categories arise independently from sensibility merely in the understanding, I must abstract from the way in which the manifold for an empirical intuition is given, in order to attend only to the unity that is added to the intuition through the understanding by means of the category.” See also Guyer, “Deduction,” 120-121.
51 Kant, Critique of Pure Resaon, B150. Guyer, “Deduction,” 139, 142-144.
52 Ibid, B152.
53 Ibid, B152. See also B153-154.
54 B143-144; B151-154. There is much debate concerning the role that imagination plays in Kant’s cognitional theory. For example, some authors regard the transcendental synthesis of the imagination as a distinct faculty between sensibility and understanding that is responsible for applying the a priori forms of space and time to the data of sense. See Beatrice Longuenesse, Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Charles T. Wolfe (NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), chapter 8 (211-242); and Michael Friedman, Kant and the Exact Sciences (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 200. Other authors argue that the imagination is nothing more than the understanding insofar as it brings the categories to bear on sensible intuition. See Paul Guyer, “Deduction,” 144, “The move from understanding to imagination is not so much a move from one faculty to another as it is a move from an abstract description to a concrete description of our ability to synthesize our intuitions in accordance with the categories.” See also: Kim Atkins, Narrative Identity and Moral Identity: A Practical Perspective (New York: Routledge, 2008), 23-24. In Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays on Human Knowledge, trans. Joseph Spoerl, ed. Robert M. Doran (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994), 21, Giovanni Sala argues that both the a priori intuitions of space and time, along with the a priori concepts of the understanding find their source in the ‘synthetic unity of consciousness.’
intuitions in their own right they too must fall under the categories.\textsuperscript{55} Accordingly, ‘the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience and thus also valid \textit{a priori} of all objects of experience.’\textsuperscript{56} Since these \textit{a priori} concepts of the understanding precede and condition all possible experience, Kant is able to argue that the ‘lawfulness’ of ‘nature’ (i.e. the synthetic \textit{a priori} law of causality) is a product of the human mind.\textsuperscript{57} In this way Kant saves classicist science from the extremes of empiricist skepticism and dogmatic rationalism.

In the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant shifts his focus to the contrast between ‘immanent’ and ‘transcendent principles’ or between the \textit{a priori} categories of understanding whose application is limited to the ‘empirical’ realm and those principles of reason that extend beyond the boundaries of ‘possible experience.’\textsuperscript{58} Kant describes reason as a natural capacity for ‘drawing inferences mediately,’\textsuperscript{59} an ability to subsume or unify judgments produced through understanding under universal concepts.\textsuperscript{60} He associates this process with syllogistic reasoning in general and the notion of a ‘prosyllogism’ in particular.\textsuperscript{61} According to Kant, the conclusion of a syllogism represents a conditioned or a particular ‘given fact’\textsuperscript{62} that reason naturally seeks to explain or ground through reference to a major premise or universal condition.\textsuperscript{63} Kant further distinguishes between categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive syllogisms based on the different


\textsuperscript{56} B161.

\textsuperscript{57} A114, 125-127. A127, “the understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances; it is itself the legislation for nature, i.e. without understanding there would not be any nature at all, i.e. synthetic unity of the manifold of appearances in accordance with rules.” B160-166, “categories are concepts that prescribe laws \textit{a priori} to appearances, thus to nature as the sum total of all appearances…they are not derived from nature and do not follow it as their pattern (for they would otherwise be merely empirical).”

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, A296/B353.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, A299.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, B359. “If the understanding may be a faculty of unity of appearances by means of rules, then reason is the faculty of the unit of the rules of understanding under principles. Thus it never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding, in order to give unity \textit{a priori} through concepts to the understanding’s manifold cognitions, which may be called the ‘unity of reason.’”

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, A299-301/B355-359. See also: A299/B356, where Kant portrays reason as ‘the faculty of principles’ in contrast with the understanding conceived as a ‘faculty of rules.’

\textsuperscript{62} Michael Rohlff, “The Ideas of Pure Reason,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique}, 197

‘relation[s] between a cognition and its condition’ or between major premise and conclusion. In each of these instances the natural and unrestricted desire of reason for universal and ‘complete explanations’ is oriented, in the limit case, through the ascending movement of prosyllogisms toward the ‘unconditioned’ or a self-sufficient explanation.

The end goal of each of these prosyllogisms lies in what Kant calls ‘transcendental ideas’ or certain pure concepts that reason presupposes a priori as principles of explanation. The categorical prosyllogism terminates in the ‘absolute…unity of the thinking subject,’ or the ‘transcendental doctrine of the soul’ that is the subject matter of ‘rational psychology.’ The hypothetical prosyllogism terminates in the ‘absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearance,’ or the ‘transcendental science of the world’ that is the subject matter of ‘cosmology.’ The disjunctive prosyllogism terminates in the ‘absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general’ or the ‘transcendental cognition of God’ that is the subject matter of ‘rational theology.’ In each of these cases Kant is careful to note that although the resulting transcendental ideas are not ‘arbitrarily invented,’ they nevertheless remain ‘problematic’ in nature and the inferences that lead to them must be labeled ‘sophistical.”

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64 Ibid, A303/B361.
65 Rohlf, 196.
67 Ibid, A308, 311, 320, 321, 323, 334/B365, 368, 377-378, 380, 391. See also A321/B378, “the form of judgments…brought forth categories that direct all use of the understanding in experience. In the same way, we can expect that the form of the syllogisms, if applied to the synthetic unity of intuitions under the authority of the categories, will contain the origin of special concepts a priori that we may call pure concepts of reason or transcendental ideas.”
70 Ibid, A334/B391.
72 Ibid, A334/B391.
74 Ibid, B384. These ideas arise a priori insofar as human reason is naturally oriented to the unconditioned.
75 Ibid, A339/B397.
76 Ibid, A339/B397. See also: A422/B450.
From this perspective, transcendental ‘illusion’\(^77\) refers to the propensity of reason to inappropriately posit the existence of objects that correspond to such concepts.\(^78\)

Kant’s efforts at dialectic are aimed at undercutting both rationalists who do not respect the boundaries of possible experience and skeptics who, in rightly criticizing dogmatic metaphysical claims, end up denying the objective reality of transcendental objects \textit{a priori}.\(^79\) In his chapter on the paralogisms of pure reason Kant examines rational psychology in more detail and places the source of such reflection in the judgment ‘I think’ and in the related conceptions of ‘immateriality,’ ‘incorruptibility,’ ‘personality,’ and ‘immortality.’\(^80\) Kant argues that all illusion concerning the soul stems from the natural error of ‘taking…a subjective condition of thinking for the cognition of an object.’\(^81\) Since the unity of apperception or of self-consciousness designated by the proposition ‘I think’ is the purely formal or logical condition of all possible experience, it cannot itself be an object in the absence of intuition.\(^82\) The presence of intuition in ‘inner sense’ thereby turns a purportedly rational psychology into an empirical

\(^77\) Ibid, A295.
\(^78\) Ibid, B384.
\(^79\) See also: Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A466-472/B495-500, A472/B500, “This is the opposition of Epicureanism and Platonism….Each of the two says more than it knows, but in such a way that the first encourages and furthers knowledge, though to the disadvantage of the practical, the second provides principles which are indeed excellent for the practical, but in so doing allows reason, in regard to that of which only a speculative knowledge is granted us, to indulge in ideal explanations of natural appearances, and to neglect the physical investigation of them.”
\(^80\) Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A343-344/B401-402-405, 429-432. B403, “The substance, merely as an object of inner sense, gives us the concept of immateriality; as simple substance, it gives us that of incorruptibility; its identity, as an intellectual substance, gives us personality; all these points together give us spirituality; the relation to objects in space gives us the interaction with bodies; thus it represents the thinking substance as the principle of life in matter, i.e. as a soul (anima) and as the ground of animality, and this – limited by spirituality – is immortality.” B428, “The dialectical illusion in rational psychology rests on the confusion of an idea of reason (of a pure intelligence) with the concept, in every way indeterminate, of a thinking being in general, I think of myself in behalf of a possible experience, by abstracting from all actual experience, and from this conclude that I could become conscious of my existence even outside experience and its empirical conditions.”
\(^81\) Ibid, A396.
\(^82\) Ibid, A398/B421. A402, “I cannot cognize as an object itself that which I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all.” A382, “the mere form of consciousness.” B422, “the unity of consciousness, which grounds the categories, is here taken for an intuition of the subject as an object and the category of substance is applied to it. But this unity is only the unity of thinking through which no object is given; and thus the category of substance, which always presupposes a given intuition, cannot be applied to it, and hence this subject cannot be cognized at all.”
account of subjectivity.\textsuperscript{83} Thus although speculative reason unavoidably presupposes these purely formal concepts or ideas, their reality, let alone their possibility, cannot be proven or disproven through theoretical reason.\textsuperscript{84}

In the following chapter on the antinomy of pure reason, Kant delves deeper into the ‘the system of cosmological ideas’ by setting up a ‘transcendental antithetic’\textsuperscript{85} or an ‘investigation’ of four antinomies of reason that juxtapose a ‘dogmatic’ or ‘intellectualist’ thesis with an ‘empiricist’ antithesis.\textsuperscript{86} As with the paralogisms, he argues that the antinomies are inevitable expressions of human reason’s quest for the unconditioned and again he seeks to defend a critical middle-ground between dogmatism and skepticism. The first two, ‘mathematical’ antinomies are concerned with the ‘extent of the world in space and time’ and ‘the division of objects in space’\textsuperscript{87} respectively.\textsuperscript{88} The second two, ‘dynamical’ antinomies are concerned with ‘the series of causal conditions, and the world as a whole’\textsuperscript{89} respectively.\textsuperscript{90} Although both sides of the antinomy seek the ‘totality of the regressive synthesis’ or the unconditioned that grounds ‘the complete

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, A381, “thus the whole of rational psychology, as a science transcending all the powers of human reason, collapses, and nothing is left except to study our soul following the guideline of experience.”

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, A384, 395, 402, B424-426; B432. Here Kant points to the possible practical application of these concepts.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, A421/B449. “the conflict between what seem to be dogmatic cognitions,…, without the ascription of a preeminent claim to approval of one side or the other….there arise sophistical theorems which may neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear refutation by it; and each of them is not only without contradiction in itself but even meets with conditions of its necessity in the nature of reason itself, only unfortunately the opposite has on its side equally valid and necessary grounds for its assertion.”


\textsuperscript{88} See Kant, Critique of Pure reason. First antimony: The world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries (A427/B455). The world has no beginning and no bounds in space, but is infinite with regard to both time and space (A428/B456). Second antimony: every composite substance in the world consists of simple parts and nothing exists anywhere except the simple or what is composed of simples (A434/B462). No composite thing in the world consists of simple parts, and nowhere in it does there exist anything simple (A435/B462).

\textsuperscript{89} Mattey, “Lecture Notes.”

\textsuperscript{90} Third antimony: Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature (A445/B473). Fourth antimony: To the world there belongs something that, either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being. There is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, either in the world or outside the world as its cause (A453/B481).
comprehensibility of what is given in appearance, each side conceives the unconditioned in different ways. In the mathematical antinomies, the thesis ‘postulates an ultimate termination of a series,’ whereas the antithesis posits an ‘unconditional extension of the series.’ Kant argues that both options are inadequate. Since the objects that purportedly correspond to the cosmological ideas of a ‘first event, a largest extent of the world or a simple substance’ cannot ever ‘be given to intuition,’ the theses are false. Since ‘there is no fact of the matter about the age of the world in time, its extent in space, or about whether the divisibility of composites given in experience is finite or infinite,’ the antitheses’ commitment to the latter is untenable. As with the paralogisms, Kant argues that both sides in the first two antinomies attempt to draw conclusions that extend beyond the bounds of possible experience.

By contrast, the dynamical antinomies are concerned with ‘causal dependencies in the world’ in general and with the possibility of a ‘first cause’ in particular. Again, ‘the theses result from reason’s desire for closure and the antitheses result from reason’s desire for infinite extension.’ Unlike the mathematical antinomies, his solution to the dynamical antinomies posits ‘that both the thesis and the antithesis are (or might be) true.’ Although freedom and ‘a

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91 Ibid, A409/B436.
93 Guyer, “Immanuel Kant,” 499. See also, Allen W. Wood, “The Antinomies of Pure Reason,” in The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique, 248-250, “the problem is that this unconditioned might be ‘given’ in either of two ways: as a first member exempt from the conditioning relation or as an infinite series of members, none of which is exempt from it.”
95 Ibid.
96 Wood, 259. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A517-527/B545-556. Ward, Three Critiques, 113, “In short, since the size and age of the world – that is the phenomenal world – depend on the empirical synthesis of successive conditions, which can never be perceived as complete, it follows that the world’s extent cannot exist as an unconditioned whole, whether as finite or as infinite.”
97 Wood, 255.
99 Wood, 259. See also Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A529-532/B557-560.
being falling within the causal necessity of nature whose existence is also necessary,¹⁰⁰ are not ‘given in appearance,’ it remains possible to argue that the objects of such cosmological ideas are things-in-themselves, thereby dissolving the apparent contradiction.¹⁰¹ In regards to the third antinomy in particular, Kant argues that freedom as a property of the subject’s ‘intelligible character’ may coexist with the natural necessity constitutive of the world of appearance.¹⁰² Despite this critical resolution, Kant is clear that the question of freedom remains unanswerable from the ‘standpoint of theoretical reason.’¹⁰³

In the following chapter Kant moves from rational psychology and cosmology to rational theology and the ‘ideal of pure reason.’¹⁰⁴ The object of this ideal – an ‘individual thing which is determinable or even determined, through the idea alone,’¹⁰⁵ – is an ‘original being,’ the ‘highest reality,’ the ‘absolutely necessary being’¹⁰⁶ that is the ground of all that is conditioned.¹⁰⁷ Although human reason is naturally led by a ‘subjective necessity’ in its search for the unconditioned to this transcendent concept of God, the human mind cannot move from the concept of this ideal to the ‘existence of a being that corresponds to this ideal.’¹⁰⁸ The inappropriateness of this movement from mere concept or idea to the synthetic claim regarding the existence of God – an object that is not given in possible experience¹⁰⁹ – underlies Kant’s rejection of the ontological argument for God’s existence.¹¹⁰ He argues further that both the cosmological and physico-theological proofs for the existence of God ultimately rely on the

¹⁰⁰ Wood, 256-257.
¹⁰¹ Wood, 259. See also Sebastian Gardner, Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 171.
¹⁰² Wood, 263. See also Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A528-558/B556-586.
¹⁰³ Wood, 259. See also Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A532-537, 559-565/B560-565, 587-593.
¹⁰⁴ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A567/B595.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid, AA568/B596.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid, A587/B618.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid, A578/B606.
¹¹⁰ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A592-602, 640/B620-630, 668. Grier, 278.
ontological argument. Insofar as it moves by inference from contingent to necessary being, the cosmological proof at least purports to begin with experience. Nevertheless, the second stage of the cosmological argument makes the same mistake as the ontological proof insofar as it moves from the concept of absolute necessity to positing the existence of a ‘supremely real being,’ an object entirely foreign to experience. In a similar way, the physico-theological proof purports to move from the ‘order and purposiveness’ of nature to a ‘sublime and wise cause’ of the world. Again, Kant argues that this movement implicitly presupposes the cosmological argument’s movement from contingency to necessity and, by extension, the ontological argument’s movement from necessity to the existence of a highest being through conceptual analysis.

Although Kant argues that the transcendental ideas of reason serve no ‘constitutive use,’ they may nevertheless continue to play a ‘regulative’ role as ‘maxims of speculative reason, which rest solely on reason’s speculative interest, even though it may seem as if they were objective principles.’ In other words, the transcendental ideas of rational psychology, cosmology and theology serve ‘not as constitutive principles for the extension of our cognition to more objects than experience can give, but as regulative principles for the systematic unity of the

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111 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A609-610, 615/B637-638, 643. Ibid, A605/B633, “In order to ground itself securely, this proof gets a footing in experience, thereby gives itself the reputation that it is distinct from the ontological proof which puts its whole trust solely in pure concepts *a priori.*”
112 Grier, 282.
113 Grier, 282. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A606-609, 615/B634-637, 643. A607/b634, “Now if I say: the concept of the *ens realissimum* is a concept and indeed the one single concept, that fits necessary existence and is adequate to it, then I must admit that the latter could be concluded from it. Thus it is really only the ontological proof from mere concepts that contains all the force of proof in the so-called cosmological proof.”
115 Ibid, A626/B654.
118 Ibid, A666/B694.
manifold of empirical cognition in general. In the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Kant shifts from the purely regulative use of the speculative or transcendental ideas of reason to an investigation of the ‘practical use of reason’ that anticipates the ‘Critique of Practical Reason.’ According to Kant, the ‘final aim’ of reason is not speculative but practical in orientation and is concerned with three objects in particular: ‘the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.’ In his ethical writings, Kant shifts his explorations from the *a priori* components of intuition, understanding and speculative reason to pure practical reason and, more specifically, from the speculative idea of freedom presented in the third antinomy to its connection with the moral law. In what follows I will examine this connection and its implications in more detail.

9.2 Kant on Human Choosing

Kant extends transcendental idealism in his account of human choosing by distinguishing between two manners in which the subject or moral agent may cognize herself. From the perspective of the world of appearances governed by mechanistic natural laws, the subject is affected by ‘inclination.’ Kant conceives inclination as a natural, albeit pathological, and purely sensuous desire for ‘one’s own happiness’ that is roughly equivalent to the hedonistic criterion of the good found in Hobbes and Locke’s respective accounts of sensitive spontaneity. In the

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119 Ibid, A671/B699. On the regulative use of ‘soul’ as a transcendental idea see, for example: A682-684/B711-712. On the regulative use of the cosmological ideas see, for example: A684-685/B711-713. On the regulative use of the transcendental idea of God see, for example: A686-699/B714-727.

120 Ibid, A796, 798/B824, 826.


case of inclination where the faculty of desire is dependent on sensations, he argues that reason functions instrumentally by specifying precepts of skill or hypothetical imperatives that function as counsels designed to facilitate the realization of some contingent end.\textsuperscript{124} He argues further that similar albeit modified appeals to happiness lie at the base of ‘subjective’ theories that appeal, either externally to ‘education’ or internally to moral sentiment, as well as ‘objective’ theories that appeal either internally to teleology or externally to the will of God.\textsuperscript{125} All of the above attempt to ground ethics on agent-relative ‘empirical’ or ‘material’ principles incapable of supplying an objective practical law binding on or valid for all human beings.\textsuperscript{126} According to Kant, such principles impinge on the subject insofar as her nature is sensible or ‘empirically conditioned’ and are therefore ‘heteronomous’ in nature.\textsuperscript{127}

If reference to inclination yields a purely phenomenal agent subject to ‘natural necessity,’\textsuperscript{128} Kant argues that the subject may also cognize herself as belonging to the world of ‘things-in-themselves’ and therefore as possessing a ‘supersensible nature.’\textsuperscript{129} Rather than starting with the material notion of a \textit{summum bonum}, Kant conceives the moral law in abstraction from all ‘matter’ or contingent objects of desire that structure the subject’s sensible nature.\textsuperscript{130} Grounded \textit{a priori} in pure practical reason, the ‘supersensible’ moral law specifies a universally binding categorical imperative or command that provides an objective criterion for deriving all particular obligations or duties.\textsuperscript{131} The initial and most formal of Kant’s formulations

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Kant, \textit{Practical}, 5:20; 5:26. See also: Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, Ak 4:414-4:420.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Kant, \textit{Practical}, 5:41. Sullivan, 40-41. Kant, \textit{Metaphysical Elements of Justice}, 215, “If moral philosophy were nothing but \textit{eudaemonism} [the happiness-theory], it would be absurd to look to \textit{a priori} principles for help.”
\item \textsuperscript{127} Kant, \textit{Practical}, 5:43.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, Ak 4:415.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Kant, \textit{Practical}, 5:43. See Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, Third Section.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Kant, \textit{Practical}, 5:27, “If a rational being is to think of his maxims as practical universal laws, he can think of them only as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not by their matter but only by their form.”
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 5:30. This conception of the moral law mirrors in certain respects the Scotistic and Ockhamist account of categorical obligation.
\end{itemize}
of the categorical imperative in the second *Critique* reads: ‘act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation.’\(^{132}\) While a maxim refers to the subjective principle of an agent’s action that may or may not conform to the moral law, the categorical imperative provides an objective principle for gauging the appropriateness of any particular maxim.\(^{133}\)

Although the intimate connection between a purely formal moral law and autonomy rules out the possibility of grounding morality on any material principles or subjective ends, it need not preclude the notion of what Kant calls in the *Groundwork* an ‘objective end’ or an ‘end-in-itself.’\(^{134}\) In the *Groundwork*, he develops this notion of the moral law’s end by arguing that human beings exist as ends in themselves and ‘not merely as means to the discretionary use of this or that will.’\(^{135}\) Similarly, in the second *Critique*, Kant argues that, insofar as humans possess a supersensible nature that frees them from natural necessity and subjects them to the moral law which is ‘holy’ or ‘inviolable,’\(^{136}\) they possess a distinctive moral ‘personality.’\(^{137}\)

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\(^{132}\) Kant, *Practical*, 5:30. Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak 4:402. See also Kant, *Groundwork*, xviii. In the *Groundwork*, Kant provides three progressively more detailed formulations of the categorical imperative, each with its own ‘variant.’ The titles and groupings that follow are taken from Allen Wood’s summary. 1) *The Formula of Universal Law*: ‘Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law’ (G 4:421; cf. G4:402); *The Formula of the Law of Nature*: ‘So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature’ (G 4:421; cf. G 4:436). 2) *The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself*: ‘Act so that you use humanity, as much as the same time as end and never merely as means’ (G 4:429; cf. G 4:436). 3) Formula of Autonomy: ‘the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law’ (G 4:431; cf. G 4:432) or ‘not to choose otherwise than so that the maxims of one’s choice are at the same time comprehended with it in the same volition as universal law’ (G 4:440; cf. G 4:432, 434, 438); *The Formula of the Realm of Ends*: ‘act in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends’ (G 4:439; cf. G 4:433, 437, 438). Kant’s explicit articulation of the imperative in the second *Critique* seems to blend aspects of the first and third formulas.

\(^{133}\) Kant, *Practical*, 5:31. See also Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak 4:401, “A maxim is the subjective principle of volition; the objective principle (i.e., that which would serve all rational beings also subjectively as a practical principle if reason had full control over the faculty of desire) is the practical law.”

\(^{134}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak 4:427-4:429. Whereas subjective ends are correlative with the relative or contingent objects of hypothetical imperatives, an objective end or end-in-itself functions as the ground of a categorical imperative or of a command issued *a priori* by reason.

\(^{135}\) Ibid, Ak 4:430.

\(^{136}\) Kant, *Practical*, 5:87.

\(^{137}\) Ibid.
This personality, or that which the *Groundwork* calls ‘dignity,’\(^{138}\) precludes the utilization of human beings as mere means.\(^{139}\) It is this concern for universal human rights captured by the categorical imperative that provides the criterion for ascertaining the relative legitimacy of particular subjective aims in the *Groundwork*’s ‘realm of ends.’\(^{140}\) This emphasis on dignity provides a more than formal alternative to the truncated notions of the human good that prioritize narrow self-interest in Hobbes and Locke.

Since the moral law functions as a ‘determining ground not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions,’\(^{141}\) consciousness of that law directly implies or provides at least practical reality to freedom. Kant conceives the latter as a ‘supersensible object of the category of causality,’\(^{142}\) or as an ‘absolute spontaneity’\(^{143}\) that allows the subject to determine herself ‘by the representation of rules.’\(^{144}\) According to Kant, this law presupposes a ‘nature not given empirically and yet possible through freedom, hence a supersensible nature to which we give objective reality at least in a practical sense.’\(^{145}\) On the one hand, from the perspective of sensible nature governed by natural necessity or mechanism, ‘objects must be causes of the

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\(^{138}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak 4:434, “That which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself does not have merely a relative worth, i.e. a price, but rather an inner worth, i.e. dignity.”


\(^{140}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak 4:438, “Such a realm of ends would actually be brought about through maxims, the rule of which is prescribed by the categorical imperatives of all rational beings.”

\(^{141}\) Kant, *Practical*, 5:29.

\(^{142}\) Ibid, 5:6.

\(^{143}\) Ibid, 5:48.

\(^{144}\) Ibid, 5:32. Kant’s procedure in the second *Critique* therefore differs from his approach in the *Groundwork*. Ibid, ix-x, “The first two chapters of the Groundwork use an analysis of the concept of duty to arrive at a statement of the basic principle of duty, but stop short of showing that we ought to endorse this principle. The formal justification of the validity of the moral law, which Kant refers to as its ‘deduction’…is left to the third chapter. Here Kant tries to show that it is fully rational to accept the moral law as our basic principle of conduct by deriving it from a conception of freedom that we are warranted in attributing to ourselves on grounds that are independent of morality…in the *Critique* Kant argues that the moral law neither allows of nor needs a deduction in this technical sense.” See also: Ibid, xiii, “whereas in the *Groundwork* Kant appears to believe that we must have grounds for ascribing transcendental freedom to ourselves before we can establish the validity of the moral law, the second *Critique* reverses this order: here Kant argues that it is the validity of the moral law that reveals our freedom.”

\(^{145}\) Ibid, 5:44.
representations that determine the will. On the other hand, from the perspective of supersensible nature, the will is the ‘cause of the objects; so that its causality has its determining principle solely in the pure faculty of reason. Although consciousness of the moral law is a ‘fact of reason’ incapable of ‘justification,’ Kant argues that appeal to the law grounds the deduction of freedom and the latter’s objective, albeit only practical, reality. Freedom or autonomy is therefore defined both negatively as freedom from natural necessitation and positively as a capacity for self-legislating the moral law. This approach not only represents a repudiation of empiricist notions of freedom and obligation but also a radicalization of internally unstable voluntarist themes in Scotus and Ockham.

Kant draws a further distinction between actions that are performed in ‘conformity’ to the moral law or that externally cohere with obligation and actions performed purely ‘for the sake of the law’ or that are done out of duty alone. Motivated by sensible impulses or inclination, actions of the former type ‘contain legality’ but do not qualify as genuinely moral acts. By contrast, genuine morality requires that the free will be determined ‘solely by the law’ or

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146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid, 5:31; 5:47.
149 Ibid, 5:47, “the moral law is given, as it were, as a fact of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious and which is apodictically certain, though it be granted that no example of exact observance of it can be found in experience. Hence the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction, by any efforts of theoretical reason, speculative or empirically supported, so that, even if one were willing to renounce its apodictic certainty, it could not be confirmed by experience and thus proved a posteriori; and it is nevertheless firmly established of itself.”
151 It is the latter emphasis on freedom that underlies the ‘formula of autonomy’ in the Groundwork or the ‘idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislative will.’ Kant, Groundwork, Ak 4:432. See also: Ak 4:431. In the Groundwork, Kant argues that the ‘formula of autonomy’ proceeds from two earlier formulations: “the ground of all practical legislation, namely, lies objectively in the rule and the form of universality, which makes it capable of being a law…but subjectively it lies in the end; but the subject of all ends is every rational being as end in itself…: from this now follows the third practical principle of the will, as the supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law.”
152 Kant, Practical, 5:72.
153 Ibid.
154 Kant, Groundwork, Ak 4:397.
155 Kant, Practical, 5:72
independently of all inclination. From this perspective, the pure motive of the moral law may be characterized in negative terms as a feeling that Kant labels ‘pain,’ precisely insofar as it precludes the influence of pathological feelings or impulses. At the same time, by breaking down ‘unjustifiable’ claims to ‘self-conceit’ or excessive self-satisfaction that precede genuinely moral action via humiliation, the moral law may also produce a positive effect, a purely intellectual or moral feeling that he labels ‘respect.’ Such respect reduces the ‘hindrance to pure practical reason’ by producing the recognition that the moral law is superior to all material precepts. Since the subject is always beset by the tension between inclination and the moral law, love of God and love of neighbor rooted in stable affective dispositions, far from being commanded, are nothing more than ideal goals whose subjective realization would constitute ‘holiness.’

9.3 Kant on Politics, Virtue, and Rational Religion

In the first part of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant builds on his account of moral choice to develop a theory of political legitimacy. In the opening, he develops a distinction between moral and juridical laws hinted at in his contrast between actions performed for the sake of duty and actions that externally conform to duty but that are supported by pathological inclinations. According to Kant, insofar as moral laws are ‘directed to mere external actions and their legality they are called juridical.’ Whereas ‘internal’ duties require that actions be performed from duty or without any alternative incentive, duties ‘in accordance with juridical legislation’ can only be ‘external,’ since the agent may appeal to additional incentives in support of

156 Ibid.
157 Ibid, 5:73.
159 Ibid, 5:75.
160 Ibid, 5:76.
162 Kant, Metaphysical Elements of Justice, 214.
compliance.\textsuperscript{163} In other words, although such ‘duties of justice’ or of ‘right’ may nevertheless ‘belong to ethics,’ provided fidelity is motivated by duty alone, juridical legislation may also appeal to incentives or disinclinations linked to ‘external coercion.’\textsuperscript{164} According to Kant, those binding laws susceptible of ‘external’ legislation are called ‘external laws,’\textsuperscript{165} the body of which is called ‘jurisprudence.’\textsuperscript{166} Among external laws, Kant further distinguishes between ‘natural laws,’ ‘those external laws to which an obligation can be recognized \textit{a priori} by reason without external legislation,’\textsuperscript{167} and ‘positive’ or ‘statutory’ laws grounded in natural law that proceed ‘from the Will of a legislator.’\textsuperscript{168} The most fundamental natural law is the ‘universal principle’ or ‘law of justice’: ‘act externally in such a way that the free use of your will is compatible with the freedom of everyone according to a universal law.’\textsuperscript{169} This law defends the agent’s innate right to freedom or ‘independence from the constraint of another’s will…insofar as it is compatible with the freedom of every one else.’\textsuperscript{170} Since interference with an agent’s freedom is unjust, the

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 218-220.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 219-220.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 224.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 229.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid, 224. See also: 229, “pure juridical science….applies to the systematic knowledge of natural law, [and] provides the immutable principles for all positive legislation.”
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 224, 237. See also: 229, 230.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid, 231. See also: Ibid, 230-231, “every action is right (just) that in itself or in its maxim is such that the freedom of the will of each can coexist together with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a universal law.” Ibid, 231, “That I adopt as a maxim that maxim of acting justly is a requirement that Ethics (rather than jurisprudence) imposes on me.” Ibid, 231, “given that we do not intend to teach virtue, but only to give an account of what is just, we may not and ought not to represent this law of justice as being itself an incentive.” Ibid, 232, “strict (narrow) justice is that which alone can be called wholly external. Strict justice is admittedly founded on the consciousness of each person’s obligation under the law; but, if it is to remain pure, this consciousness may not and cannot be invoked as an incentive in order to determine the will to act in accordance with it.”
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid, 237. See also: 238, “this principle of innate freedom contains within itself all the following rights: innate equality, that is, independence from being bound by others to do more than one can also reciprocally bind them to do; hence also the attribute of a human being’s being his own master and of being an irreproachable man, inasmuch as prior to any juridical act, he has done no injustice to anyone; finally, also the authorization (or liberty) to do anything to others that does not by itself detract from what is theirs.”
principle of justice sanctions the use of coercion in instances where freedom is inappropriately hindered.\textsuperscript{171}

Kant then proceeds to articulate his own vision of the distinction between the state of nature, the ‘nonjuridical state of affairs’ in which ‘distributive legal justice’ is lacking,\textsuperscript{172} and the civil condition conditioned by the existence of public legal justice. In this pre-civil state of nature all land is initially held in common.\textsuperscript{173} ‘Consistent with the law of external freedom’\textsuperscript{174} individuals may procure property through ‘first possession,’ though such possession remains ‘only provisional.’\textsuperscript{175} Provisional possession is equivalent to what Kant calls ‘sensible,’ ‘empirical’ or ‘physical possession of an object.’\textsuperscript{176} In contrast with the state of nature, Kant defines civil society as ‘the condition of being subject to general external (that is, public) legislation that is backed by power.’\textsuperscript{177} Kant argues that the transition from the pre-civil ‘state of private law’ governed by natural law,\textsuperscript{178} to the ‘juridical condition’ governed by ‘public law’\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 231. See also: 232, “the law of a reciprocal use of coercion that is necessarily consistent with everyone’s freedom under the principle of universal freedom may in certain respects be regarded as the construction of this concept (of justice).”

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, 306, “the state of nature is not, to be contrasted to living in society…; rather, it is to be contrasted to civil society, where society stands under distributive justice. Even in a state of nature, there can be legitimate societies (for example, conjugal, paternal, domestic groups in general and many others) concerning which there is no a priori law declaring: ‘thou shalt enter into this condition.’

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid, 250.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 251.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 250-251. 251, “purely physical possession (Detention) of land already constitutes a right in a thing, although it is obviously not sufficient for considering the land mine. In relation to others, this possession is (as far as one knows) a first possession and as such is consistent with the law of external freedom and is, at the same time, implied in the original community of possession, which, in turn, implies a priori ground of the possibility fo private possession. It follows that interference with the first holder of a piece of land in his use of it constitutes an injury. Thus, first possession has for itself a ground in right and this ground is original common possession.” See also: 257.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 245, 249. Although the first possessor retains a right to defend her property, the absence of public law in the state of nature implies that this can only be done through physical force. See Ibid, 250, 256, 307-308, 312, “certainly a state of nature need not be a condition of injustice in which men treat one another solely according to the amount of power they possess; it is however, still a state of society in which justice is absent and one in which there is a controversy concerning rights, no competent judge can be found to render a decision having the force of law.”

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 256.


\textsuperscript{179} Kant, \textit{Metaphysical Elements of Justice}, 311.
is not based on any fact of experience but rather on an *a priori* obligation ‘developed analytically from the concept of justice in external relations.’ The promulgation of public law based on such natural duties and the correlative establishment of ‘lawful external coercion’ for the defense of freedom and property transforms provisional possession into ‘*de jure*’ or ‘intelligible possession.’

According to Kant, an ‘ideal’ or ‘just’ state is a republic where the legislative authority is distinct from the ruler’s coercive power or executive authority and where the former most adequately reflects the ‘spirit’ of what Kant calls the ‘original contract.’ Echoing Rousseau, the legislative authority of the ideal state toward which all historical states are oriented derives its criterion from the general Will of its citizens, the latter which is based on the principle of justice and the related right to freedom. Thus, just as in empiricist versions of liberalism, the general aim of the just state is to provide the conditions of possibility for reciprocal freedom from interference among individuals who pursue alternative material ends. At the same time, Kant’s variation of liberalism differs from empiricist versions that deny a transcendental criterion for public law by tracing the roots of externally legislated juridical duties to the categorical or

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180 Such facts may include reference to the inconveniences associated with the state of nature.
181 Ibid, 307. See also: 306; 312, “everyone may use violent means to compel another to enter into a juridical state of society.” See Roger J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Kant’s Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 11-13. Kant therefore differs from Hobbes on the grounds of this movement from the state of nature to the civil condition.
182 Ibid, 245-250, 257.
general Will of the people grounded *a priori* in practical reason.\(^{186}\) Despite this orientation toward an ideal state, Kant is clear that any, even despotic, forms of public law are superior in general to lawlessness. The moral ought that compels individuals to enter civil society is incompatible with a citizen’s desire for rebellion or revolution against all forms of authority.\(^{187}\)

In the second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant shifts his focus from the political legitimacy and duties of right to the doctrine of virtue. Whereas duties of right place restrictions on the actions individuals may perform in pursuit of their contingent material ends regardless of motive, the doctrine of virtue starts with ends that are also duties for which only internal self-constraint is possible.\(^{188}\) Developing the formula of humanity and the correlative emphasis on human dignity,\(^{189}\) Kant argues that humans have a duty to cultivate ‘their own perfection’ as well as ‘the happiness of others.’\(^{190}\) As Allan Wood notes, ‘within each of these two main divisions of ethical duty, there is a further division between duties that are strictly owed, requiring specific actions or omissions, and whose violation incurs moral blame, and duties that are wide or meritorious, the specific actions not strictly owed, but deserving of moral credit or merit.’\(^{191}\) The former, whether ‘perfect duties’ to oneself or ‘duties of respect’ to others, function as ‘necessary preconditions of morally appropriate promotion of our own perfection and the happiness of

\(^{188}\) Kant, *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, 380-383, 389, 396, 410; 395, “the supreme principle of the doctrine of virtue is this: ‘act according to a maxim whose ends are such that there can be a universal law that everyone have these ends.’ According to this principle a man is an end to himself as well as to others.”
\(^{190}\) Kant, *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, 387. See also: 388. In this context, perfection must be construed in a non-eudaimonistic way.
others. The vices opposed to the agent’s perfect duty to oneself, ‘insofar as he is an animal,’ include: suicide, ‘wanton self-abuse,’ and ‘self-stupefaction through the immoderate use of food and drink.’ The vices opposed to the agent’s perfect duty to oneself ‘only as a moral being’ include: lying, avarice, and ‘false humility’ or ‘servility.’ The positive obligation to perfect oneself includes the agent’s imperfect or wide duties to ‘develop and increase’ her ‘natural perfection, that is, for pragmatic reasons,’ and to ‘cultivate the ‘purest virtuous disposition, in which the law is at the same time incentive of one’s actions which are in accordance with duty.’ The duties of respect for others derived from the formula of humanity are ‘expressed only negatively’ or ‘indirectly’ as specifying the avoidance of ‘pride,’ ‘calumnny’ and ‘mockery.’ Love for others is construed not as a sensitive feeling or affection, but rather in practical terms as benevolence. The duty of love commands the agent to be beneficent or helpful to others ‘according to one’s means, for the sake of their happiness and without hoping for anything thereby.’ Such concern also commands that recipients of practical beneficence express gratitude or non-prudential ‘respect’ toward benefactors. Finally, concern for others generates a command to harness the capacity to ‘share another’s feelings’ in service of ‘active and rational benevolence.’

From the perspective of ethical duties, virtue is reinterpreted as a commitment to obey the moral law precisely for the sake of the law without any additional inclination, a disposition

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194 Ibid, 444-446.
195 Ibid, 387. See also: 446-447.
196 Ibid, 462-468.
197 Ibid, 450-452.
198 Ibid, 453.
199 Ibid, 455-456.
200 Ibid, 457.
that Kant describes in non-teleological fashion as a ‘worthiness to be happy.’ The second *Critique*’s Dialectic completes Kant’s reorientation of ethics by moving from this relationship between the moral law and virtue to the broader conception of the *summum bonum*. If virtue as a worthiness to be happy is the ‘supreme good,’ the realization of happiness together with the former constitute the ‘possession of the highest good in a person.’ By extension, ‘happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality…constitutes the highest good of a possible world’ roughly equivalent to the *Groundwork*’s ‘realm of ends.’ Since the conjunction of virtue and happiness in the *summum bonum* is a synthetical or ‘real connection’ and is *a priori* or ‘practically necessary,’ Kant claims that it must be possible to produce a transcendental deduction of the concept. In the antinomy of practical reason that follows, Kant defends a connection of cause and effect between the moral law as a ‘purely intellectual determining ground of my causality’ and happiness, both in the ‘sensible world.”

Kant next moves from the general relation of virtue and happiness to the postulates of practical reason that proceed from the moral law. The three postulates of practical reason are presuppositions that ‘do not extend speculative cognition’ but rather ‘give objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason…by means of their reference to what is practical.’ Kant correlates

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202 Kant, *Practical*, 5:110. See also: 5:117-118. Although clearly different from happiness conceived as fulfillment of sensible inclination, Kant describes the ‘analogue of happiness that must necessarily accompany consciousness of virtue’ as a ‘negative satisfaction’ or ‘intellectual contentment’ correlative with one’s independence from inclinations. Kant associates this conception of happiness with Stoic moral philosophy.


204 Ibid, 5:110-111. “Virtue as the condition is always the supreme good, since it has no further condition above it, whereas happiness is something that, though always pleasant to the possessor of it, is not of itself absolutely and in all respects good but always presupposes morally lawful conduct as its condition.”


206 Kant, *Practical*, 5:111.


212 Ibid, 5:119-121.
the practical reality of freedom – whose objective, albeit practical, reality has already been deduced in relation to the moral law – with the problem presupposed by the first Critique’s antinomies. He further connects the practical reality of personal immortality and the existence of God with the problems linked to the first Critique’s paralogisms and rational theology respectively.\footnote{Ibid, 5:132-5:134.} Such postulates do not afford the subject access to ‘the nature of our souls, nor the intelligible world, nor the supreme being as to what they are in themselves’\footnote{Ibid, 5:133.} but instead function as necessary presuppositions of or conditions of possibility for the *sumnum bonum*.\footnote{Ibid, 5:119.} In other words, the moral law necessitates that the subject postulate objects that correspond with the concepts of freedom, immortality and God even though she cannot determine how such concepts refer to such objects let alone cognize the latter.\footnote{Ibid, 5:134.} This action transforms regulative ideas into constitutive ones only insofar as they fulfill the interest of practical reason.\footnote{Ibid, 5:135.}

The Dialectic is concerned primarily with the relationship between the *sumnum bonum*, the postulation of personal immortality and the existence of God.\footnote{See Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960).} First, ‘complete conformity of dispositions with the moral law is the supreme condition’ of the *sumnum bonum*. Since such conformity denotes a perfection, ‘holiness,’\footnote{Kant, *Practical*, 5:122.} towards which humans must ceaselessly progress,
the realization of the ‘first and principal part’ of the *summum bonum* depends upon the ‘presupposition of the immortality of the soul.’ The second component of the *summum bonum*, ‘happiness proportioned to that morality,’ leads to the postulation of ‘a cause adequate to this effect,’ a condition of possibility that leads to the presupposition of the existence of God. Happiness is here defined as a ‘state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will.’ Since the ‘acting rational being in the world is, however, not also the cause of the world and of nature itself’ she cannot by her own powers harmonize morality and ‘proportionate happiness.’ To rectify this deficiency, Kant argues that it is ‘morally necessary’ to assume the existence of God who is the ‘cause of nature by understanding and will.’ In this way the *summum bonum* leads to ‘religion, that is to the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions…but as essential laws of every free will in itself, which must nevertheless be regarded

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221 Ibid, 5:122, “this endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul).”
223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
228 Ibid, 5:125-126, “It is well to note here that this moral necessity is subjective, that is, a need, and not objective, that is, itself a duty; for, there can be no duty to assume the existence of anything (since this concerns only the theoretical use of reason). Moreover, it is not to be understood by this that it is necessary to assume the existence of God as a ground of all obligation in general (for this rests, as has been sufficiently shown, solely on the autonomy of reason itself). What belongs to duty here is only the striving to produce and promote the highest good in the world, the possibility of which can therefore be postulated, while our reason finds this thinkable only on the presupposition of a supreme intelligence….with respect to theoretical reason alone, as a ground of explanation, it can be called a hypothesis; but in relation to the intelligibility of an object given us by the moral law (the highest good), and consequently of a need for practical purposes, it can be called belief and, indeed, a pure rational belief since pure reason alone…is the source from which it springs.”
229 Ibid, 5:125. See also: 5:145-146.
as commands of the supreme being because only from a will that is morally perfect…all-powerful…can we hope to attain the highest good."230

Although Kant’s constructive alternative represents a compelling response to empiricist hedonism, his approach is not without its own limitations, many of which stem from his modified commitment to intuitionism and voluntarism. As a middle-ground between late medieval intuitive cognition and empiricist forms of naïve realism, Kant’s transcendental idealism has the virtue of insulating claims concerning human agency, moral obligation and the existence of God from disconfirmation, though at the price of denying the possibility of genuine objectivity. Without direct access to the noumenal realm, Kant conceives knowledge in these fields as at best practically real or merely subjective in nature. The conjunction of conclusion with Kant’s voluntarist emphasis on the will’s self-legislation of the moral law – a mere ‘fact of reason’ – appears to suffer from modified forms of the same tensions that plague divine sovereignty in Scotus and Ockham.

Bracketing this broader issue concerning the overall viability of Kant’s ethics, a second objection takes issue with his classicist view of moral knowledge or with his emphasis on the a priori character of the categorical imperative.231 Just as Kant posits the a priori categories of the understanding to retain the possibility of scientific knowledge in a context where direct insight is neglected, so, in an analogous way, Kant’s ethical system prioritizes a priori conceptual foundations and moral reasoning, in logical terms, as an application of such principles to particular cases. The result, when combined with Kant’s rejection of affectivity and eudaimonism, is an excessively rationalistic and impartial account of moral knowing and

230 Kant, Practical, 5:129. See also: 5:130, “then for the first time can this ethical doctrine also be called a doctrine of happiness, because it is only with religion that the hope of happiness first arises.”
231 This objection differs from criticisms concerning the overly formal nature of Kant’s ethical criterion. On the one hand, although the formal objection may apply against Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative it is hard to argue that Kant’s ethical system prescinds from substantive ends of any kind.
choosing. Kant inappropriately downplays the role that emotions such as love, relationships to family and close friends, and shifting circumstances play in complicating everyday decision-making. Kant himself seems to recognize the insufficiency of ‘respect’ as a purely rational motivation for compliance with the moral law in his discussion of happiness and its relation to the *summum bonum*. Although Kant struggles to reinterpret virtue and the *summum bonum* in a non-teleological context, his appeal to happiness as the ultimate goal of human living highlights the difficulties internal to his categorical account of obligation.  

From a political standpoint Kant flirts with a position that mimics in certain key respects an empiricist account of the human good. Despite Kant’s efforts to identify juridical duties and correlative rights prior to positive law, Kant himself recognizes that respect for the law represents an unrealistic basis for political practice. This move tends to reduce the motivation for compliance to enlightened self-interest, the very claim that his alternative form of individualism was meant to side-step. It remains unclear what difference an *a priori* duty that impels reciprocal respect for external freedom and that compels individuals to seek the civil condition makes when an agent is motivated primarily by her desire for happiness. This challenge would seem to reveal a tension within Kant’s system between his ethical and political theories. Although the former would seem to provide an *a priori* ground for the latter, Kant’s ethics suffers from too many internal challenges to supply a compelling basis for public law. The result would seem to imply the independence of political theory, at least practically speaking, from ethics, a conclusion that appears to remain implicated in the longer cycle of decline despite all pleading to the contrary.

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232 Kant, *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, 451-452. Kant here mitigates this charge by arguing that our duty to love others can vary depending upon our closeness to the potential recipient.

233 This was MacIntyre’s point in *After Virtue*. 
Chapter 10

Bernard Lonergan’s Foundations for Democratic Practice

10. Introduction

The narrative of decline I developed in Part II traced the evolution of two methodological oversights: (a) an intuitionist account of human knowing that finds initial expression in the late medieval distinction between abstractive and intuitive forms of cognition; and (b) a voluntarist account of the relationship between divine or human intellect and will that finds initial expression in the late medieval conception of freedom as ‘unfettered’ choice. By no means have these chapters attempted to offer a definitive reading of these authors, let alone provide a detailed intellectual history of their relations to each other and their contemporaries.

The first stage in my narrative centered on the Augustinian-Aristotelian controversy, the rejection of the Thomistic or medieval synthesis in the aftermath of the condemnations of 1277 and the resulting rise of intuitionism and voluntarism in the work of authors such as Scotus and Ockham. Intuitionism combines two cognitional oversights, an overemphasis on propositional first principles and deductive logic with a naïve realist construal of existential knowledge. The former stems from an inability to identify the intelligent source of concepts in direct insight, an error that confines its proponents to producing conclusions within an excessively abstract and historically-immobile conceptual system. A useful way to highlight the cultural implications of this neglect of direct insight is to focus on the distinction that Lonergan draws between the classical control of meaning and its subsequent ‘classicist’ degeneration. By conceiving judgment as a tool for the manipulation of concepts, classicists typically compound their inattention to direct insight with a corresponding neglect of reflective insight that reveals a second dimension to the intuitionist conviction that knowing is analogous to ‘looking.’
Voluntarist reinterpretations of the relationship between intellect and will arise as an exaggerated response to the purported deficiencies of an Aristotelian-Thomist account of moral knowing and choosing. The tendency to conceive divine and or human freedom as ‘unfettered’ choice contributes to reinterpretations of divine sovereignty, the nature of universals, natural law and human freedom.

The second stage in my narrative of philosophic development focused on the way in which the evolution of intuitionist and voluntarist themes distorts negotiations of the modern turn to the subject in the empiricism of Hobbes and Locke and the transcendental idealism of Kant. All three authors in similar albeit significantly different ways combine a pejoratively classicist construal of scientific theory and culture with some variation of ‘picture-thinking.’ At the same time, voluntarist presuppositions combine with empiricist and idealist variations of intuitionism to condition the possibility of two opposed accounts of early modern liberalism. In Hobbes and to a lesser extent in Locke, one finds expressions of the ‘general bias of common sense,’ a truncation of the human good that represents an intermediate stage in the ‘longer cycle of decline.’ Both authors combine a sensitive or experiential criterion of ‘good’ with a voluntarist conception of obligation that conceives laws as authoritatively sanctioned expressions of instrumental reason designed to serve mutual self-interest in a distinctively ‘sensate’ civilization. Forced to adapt to and provide a rationalization for this truncated vision of the subject and society, the cultural superstructure tends to lose its independence or its critical capacity. On the other hand, Kant retains the late medieval conception of categorical obligation but identifies the source of moral commands conceived in classicist terms with a purely a priori, fully rational and autonomous will. Kant’s concomitant emphasis on human dignity helps shape an alternative form of liberalism that is superior in many respects to crude forms of empiricism. However, Kant’s classicist construal of moral knowledge, rationalist account of moral motivation and
lingering commitment to individualism tend to downplay the role that contingency, affectivity and communal self-understanding play in the decision-making process.

10.1 Intuitionism, Voluntarism and the Contemporary Crisis of Meaning

My dissertation’s argument has come full circle so to speak. In chapters 1-4 I examined two paradigmatic responses to the breakdown of classical liberalism in what has come to be known as the liberal-communitarian debate. Although authors on both sides share a common critique of classical liberalism, they diagnose the legacy of modernity differently and, as a result, commend alternative projects of retrieval. In each of those four chapters I highlighted a number of strengths and tensions or limitations. Although both sides in this debate are at least partially correct, I argued that the protagonists shared commitment to a family of post-modern presuppositions impugns their capacity to ground their claims or to harmonize the complementary insights present in both camps. Drawing on the work of Bernard Lonergan, Part II of this dissertation began with my attempt in chapter 5 to provide a heuristic framework for investigating the sequence of stages in my alternative narrative of decline. As noted above, chapters 6-9 traced the emergence and expression of two major methodological oversights in the late medieval work of Scotus and Ockham and their evolution in the early modern work of Hobbes, Locke and Kant. In opening this chapter it is my contention that the post-modern presuppositions that hinder rationally compelling resolution of the liberal-communitarian debate represent the final stage in this sequence of oversights.

The third and final stage in my Loneganian narrative of philosophic development focuses on the negotiation of historical consciousness in the work of MacIntyre, Rawls, Rorty, and Stout. The emergence of post-modernity’s concern for the historicity of human meaning has called into question classicist and naïve realist expressions of intuitionism as well as early modern
empiricist and rationalist forms of individualism. On the one hand, post-modern emphases on the tradition-constituted or context-dependent character of human knowing and choosing and on respect for a multiplicity of conceptions of the good are to be commended. On the other hand, it is my contention that post-modern historicism represents an exaggerated response to the errors of intuitionism, an overreaction that, in the limit case, represents, ironically, the terminal expression of voluntarism. Each of the authors examined in chapters 1-4 tend in this direction but continue to flirt with standards that are exempt from deconstruction. From a Lonerganian perspective, there is a general failure to differentiate both the classical control of meaning in general from its classicist degeneration and the validity of the epistemological turn in general from its classicist and – in certain cases – individualist expression. The result is a conception of transculturality that is excessively abstract and intrinsically incompatible with the post-modern concern for historicity. The post-modern reaction shared in similar albeit significantly different ways by each of these authors tends to reduce human subjectivity to a product of socialization, a move which impugns their capacities to account for conceptual innovation and debate in critically post-conventional terms. At the heart of this deficiency stands an overemphasis on the role that social practices play in the formation of human subjectivity. In what follows I intend to highlight the expression of this collection of oversights in each of the authors canvassed in chapters 1-4. At the same time, it is my contention that reference to Lonergan’s negotiation of the modern turn to the subject is the key to harmonizing and critically grounding certain significant insights in each author’s position.

MacIntyre’s stance presents a particular challenge for interpretation. Late medieval scholasticism and modern foundationalism’s neglect of dialectical argumentation is roughly correlative with intuitionism and its expression in classicist variations of the classical control of meaning. In addition to these primarily cognitive deficiencies, MacIntyre associates modern
foundationalism with pejorative forms of individualism. Since MacIntyre appears to conceive transculturality in strictly foundationalist categories, he is forced to read the medieval Aquinas in historicist terms, a move which tends to reduce Thomism to one among many particular metaphysical frameworks. This reading of Aquinas not only stands at odds with the transcendental aspirations of MacIntyre’s meta-theory of rationality it appears to reduce the basis for selecting between traditions to one of arbitrary choice.

Lonergan’s account of philosophic development differs in certain key respects. Central to Lonergan’s narrative is the alternative distinction that he draws between the classical ideal in Aquinas and pejorative forms of late medieval scholasticism or classicism. According to Lonergan, Aquinas’ work shares in certain structural limitations associated with metaphysically-oriented expressions of the classical control of meaning in general. More specifically, Lonergan argues that Aquinas, like Scotus and Ockham, conceived his metaphysical account of human nature in classical terms as normative. At the same time, Lonergan argues that whereas classicist variations of the classical control of meaning remain constitutionally incapable of responding to the rise of historical consciousness, Aquinas’ abstract conception of human nature remains at least implicitly compatible with it.¹ This distinction is a function of dialectically-opposed phenomenologies – mutually exclusive accounts of human knowing and choosing – that underlie what appear to be very similar metaphysical schemes. Although these cognitional theories remain implicit prior to the epistemological turn, they give rise to metaphysical frameworks whose underlying character differs radically. According to Lonergan, the contemporary crisis of meaning associated with the birth of historical consciousness challenges the Thomist to identify the psychological or cognitional source of her abstract metaphysical commitments, the transcendental source of all particular traditions. This particular negotiation of the

epistemological turn is designed to elicit transcultural norms compatible with historicity and
cultural diversity that closely resemble MacIntyre’s notion of dialectical openness. The result is a
thin conception of the human good that provides one-half of a response to MacIntyre’s rejection
of liberalism and the church/world dichotomy that arises in the work of authors such as Milbank
and Hauerwas.²

This movement clearly has relevance for responding to similar tensions in the work of
Jeffrey Stout. If Stout’s account of democratic reason-exchange is roughly correlative with
MacIntyre’s meta-theory of rationality, then it stands to reason that his own pragmatic approach
to democratic norms may benefit from Lonergan’s response to the contemporary crisis of
meaning as well. Stout’s tendency to correlate ‘metaphysics’ with both classicism and naïve
realism, whether premodern or modern, leaves his tradition-dependent account of democratic
norms in roughly the same position as MacIntyre’s reading of Aquinas. Again, one finds a well-
thought out account of reason-exchange with transcendental aspirations that – in seeking to avoid
strong forms of post-modern antirealism – ends up presupposing more than it can critically
ground. The result is an overemphasis on social practices that tends to reduce the subject of
democratic tradition to a product of socialization within democratic contexts. Again, I suspect
that this dilemma is a result of Stout’s inability to conceive how transcultural norms may be
compatible with historical consciousness or of his unwillingness to affirm the normativity of
democracy. Stout finds himself at least partway toward a solution when he argues that the
thematization of democratic norms is always subject to revision, a position that not only
resembles MacIntyre’s own fallibilist reading of Aquinas but allows him to avoid the charge of
cultural imperialism. This type of approach appears to at least implicitly presuppose a subject

² The other half of a response to Macintyre and Hauerwas – Lonergan’s transposition of sanctifying grace –
presupposes Lonergan’s detailed account of human knowing and choosing.
who remains methodologically prior to democracy conceived as a tradition. Just as with MacIntyre, it is my contention that Lonergan’s transposition of Aquinas’ metaphysical account of human nature elicits those open-ended foundations essential to critically grounding Stout’s own account of democratic reason-exchange.

With Rawls and Rorty one finds slightly different expressions of these same limitations. In my judgment, it is possible to argue that Rawls’ agnosticism represents an exaggerated response to the inadequacy of what he calls rational intuitionism and Kantian constructivism respectively. The former is couched by Rawls in what Lonergan might regard as straightforwardly classicist language. Rational intuitionism combines an overemphasis on abstract deductivism with a perceptionist account of moral knowing that conceives values as existing in some metaphysical realm ‘out there.’ If Kantian constructivism takes seriously the epistemological turn it suffers from some of the same deficiencies. Both of these approaches to moral knowledge appear incompatible with the embrace of historical consciousness or ‘the fact of pluralism.’ Even if one grants Rawls’ distinction between agnosticism and skepticism, one way to read the former is as a terminal expression of voluntarism. In other words, he appears to read comprehensive knowledge along classicist lines and therefore as intrinsically incompatible with historicism. Rawls’ instincts, however, are good. He remains committed to specifying a public criterion, some thin standard or set of norms that is compatible with historicity, something that is at least agreeable to or reasonable for all citizens. Unfortunately, Rawls’ tendency to conceive this public criterion in post-metaphysical terms, or in abstraction from all or at least thick metaphysical commitments, stands in tension with his commitment to historicism. When the latter is followed to its logical conclusion in Rawls’ work the former is exposed as one more attempt to escape the flux of history, to cut through metaphysical diversity, to identify a set of principles that colonize democratic discourse a priori. When the accent falls on Rawls’ work this
way the result not only tends to support the critic’s charge of individualism, it also reveals a lingering commitment, however unconscious, to certain Kantian-tinged presuppositions.

If Rawls is correct in arguing that a thin conception of the good is required as a standard for public discourse in a pluralistic context, he is incorrect in drawing the distinction between thick and thin along post-metaphysical versus metaphysical or comprehensive lines. In what follows I will draw the distinction between thick and thin by distinguishing between particular cultural-linguistic frameworks and their transcendental source and norm in human consciousness. Reference to the latter provides the basis for grounding a heuristic metaphysics that regards truth in its full categorial thickness as the term or product of MacIntyre’s open-ended notion of dialectic. Commitment to these transcendental conditions may provide the focus for an overlapping consensus that is both more realistic and hospitable to difference. Once again, the key to this attempt to ground a public criterion compatible with historicity lies in Lonergan’s retrieval or transposition of Aquinas’ metaphysical account of human nature.

Although MacIntyre, Stout and Rawls all take seriously the contemporary crisis of meaning, they struggle to respond it in fully critical ways. Unlike each of these authors, Rorty dissolves this tension by rejecting the challenge itself. Rorty’s characterization of representationalism and moral foundationalism shares much with both premodern and modern variations of classicism and naïve realism. Like each of our other authors, Rorty tends to read the commitment to transcultural norms as inseparable from these two distortions and hence he regards the rise of historical consciousness as intrinsically incompatible with the commitment to truth. His constructive alternative combines historicism – a standpoint that he cannot commend as normative – with a Darwininan-inspired form of pragmatism. The latter regards language and rationality in fundamentally adaptive or instrumental terms and correlates moral progress with the reflective expansion of what Lonergan might call spontaneous intersubjectivity. These two
standpoints shape Rorty’s pragmatic account of liberal norms as a collection of ‘we-intentions’ designed to delimit the boundaries of acceptable forms of idiosyncratic desire. The result is a form of secularism that evacuates the metaphysical content of religious claims and that, despite Rorty’s commitment to freedom of expression, effectively privatizes religious discourse in public debate. Although Rorty’s position is an insightful corrective for the moral rationalist’s tendency to downplay affectivity, his commitment to a form of naturalism stands in tension with his commitment to historicism. Just like Rawls, Rorty cannot avoid making metaphysical claims. The picture he ends up painting resembles in certain key respects the position of Hobbes and Locke. The question is whether it is possible to disengage the love of or desire for truth and value from the collection of errors associated with representationalism and moral rationalism and to integrate this desire with certain naturalist dimensions of Rorty’s work. Again it is my contention that Lonergan’s transposition of Aquinas can provide a cognitional theory compatible with historicity that is capable of sublating Rorty’s concern for spontaneity and the pragmatic orientation of human knowing. In this chapter’s next section I will examine Lonergan’s transposition of Aquinas’ conception of human nature in more detail before examining, more directly, it’s implications for democratic theory and practice.

10.2 Lonergan’s Transposition of Aquinas’ on Human Nature

Although Aquinas articulates his account of human cognition in metaphysical terms, Lonergan argues that at the base of ‘Aquinas’ metaphysics of the human person’ stands a method of ‘empirical introspection,’ an explicit appeal to ‘inner experience’ or ‘psychological fact.’ Nevertheless, Lonergan recognizes that insofar as Aquinas prioritizes metaphysics, he is ‘not doing phenomenology.’ ‘If Aristotle and Aquinas used introspection and did so brilliantly, it

remains that they did not thematize their use, did not elevate it into a reflectively elaborated
technique, did not work out a proper method for psychology and thereby lay the groundwork for
the contemporary distinctions between nature and spirit and between the natural and the human
sciences." In appealing to ‘introspective techniques,’ Aristotle and Aquinas were ‘performing an
activity that they themselves did not yet have the categories or the motivation to explain.’
Lonergan’s seminal work in the collection of articles subsequently published as *Verbum: Word
and Idea in Aquinas* is dedicated to thematizing this primarily latent cognitional theory. The
result is a ‘critical search, amidst the metaphysical expression of Aquinas’ cognitional theories
for the psychological facts and epistemological implications…which gave birth to that
metaphysics.’

At the heart of Lonergan’s retrieval of Aquinas stands his transposition of Aquinas’
metaphysical notion of agent intellect or ‘intellectual light.’ Lonergan articulates this notion in
phenomenological terms as a distinctively human desire for knowledge and value. Beginning at
the level of experience, the orientation to knowledge and value spontaneously assembles a
method or pattern of operations that unfolds on three successive levels of question and answer.
At the level of understanding the subject intends intelligibility. At the level of judgment the
subject intends truth or reality. At the level of decision or responsibility the subject intends
genuine goodness or value. The intended goal of each transcendental intention specifies the basic

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4 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 6, 106. See also Byrne, 56 and Snell, 74
5 Snell, 74. See also Byrne, 56. Lonergan, *Verbum*, 10, “performance must precede reflection on performance, and
method is the fruit of that reflection,” as a result, “Aquinas had to be content to perform.” Lonergan, *Verbum*, 89,
“the appeal to experience in Thomist psychological theory, though without the benefit of a parade of modern
methodology, nonetheless is frequent and even not inconspicuous.” Andrew Beards, “Christianity, ‘Interculturality,’
and Salvation,” in *Insight and Analysis: Essays in Applying Lonergan’s Thought* (New York: Continuum, 2010),
186-187. In other words, although “Aquinas did not explicitly move from a cognitional theory and an epistemology
to ground a metaphysics based upon them, Lonergan believes that both he and Aristotle…pointed in that direction.”
‘immanent principle of movement and rest.’
or heuristic meaning of the words intelligible, true, real and good. By sublating primitive self-regarding and intersubjective spontaneities, the subject’s three-fold intending functions as the transcendental source and norm of social, cultural and personal development.

As the source of categorial or cultural-linguistic determinations, the subject’s transcendental intending constitutes an *a priori* basic horizon that is methodologically prior to those context-dependent traditions that classicists and historicists tend to overemphasize. At the same time, the subject’s transcendental intending provides an immanent criterion that structures the emergence and ongoing revision of such cultural-linguistic frameworks. More specifically, Lonergan argues that the orientation to knowledge and value specifies certain *a priori* exigencies – thematized by him as transcendental precepts – that norm the subject’s operating at each particular level. At her best, the subject is spontaneously driven to be attentive in her experiencing, intelligent in her understanding, reasonable in her judging and responsible in her decision-making and living. These exigencies specify conditions whose fulfillment is essential to the attainment of the subject’s cognitional goals. On the one hand, epistemic and moral objectivity are the fruit of authentic subjectivity. By extension, social, cultural and personal progress in human history is the product of fidelity to the subject’s *a priori* basic horizon. On the other hand, resistance to this natural orientation is the result of individual, group and or

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9 Lonergan, *Method*, 11-14 “the transcendicals are comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant over cultural change. While categories are needed to put determinate questions and give determinate answers, the transcendicals are contained in questions prior to the answers. They are the radical intending that moves us from ignorance to knowledge….It is a transcendental method, for the results envisaged are not confined categorially to some particular field or subject, but regard any result that could be intended by the completely open transcendental notions. Where other methods aim at meeting the exigencies and exploiting the opportunities proper to particular fields, transcendental method is concerned with meeting the exigencies and exploiting the opportunities presented by the human mind itself.”


12 Ibid, 292.

13 Ibid, 53.
general biases that suppress and or distort the subject’s transcendental orientation. By extension, social, cultural and personal decline in human history is the product of inauthenticity or of operating at odds with the natural orientation of the human spirit.\textsuperscript{14} The tension between progress and decline constitutes what Lonergan regards as the ‘dialectic of history.’\textsuperscript{15} Unlike authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian divide, Lonergan regards human history as a mixture of both features. This allows Lonergan to differentiate structural achievements such as the rise of classical culture, the modern turn to the subject, and historical consciousness from pejorative negotiations of such achievements.

According to Lonergan, the orientation to knowledge and value is unrestricted in its scope. The subject’s orientation extends beyond the grasp of particular intelligibilities, the knowledge of proportionate being and the apprehension of and realization of limited values to include the knowledge of and communion with the ground and source of all intelligibility, reality and value. The unrestricted character of the subject’s transcendental intending represents a transposition and combination of Augustine’s emphasis on the restlessness of the human heart with Aquinas’ appeal to the subject’s natural desire for knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{16} If the unrestricted character of the subject’s yearning is implicit in all human questioning, explicit attention to the unrestricted scope of this orientation naturally leads to what Lonergan regards as ‘the question of God.’\textsuperscript{17} To answer any form of this question authentically, in ways that are consistent with the nature of human knowing and choosing, is to affirm the existence of God. In what follows I will

\textsuperscript{15} Lonergan, “Differentials,” 50-57, 71-78.
\textsuperscript{17} Lonergan, \textit{Method}, 101-103.
examine Lonergan’s transcendental method in more detail, pausing, where appropriate, to contrast his account with the authors already examined.

10.3 Transcendental Method

In contrast with empiricists who correlate reality with sense perception and Kantians who claim that the latter yields knowledge of mere appearance, Lonergan argues that the subject’s attention to data of sense and consciousness constitutes an infrastructure subject to higher intergration. The level of understanding arises when individuals are spontaneously propelled by their curiosity to intend intelligibility or to seek the ‘quiddity or nature existing in corporeal nature,’ an intention or desire that may be thematized by the question ‘what is it?’ According to Lonergan, the process of inquiry or reasoning culminates in the emergence of a direct insight, a preconceptual act of understanding that grasps the intelligibility immanent within data. Although ‘insights are into the concrete world of sense and imagination,’ direct acts of understanding ‘add to sensible data’ an ‘intelligent grasp of the intelligible order within data’ that ‘no amount of looking could ever proffer.’ Lonergan distinguishes direct insight from the subsequent conscious production of an inner word, ‘essential definition’ or concept that expresses the ‘cognitional content’ of the preconceptual act of understanding. In other words,

20 Lonergan, Verbum, 40, 49, 20, 37-38, 174-175, 189. See also Elizabeth Murray, “Oversight of Insight and the Critique of the Metaphysics of Presence,” Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies 18 (2000), 4; Stewart, 113; Ogilvie, 69; and Byrne, 50-51, “the intelligible species is not only distinguishable from the sensible or imaginable species; it is totally unlike the sensible or imaginable species, because its content is completely insensible, unimaginable, unpicturable, unrepresentable.”
22 Lonergan, Verbum, 19-24, 207, 187-188, 200, 38, 162-163; 55-56, “conceptualization is the self-expression of an act of understanding.” Lonergan, Verbum, 47-48, “human understanding…has its object in the phantasm and knows it in the phantasm…[it] is not content with an object in this state. It pivots on itself to produce for itself another object which is the inner word….and this pivoting and production is no mere matter of some metaphysical sausage
the preconceptual content of a direct insight is only subsequently expressed or formulated in
‘definitions, postulates, suppositions, hypotheses, [and] theories.’

Each of the authors I have examined, in similar albeit significantly different ways, neglects the way in which insight into sensible data mediates between questions that intend intelligibility and conceptual formulation. As a result, concept formulation is reconceived as a priori but unconscious; as an arbitrary labeling of sense particulars; or as the product of socialization. The appeal to direct insight allows Lonergan to avoid classicist and historicist variations of deductivism that regard reasoning as a relation and manipulation of concepts. By contrast with deductivism, Lonergan argues that ‘reasoning in its essence is simply the development of insight; it is motion towards understanding.’ Reference to the development of insight helps correct the overemphasis on conceptual manipulation that marks intrinsically static forms of classicism. As Gerald McCool notes, ‘the conscious emanation of the abstract intelligibility formulated in the concept from the concrete intelligible form which insight grasps immediately in the datum permits both a growth in insight and progressively more accurate formulations of insight through a diverse range of concepts. Sets of concepts and the diverse systems of their formulation can constitute a range of diverse conceptual networks.’ Increase in knowledge is not first and foremost the product of manipulating ‘abstract terms or propositions’

machine, at one end slicing species off phantasm, and at the other popping out concepts; it is an operation of rational consciousness.” See also Matthews, 133-134, 198; and Ogilvie, 79, 80, 83.


24 I shall bracket the issue concerning data of consciousness until I discuss the invitation to cognitive self-appropriation below.

25 The first is found in Scotus and Ockham, the second in Hobbes and Locke, and the third in authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate.


27 McCool, 61-62.
within a logical system, but rather the result of progressive insight into the particular.\textsuperscript{28} In other words, intellect is not primarily a logical machine but rather a restlessness that drives individuals to ever deeper understanding of the concrete. The priority of insight over concept helps account for what Lonergan regards as ‘original meaningfulness’ or the reality of conceptual innovation that historicists, who emphasize the social mediation of ‘ordinary meaningfulness,’ tend to neglect.\textsuperscript{29}

According to Lonergan, the human spirit is not content with intelligibility but spontaneously moves from the level of understanding to the level of judgment where the subject intends truth or reality, a desire or yearning that may be thematized by the question ‘is it so?’\textsuperscript{30} The distinction between truth and falsehood or between fact and fiction is a product of reasoning, a process of gathering and assessing the evidence for and against the various theories or hypotheses presented by human intelligence for critical scrutiny.\textsuperscript{31} Just as at the level of understanding, so too at the level of judgment Lonergan identifies a distinctively reflective act of understanding that mediates between questions that intend truth or reality and subsequent judgments of fact. Lonergan characterizes reflective insight as a ‘single synthetic apprehension of all the motives for judgment or assent’ that provides the warrant for judgments, whether certain or merely probable, whereby individuals obtain knowledge of truth or reality.\textsuperscript{32}

Again, each of the authors I have examined, in similar albeit significantly different ways, compounds his neglect of direct insight with the neglect of reflective insight. Since naïve realists of various stripes conceive knowledge of reality as a function of sensitive or intellectual


\textsuperscript{29} On the distinction between ordinary and original meaningfulness see Lonergan, \textit{Method}, 256-257.


\textsuperscript{32} Lonergan, \textit{Verbum}, 71-72, 76-77, 83-84, 101. See also Matthews, 139, 137, 136.
intuition, they tend to restrict judgment to the conceptual level. Although post-modern historicists jettison the commitment to naïve realism, their overemphasis on ordinary meaningfulness tends to reduce truth to coherence. When epistemic objectivity is conceived as the product of fidelity to a particular cultural-linguistic framework the basis for judging between forms of life is reduced to arbitrary choice. The appeal to the subject’s transcendental desire for truth and the mediating role of reflective insight – intimated by but ungrounded in, for example, MacIntyre’s meta-theory of rationality – provides a critical basis for avoiding both naïve realism and relativism. For Lonergan, epistemic objectivity is the product of fidelity to the transcendental intention of truth and not a result of seeing, either sensitive or intellectual, nor the product solely of fidelity to communal norms.

The desire for self-transcendence is not just cognitive. According to Lonergan, the level of judgment spontaneously gives way to the level of responsibility or decision where the subject intends value, a desire that may be thematized by the questions ‘is this genuinely good?’ or ‘ought it be so?’ The level of responsibility sublates the levels of experience, understanding and judgment insofar as it presupposes some knowledge of reality. At the same time, the transcendental notion of value sublates experiential and intelligible notions of the good as sensitively desirable or as intelligently-designed. In other words, it is the intention of value that supplies the criterion for passing judgment on particular goods and the goods of order that serve their recurrent realization. As I mentioned in chapter 5, Lonergan’s notion of the human good requires a further distinction between culture and the subject’s personal orientation or horizon. I am now in a position to draw this distinction in a much clearer way. Culture refers, in a certain

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36 See footnote 57.
sense, to the set of categorial determinations of the transcendental notion of value that supply the proximate criterion for evaluating spontaneities and institutional frameworks. The transcendental notion of value – along with the broader orientation to intelligibility and reality – supplies the immanent personal standard that is the remote norm of cultural development.

Just as direct and reflective acts of understanding mediate between questions and concepts or judgments respectively, so too Lonergan points to a cognitional event that mediates between questions that intend genuine goodness and a subsequent judgment of value. In *Method in Theology* Lonergan describes this event as an ‘apprehension of value’ that is given in ‘feelings.’ Prominent interpreters of Lonergan describe this event as a ‘deliberative insight,’ a feeling-laden ‘a-ha’ event that provides the ground or warrant for a particular value judgment. If moral objectivity is the product of fidelity to the inborn desire for value or goodness, the orientation to self-transcendence at the level of responsibility is not content with knowledge of value. According to Lonergan, the subject is spontaneously propelled to make decisions and perform actions in accord with prior value judgments. This distinction between knowledge of the good and decision points to the need for an additional affective component capable of motivating subjects to act in ways that accord with their moral knowing.

Emphasis on the transcendental character of the desire for value differentiates Lonergan’s account of moral knowledge from the classicist and historicist emphasis on propositional first principles. The result, in both cases, is an ethical immobilism that tends to conceive moral objectivity as a product of judgmental and decisional fidelity to already formulated principles.

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40 This insight shares much with Rorty’s emphasis on sentimental education. The development of feeling occurs in a communal context.
Rather than starting with abstract moral norms that are subsequently applied to concrete circumstances, Lonergan emphasizes the way in which deliberative insight apprehends value or genuine goodness in particular instances. From this perspective, propositional principles include the general norm ‘do good and avoid evil,’ which functions as a thematization of the transcendental intention, and more particular norms that function as short-hand rules for moral decision-making. The latter are the products of the subject’s generalizing from particular instances to abstract norms. At the same time, Lonergan’s attention to the affective character of the transcendental intention of value and its satisfaction in deliberative insight highlights the cognitive value of teleology and emotion that divine voluntarists and Kantians tend to downplay. Lonergan is clear that the appeal to affectivity is not reducible to the empiricist concern with pleasure and pain. Key here is the distinction between intentional responses to objects insofar as they are experientially desirable and intentional responses to objects insofar as they are of genuine value. In this chapter’s next section I will complicate this picture of human nature by situating it within the process of socialization that historicist authors highlight.

10.4 Human Nature in Developmental Perspective

Up to this point critics may rightfully argue that, by overemphasizing first-hand or personally-generated knowledge, Lonergan has neglected or inappropriately downplayed the role that ordinary meaningfulness plays in human development. If transcendental method supplies the source and norm of original meaningfulness, Lonergan nonetheless agrees with historicists that the mediation of ordinary meaningfulness via the process of socialization plays a

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41 Lonergan, *Method*, 38, “The feelings are not the…non-intentional states, trends, urges, that are related to efficient and final causes but not to objects [i.e. first level biological spontaneities]. Again they are not intentional responses to such as the agreeable or disagreeable, the pleasant or painful, the satisfying or dissatisfying.”

42 Lonergan, *Method*, 41-47. First-hand knowledge is knowledge that begins with experience and then moves through understanding and judgment. Lonergan contrasts first-hand knowledge with second-hand knowledge or ‘belief.’
chronologically prior and constitutive role in such development. This prior phase of ‘development from above’ is conditioned by the primitive affective bonds that link parents and children to one another. Motivated by these intersubjective spontaneities, the process of socialization or acculturation begins with the developing child’s tacit decision to regard their parents and, by extension other cultural authorities as worthy of trust, respect and emulation. Through a complicated process of example-giving, observation, correction and encouragement, children are initiated into the variety of communal or social practices constitutive of a particular tradition. Initiates not only develop skills correlative with particular institutional frameworks, they also tacitly appropriate the values, beliefs, and understandings constitutive of what Lonergan regards as a community’s ‘everyday’ culture.’ Implicit in social practices, these values and meanings constitute an a posteriori horizon, a socially-mediated ‘orientation’ or ‘second nature’ that tones and norms the developing subject’s particular acts of knowing and choosing. From the perspective of this socially mediated horizon, authenticity and objectivity are the product of fidelity to a community’s ordinary meaningfulness. Since human history is at least partly constituted by the dialectical relationship between progress and decline, the subject’s a posteriori horizon is always the product of collective authenticity and inauthenticity or communal progress and decline.

If the distinctions between pre-critical, classical, and empirical or historically conscious conceptions of culture reflect three stages in the evolution of human meaning writ large, the

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46 Lonergan, *Method*, 79-80. “There is the minor authenticity or unauthenticity of the subject with respect to the tradition that nourishes him.”
distinctions may also be applied to the evolution of individual consciousness. Authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian divide distinguish between the tacit or pre-critical appropriation of cultural norms and a subject’s subsequent capacity to objectify the values and meanings implicit in communal practice. The former is reflected in the developing child’s largely spontaneous capacity to operate in ways that conform to her training or initiation. The latter capacity is compatible with a classicist or normative notion of culture that regards socially-mediated norms as absolute and that conceives the control of meaning in primarily logical terms. The natural relativization of inherited ordinary meaningfulness generally occurs in adolescence or early adulthood as individuals come face-to-face with the particularity of their own tradition. Historicists embrace the empirical notion of culture but tend to deny the possibility of discovering foundations for guiding ongoing personal, cultural and social development compatible with historicity. This approach may find expression in both a pragmatic live-and-let-live attitude or in a Nietzschean form of individualism that finds expression in nihilism. In response to the demand for a new higher level of cultural control, Lonergan commends a project of self-appropriation capable of effecting the subject’s transition from an \textit{a posteriori} horizon to the transcendental source of concepts, judgements and their ongoing revision. In this chapter’s next section I will examine this invitation and some of its implications in more detail.

10.5 The Invitation to Cognitive and Existential Self-Appropriation

One misunderstands the nature of Lonergan’s work if one conceives him as presenting a series of deductive arguments capable of compelling assent. By contrast with classicists and

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47 One way to concretize this standpoint is to correlate it with MacIntyre’s more limited and chronologically prior way of responding to difference.


49 This would be Rorty’s option.
historicists who tend to underemphasize the role that subjectivity plays in human knowing and choosing, Lonergan’s work must be understood as an invitation or an aid to self-appropriation or critical self-possession.\(^{50}\) Key to understanding the task of self-appropriation lies in recognizing that the subject’s operations are both conscious and intentional.\(^{51}\) As intentional, the operations intend objects or answers that satisfy questions for intelligibility, reality and value.\(^{52}\) In contrast with empiricists who tend to reduce data to the ‘sensate operations of consciousness’ correlative with ‘seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting,’\(^{53}\) Lonergan argues that consciousness refers to the subject’s self-presence.\(^{54}\) The character of this self-presence, the experience of oneself as operating, changes as the subject ascends from the level of experience, through understanding, judging and deciding.\(^{55}\) When Lonergan describes the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value as a ‘prior conscious reality,’ or as ‘conscious and operative,’ prior to objectification, he is pointing to the subject’s tacit awareness of her cognitional performance.\(^{56}\)

Unlike early modern thinkers who conceive introspection as a form of inward-looking or perception,\(^{57}\) Lonergan argues that self-appropriation consists in the application of the operations

\(^{50}\) Lonergan invites his readers to enter the laboratory of their own selves in order to gauge the accuracy of his mapping of human subjectivity. Lonergan, *Method*, 14. “It is quite difficult to be at home in transcendental method, for that is not to be achieved by reading books or listening to lectures or analyzing language. It is a matter of heightening one’s consciousness by objectifying it, and that is something that each one, ultimately, has to do in himself and for himself.”

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 14.

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 7.


\(^{54}\) Lonergan, *Method*, 8. Bernard Lonergan, “First Lecture: Religious Experience,” in *A Third Collection*, 117, “we all are conscious of our sensing and our feeling, our inquiring, and our understanding, our deliberating and decision. None of these activities occurs when one is in a coma or in dreamless sleep. In that basic sense they are conscious.” Rather than conceiving consciousness in intuitionist fashion – a trend common among early modern thinkers – Lonergan argues that consciousness is identical with the subject’s experience of her intentional operating.


\(^{57}\) Lonergan, *Method*, 8, “There is the word, introspection, which is misleading inasmuch as it suggests an inward inspection. Inward inspection is just myth. Its origin lies in the mistaken analogy that all cognitional events are to be conceived on the analogy of ocular vision; consciousness is some sort of cognitional event; therefore consciousness is to be conceived on the analogy of ocular vision and since it does not inspect outwardly, it must be an inward inspection.”
as intentional to the operations as conscious.\textsuperscript{58} According to Lonergan, the journey to self-appropriation or self-knowledge begins with the subject’s explicit advertence to the data of consciousness. By shifting the focus from the objects of knowledge to the conscious dimension of one’s operating the subject heightens her consciousness.\textsuperscript{59} Objectification of the orientation to knowledge and value begins with the identification and naming of the subject’s operations. The desire for intelligibility is satisfied by a direct insight or act of understanding that grasps the ‘unity and relatedness’ of the subject’s cognitional acts.\textsuperscript{60} This direct insight into the nature of human knowing and choosing finds expression in a cognitional theory or noetic phenomenology. The spontaneous desire for truth or reality is satisfied by a reflective insight that grasps the evidence for affirming the structure of human knowing and choosing in the subject’s conscious intentional performance. In and through the subsequent judgment of fact the subject achieves self-knowledge in the strict sense.\textsuperscript{61}

Walter Conn, a prominent interpreter of Lonergan, points to a distinction between common sense and systematic or explanatory forms of self-appropriation or between an implicit

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. According to Lonergan, ‘‘introspection’’ may be understood to mean, not consciousness itself but the process of objectifying the contents of consciousness. Just as we move from the data of sense through inquiry, insight, reflection, judgment, to statements about sensible things, so too we move from the data of consciousness through inquiry, understanding, reflection, judgment, to statements about conscious subjects and their operations. That, of course, is just what we are doing and inviting the reader to do at the present time. But the reader will do it, not by looking inwardly, but by recognizing in our expressions the objectification of his subjective experience.’’ Ibid, 14, “what is conscious, can be intended. To apply the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious is a fourfold matter of (1) experiencing one’s experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, (2) understanding the unity and relations of our experienced experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding, (3) affirming the reality of our experienced and understood experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding, and (4) deciding to operate in accord with the norms immanent in the spontaneous relatedness of one’s experienced, understood, affirmed experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding.”

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 14; 15, “we must, then enlarge our interest, recall that one and the same operation not only intends an object but also reveals an intending subject, discover in our own experience the concrete truth of that general statement.”

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 15-16.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 16-20; 238-239. Cognitive self-appropriation refers to the objectification and subsequent verification of the first three levels of operating: experience, understanding, and judging. The verification of this account of human knowing constitutes what Lonergan regards as ‘intellectual conversion.’ Existential or moral self-appropriation builds upon cognitive self-appropriation but refers more specifically to the objectification and subsequent verification of the fourth level of operating, the level of responsibility.
and explicitly philosophic form of self-appropriation. The latter is a relatively unthematized form of self-possession that lies at the basis of the young adult’s capacity to gain critical distance from her heritage and to resituate the basic standards for knowing and choosing within the self.

In both cases the culminating or climactic stage of self-appropriation arises when the subject is faced with what Lonergan regards as an ‘existential discovery,’ the realization that the character of social, cultural and personal development is the product of the individual’s relative authenticity. Faced with this recognition the subject is confronted with a basic decision: will she affirm or reject her orientation to knowledge and value and its implications for her concrete living?

According to Lonergan, the objectification of the orientation to knowledge and value in ‘concepts, propositions, and words’ is subject to revision. Following MacIntyre’s account of Thomism, Lonergan argues that his particular articulation of transcendental method is historically-conditioned or tradition-dependent. At the same time, Lonergan, unlike MacIntyre, argues that the subject’s transcendental intending is transcultural insofar as it is conscious and operative prior to any thematization. More specifically, if the articulation of transcendental method is subject to reformulation, the subject’s ‘conscious, unobjectified attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, [and] responsibility’ constitutes an infrastructural ‘rock’ that is not subject to revision. The latter grounds Lonergan’s claim that the denial of transcendental

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63 Ibid.


65 Lonergan, Method, 18-20, 282; 283, “the explicit formulation of that method is historically conditioned and can be expected to be corrected, modified, complemented as the sciences continue to advance.”

66 Ibid. This distinction resolves the tension in MacIntyre that results from regarding Thomist first principles as simultaneously defeasible and transcendental. For all of these reasons Lonergan is able to agree with MacIntyre that all knowing is tradition-dependent and yet, by appealing to the modern turn, also provide a transcendental grounding for MacIntyre’s meta-theory of rationality. This move completes MacIntyre’s efforts to forge a middle-ground
method involves the subject in a performative self-contradiction since this type of negation ends up presupposing the very operations it purportedly rejects. Only in this way is it possible to speak about a subject that is methodologically prior to socialization, the source and norm of traditions and their ongoing revision. If Lonergan would likely agree that there is a rhetorical dimension associated with the invitation to self-appropriation, disagreements concerning the nature of human knowing and choosing may, in principle, be resolved through appeal to the data of consciousness. In other words, the subject that Lonergan thematizes is not merely posited or constructed but rather is a transcultural reality capable of empirical verification.

10.6 Lonergan’s Transposition of Sanctifying Grace and Religious Self-Appropriation

If social and cultural progress is the product of personal fidelity to the subject’s orientation to self-transcendence, Lonergan is quite clear that habitual authenticity is not a given. In reality, the subject’s yearning for intelligibility, reality, and value is distorted and suppressed by the various forms of bias, whether individual, group or general, that lay at the root of personal, social and cultural decline. As a result, the resolution of the dialectic of history constituted by this opposition between progress and decline requires something more than the recognition that the natural orientation of the human spirit provides an immanent criterion for all ongoing development. Just as the individual’s orientation to knowledge and value sublates and orders spontaneity, practical intelligence and culture, so too Lonergan argues that the dialectic of history finds its proper resolution in a higher integration that ‘sublates the whole of human

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 Lonergan, Method, 19, “It follows that there is a sense in which the objectification of the normative pattern of our conscious and intentional operations does not admit revision. The sense in question is that the activity of revising consists in such operations in accord with such a pattern, so that a revision rejecting the pattern would be rejecting itself. There is then a rock on which one can build.”


living. More specifically, Lonergan argues that the *a priori* orientation to intelligibility, reality and value that is the source of ongoing cognitive and evaluative development is sublated by a ‘relatively *a priori*’ religious or spiritual dimension. Lonergan articulates the meaning and effects of this dimension in terms derived from his analysis of human intentionality as an experience of unrestricted being-in-love or as an apprehension of transcendent value. Received as a gift independently of human striving, religious experience incipiently fulfills the subject’s yearning for goodness or value. The incipient character of religious fulfillment may be situated in reference to the subject’s unrestricted yearning as an experience of communion with the God named heuristically as the goal or term of intentional striving. Since the gift of love overcomes the subject spontaneously or independently of her striving, the religiously fulfilled subject faces the further question whether she will cooperate with or nurture this gift. As a result, religious development depends partly upon the gift of religious love and partly upon the subject’s free response. When the demands associated with religious experience are accepted, the result is what Lonergan regards as a religious conversion, a transformation of the subject’s willingness to live authentically that enriches the subject’s desire for intelligibility, reality and value.

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73 Ibid, 106-107; 105, “as the question of God is implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfillment of our conscious intentionality.”
74 Lonergan, *Method*, 106-107; 115-116, “this apprehension consists in the experienced fulfillment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actuated orientation towards the mystery of love and awe. Since that thrust is of intelligence to the intelligible, of reasonableness to the true and the real, of freedom and responsibility to the truly good, the experienced fulfillment of that thrust in its unrestrictedness may be objectified as a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and reality, absolute goodness and holiness.” Lonergan, “Second Lecture,” 133.
76 Lonergan, “Faith and Beliefs,” 38, 42-43. Lonergan, *Method*, 105, 106-107, 115-116, 242, 283-284, 289; 240-241, “Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and
transcendental method supplies the conditions of possibility for human creativity or
‘development from below,’ the gift of religious conversion and the purgative effects of religious
love moving ‘downward’ through human consciousness provide the basis for the former’s
authentic unfolding. Reference to religious experience or redemption thereby provides the third
and final dimension in Lonergan’s dialectic of history. If progress is the product of authenticity
and decline is the product of inauthenticity, religious conversion or redemption resolves the
tension between progress and decline in line with the former.

Just as Lonergan regards transcendental method as a pre-linguistic infrastructure
operative prior to objectification and verification so too he conceives religious experience as a
pre-linguistic datum of consciousness that is methodologically prior to its interpretation. If
Lonergan articulates the meaning and effects of religious experience in historically conditioned
terms drawn from his heuristic analysis of human intentionality or from his Christian heritage,
it is his contention that the reality to which these formulations point is transcultural. In both
cases, Lonergan’s formulations serve the purpose of heightening the reader’s consciousness, of
directing the subject towards explicit attention to, and appropriation of the realities he regards as
already conscious but not necessarily known. According to Lonergan, the transcultural

permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but
as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts.” Dadosky, 112-113.
79 The phrase ‘unrestricted being-in-love’ is particularly susceptible to charges of cultural imperialism. It is a
distinctively Western (and indeed Christian) way of describing how religious experience fulfills and transforms
human subjectivity at the level of responsibility in a way that hints at the subject’s encounter with an utterly
transcendent other. To imply the reality of an utterly transcendent other and to speak of a relationship of unrestricted
love and intimacy is problematic in certain respects. The phrase itself appears to move beyond a mere description of
the concretely universal features of religious living towards interpretation and verification
80 Lonergan, Method, 282-283.
81 Bernard Lonergan, Philosophy of God, 17-18. Frederick Lawrence, “The Ethics of Authenticity and the Human
Good, in Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin, an Authentic Colleague,” in The Importance of Insight, 131.
Lonergan, Method, 278. The gift may be present and one might be may be cooperating with it or rejecting it without
even being reflectively aware. This is particularly true in the case of agnostics and atheists who may in fact be in
love with God or who may be responding affirmatively to this gift without actually being aware of it.
dimensions of religious experience constitute the ‘inner word’ of religion distinguishable from
the context-dependent and communal expression of religious meaning that he terms the ‘outer
word.’ Typically the latter is contextualized by the variety of historical revelations judged by
religious believers to be manifestations or mediations of the God or transcendent reality
encountered in religious experience. In a Christian context, the outer word of religion is
correlated with Jesus of Nazareth, the definitive self-revelation of God in human history, and
with the related Trinitarian conception of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From a Christian
perspective, the inner word of religion is conceptualized as the gift of the Holy Spirit or the gift
of sanctifying grace. As a result, rather than conceiving sanctifying grace as a cultural-
linguistic construct, Lonergan argues that grace is a theoretical term that points to the pre-verbal
and concretely universal reality of religious experience offered to all of humankind in all times
and places.

Noted political theologian William Cavanaugh regards the effort to isolate and identify
the transcultural in human consciousness as a distinctively modern approach that reduces religion
to an interior disposition capable of privatization in democratic contexts. Although I agree with
Cavanaugh that pejorative forms of privatization benefit from a distinctively modern account of
religion as an interior phenomenon, I disagree with him that the only other option is a return to

83 Lonergan, Method, 107. Members of other religious traditions may conceptualize this gift in terms drawn from
their own traditions.
84 See, for example, Cavanaugh, The Myth of Religious Violence, chapter 2. Cavanaugh argues that in a premodern context religio referred to a habit or virtue, a ‘disposition toward moral excellence produced by highly specific disciplines of body and soul.’ The objects of such ‘worship’ or deference include, for example, the ancient polis, pagan gods, the God revealed by Jesus Christ. Lonergan would no doubt agree with Cavanaugh that ‘religion’ is not a transcultural concept. At the same time, I think he would more forcefully commend the retrieval of religious interiority.
Christian particularism. In other words, I do not believe that Christians and other religious believers should be forced to choose between a concern for transculturality that is inextricably wed to a pejorative form of secularism and a strong form of particularity that tends to overemphasize the church. On the one hand, I think Lonergan would agree with Cavanaugh that the practices constitutive of Christian and other religious communities are essential to forming individuals capable of consistently authentic living and that such formation has political implications. On the other hand, it is my contention that the modern turn to the subject is essential to negotiating the reality of religious diversity in ways that take seriously the Second Vatican Council’s recognition of the universality of grace. If one is going to speak about the universality of grace or about salvation as correlative with something more than simply nominal membership in the Body of Christ, then one needs to be able to identify grace’s at least potentially transcultural effects within human consciousness and history. Recourse to a heuristic account of redemption also provides a way to speak about grace’s social manifestation in a democratic polity that reflects a commitment to authentic human fulfillment.

The middle-ground that I am hinting at above enriches the initial account of socialization I examined in section 10.4. When the basic account of development from above is complicated by appeal to religious experience, the subject’s heritage is not simply a reflection of collective authenticity and inauthenticity but, more radically, a product of cooperation with and rejection of religious love. Pre-critical religious development begins with the child’s tacit appropriation of the cultural meanings and values implicit in communal practices such as liturgy, catechesis etc. The shift from pre-critical to reflexive forms of religious belonging in the lives of individuals is analogous to the emergence of classical culture writ large. Typically at this stage, religious

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85 See for example, Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*), 16 and *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*), 2.
believers regard their own claims and relative form of salvation in culturally normative or classical terms. In both stages, the subject’s religious experience is interpreted in terms derived from their particular cultural-linguistic standpoint. The natural relativization of a posteriori religious standards typically occurs in late adolescence or young adulthood.

In distancing themselves from classical inclusivism and Kantian-inspired forms of pluralism, historicists tend to embrace a form of post-modern Christian exceptionalism or exclusivism. By contrast, just as Lonergan commends a project of cognitive and moral self-appropriation in response to the call for an alternative higher level control of meaning in general, so too Lonergan invites readers to a corresponding form of religious self-appropriation. Building upon these more basic cognitive and existential dimensions, I contend that religious self-appropriation includes at least three main features. First, drawing on the technical notion of consciousness as experience, the fully self-appropriated subject stands in a unique position to recognize that religious experience is a pre-verbal and transcultural event that is methodologically prior to its interpretation. This view elicits an inclusivism that differs from absolutist and post-modern forms of exclusivism by extending the salvific will of God beyond the confines of the Christian community and from Kantian-inspired forms of pluralism that restrict thick metaphysical claims. It is this gift that provides the basis for a common religious community of humankind and that provides a common ground for dialogue and practice. Second, the fully self-appropriated subject stands in a unique position to respond to the invitation to communion in open-eyed fashion. Third, and perhaps most controversially, the fully self-appropriated individual stands in a unique position to hold the realistic nature of religious truth.

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86 The classic example here is the practice of discernment or the discipline of attending to the Spirit’s movements. Religious self-appropriation further differentiates the subject’s basic existential discovery. The subject must decide to live in fidelity with both her natural wonder and must choose to cooperate with the gift that incipiently fulfills and enriches that desire.
claims in tension with the realization that historical judgments are at-best-highly probable. In this chapter’s final section I shall draw on Lonergan’s transpositions of nature and grace to integrate and ground insights from both sides of the contemporary liberal-communitarian debate.

10.7  Lonergan and Democracy

In closing, I would like to draw out some of the implications of Lonergan’s emphasis on self-appropriation for democratic practice and theory. This final section will proceed in four parts. First I will distinguish between the remote and proximate norms of democratic practice. Second, I will briefly examine the status and nature of democratic norms and hint at how my approach might walk a middle-ground path between historicism and uncritical forms of Western imperialism. Third, I will utilize this approach to develop alternative accounts of individualism and public discourse. Fourth, I will close with some remarks about the role of religion and redemption in public life.

10.7.1 The Remote and Proximate Norms of Democratic Practice

At the center of my account lies a distinction between what I’m calling the remote and proximate norms of democratic practice. The former refers to the transcendental source and ground of responsibility for proximate democratic standards in human consciousness. The differentiation of categorial from transcendental norms parallels the distinction between thick and thin conceptions of the good found in different ways in both MacIntyre and Rawls. On the one hand, self-appropriation provides the basis for articulating a historically-conscious account of natural law, a thin conception of the good roughly correlative with the norms that guide

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87 This is one of the more controversial claims I make in this dissertation. Although faith conceived as fides qua may supply an affective support for the subject’s commitment to particular claims, the gift of religious love is itself transcultural. The recognition of the latter in the context of historical consciousness counsels epistemic humility.

88 The relationship between proximate and remote democratic norms resembles Catholic Social Teaching’s emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between rights and correlative responsibilities. See The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 156.
MacIntyre’s account of dialectical rationality and Stout’s account of immanent criticism. On the other hand, reference to the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value provides a basis for retrieving Rawls’ conception of public reason. Rather than drawing the distinction between thick and thin along metaphysical versus post-metaphysical lines, I would distinguish between a heuristic conception of fulfillment or form of metaphysics and thick categorial or cultural-linguistic frameworks. The focus of an overlapping consensus of comprehensive commitments thereby shifts from a post-metaphysical conception of justice to the shared desire for truth and value.

Proximate democratic norms include but are not limited to the codification of civil or political and socio-economic rights that inform democratic institutions. The ground of such rights in Catholic Social Teaching is linked to human dignity.89 Traditionally, the connection between dignity and human rights has been articulated in one of two ways. One account of human dignity appeals primarily to divine revelation or to the human person’s creation in the image of God and to the dignity that accrues to the human person as a result of the Incarnation and her supernatural orientation.90 Yet the tradition also includes a natural law approach to human dignity that purports to provide a universal ground or warrant for human rights.91 Historicists on both sides of the liberal-communitarian divide tend to deny the availability of the second approach. Historicists on the communitarian side tend to view human rights discourse

89 See for example: Dignitatis Humanae, 2.
91 The classic example of this approach, prior to Vatican II is John XXIII’s On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty (Pacem in Terris). This is one way of articulating what it means to say we are made in the image of God. Just as grace does not obliterate human nature but rather perfects it, so too this more universalist account of human dignity is capable of sublation through reference to more particular warrants drawn from divine revelation.
with suspicion in general.\textsuperscript{92} By contrast, from a Lonerganian perspective, human dignity is a function of the subject’s capacity for self-determination, her ability to freely choose for or against her orientation to knowledge and value, together with her experience of religious fulfillment. What at first perhaps reads as an overly individualistic account of human dignity is further contextualized through reference to Lonergan’s emphasis on spontaneous intersubjectivity and on the transcendental intention of value’s orientation toward communion with God and neighbor. These features of the human person represent transpositions of what the Catholic tradition has described as the human person’s natural sociality. In this context, the common good refers to the broad range of ‘social conditions’ that support collective movement toward fulfilment in truth, friendship and love.\textsuperscript{93} Human rights set the conditions of possibility for the common good by specifying the bare minimum required for human development and fulfillment. This collection of conditions includes certain civil-political rights as well as those socio-economic rights that ensure that basic human needs are met. Together these rights further thematize the thin conception of the good I specified above through reference to the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value.

\textit{10.7.2 The Nature and Status of Democratic Norms}

I agree with second-generation liberals that democratic norms are in principle defeasible and historically contingent, subject to revision and development in different times and places. At the same time, I agree with Rawls that the basis for democracy is something more than a mere \textit{modus vivendi}. Is there a way to hold onto both insights? In other words, is there a way to avoid the charge of Western imperialism while defending an appropriately moral foundation for

\textsuperscript{92} This is an undercurrent in the work of authors such as MacIntyre, Milbank, and Hauerwas.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Compendium}, 164.
democratic institutions and practice? Again I am not convinced that one needs to construe these options as mutually exclusive. The key, in my judgment, to this alternative middle-ground position lies in the distinction I have already drawn between transcendental method as conscious and as objectified. Expanding this distinction, it is my contention that proximate democratic norms may be construed as secondary objectifications of the subject’s transcendental intending in a new context of cultural and religious diversity. In other words, proximate democratic norms are the product of reflection on self-appropriation’s resolution of the contemporary crisis of meaning, the drawing out of self-appropriation’s implications in the context of historical consciousness. Just as Lonergan’s objectification of transcendental method is tradition-dependent and, in principle, revisable, so too secondary objectifications of transcendental method remain defeasible. At the same time, just as Lonergan is able to differentiate between his contingently-articulated cognitional theory and its transcultural source, so too I contend that the ultimate ground of proximate norms lies in the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value. This approach provides a framework for identifying and assessing inadequate accounts of democracy. When self-appropriation is incomplete or truncated the result are objectifications of the norms implicit in democratic practice that obscure or stand in dialectical tension with the subject’s inborn orientation. Another way to make this point is to note that democratic practices and institutions function authentically when remote democratic norms guide the formation, revision, and implementation of proximate norms such as human rights. When human rights doctrine is

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94 Many authors have called into question the conviction that democracy is a universally normative form of life. There is much truth in this criticism but once again I am not convinced that there exists no middle ground between total rejection and pejoratively classicist forms of democratic imperialism.

95 Human rights discourse is not so much a creation ex nihilo as it is the contingent product of reflection on human nature in a post-classicist or historically conscious context. In other words, human rights doctrine helps make something explicit that has always been implicit.

96 I think a case can be made that there are core features of human rights doctrine that remain non-negotiable. If the commendation of democracy requires an appeal to rhetorical persuasion it may also appeal to the subject as bedrock
disengaged from its source and foundation in the natural law the result is the very emotivism that MacIntyre rejects and that Rorty celebrates.

10.7.3 Rethinking Individualism and Public Discourse

What I have been calling the remote and proximate norms of democratic practices and institutions combine to norm what might be called post-conventional living. More specifically, it is my contention that self-appropriation together with the secondary objectifications of transcendental method captured by human rights doctrine undergird distinctive understandings of democratic individualism and public discourse. Unlike classical liberals and in line with Stout’s mitigated form of self-reliance, it is my contention that individuals define themselves at least partially against the *a posteriori* horizon mediated to them via socialization and in the context of the community’s common good. On the one hand, the self-appropriated or post-conventional individual stands in a unique position vis-à-vis her heritage. By acquiring a limited form of critical distance she is able to conceive communal values and beliefs as data to be subsequently understood and evaluated and to engage in ongoing identity formation in open-eyed fashion. At the same time, greater emphasis on ‘development from below’ does not sanction an anti-traditionalism that jettisons second-hand knowing in general but rather provides the basis for a critical evaluation of authority. On the other hand, the post-conventional subject also stands in a unique position to identify and harness her personal distinctiveness in service of the common good. The individual stifles her potential when she conceives talents as aids to personal gratification rather than as capacities to be identified, integrated and evaluated by human

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97 This position resembles in certain key respects the account of fully reflective reason-exchange in MacIntyre and Stout. It also closely resembles what Charles Taylor labels a form of ‘holist individualism.’ See for example: Charles Taylor, “Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995).

98 The theological analogue of this emphasis on natural talents or distinctiveness is the Pauline-inspired notion of charisms.
intentionality. In general, individual freedoms are contextualized, guided and normed by communal contexts but also, more basically, by the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value.

This multi-level reading of democratic norms also finds expression in debates surrounding the character of the right to religious freedom and its relationship to public discourse. Religious freedom is most typically characterized in negative terms as an immunity that guarantees believers freedom from coercion or interference in matters concerning religious belief, expression and practice.\(^9\) Most citizens in democratic contexts such as Canada and the United States take for granted that the right to religious freedom informs and shapes democratic practice. At the same time, there exists widespread disagreement concerning the meaning and value of this right. Catholic commentators often conceive these differences as a function of divergent accounts of the relationship between freedom and truth.\(^10\) According to such commentators, some characterizations of the right to religious freedom prioritize freedom to the exclusion of truth, some prioritize truth in ways that circumscribe legitimate concerns for freedom, and others fall somewhere in between these two extremes. Although this type of approach recognizes the way in which the right to religious freedom is contextualized by more basic methodological presuppositions, it tends to conceive the latter in insufficiently nuanced ways. The relationship between freedom and truth is essential but the category of truth in general and its relationship to historical consciousness in particular is precisely that which is contested. More to the point, it is my contention that interpretational disagreements concerning the right to religious freedom are at least in part a function of dialectically-opposed accounts of human knowing and choosing.

\(^9\) See *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.
From a Lonerganian perspective, education for democratic citizenship entails education for critical self-possession, an appropriation of the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value that sets the conditions of possibility for post-conventional intra- and inter-tradition discourse. The differentiation of transcendental from categorial norms in the context of cultural and religious diversity places newfound emphasis on the subject’s dignity, her search for truth and value in freedom and dialogue. Respect for dignity and diversity counsels the separation of church from state, the differentiation of a limited constitutional order from what John Courtney Murray calls civil society or what Rawls calls the background culture of a democratic community. The limited state is responsible for defending what Dignitatis Humanae calls ‘public order,’ a thin conception of the good whose content includes those human rights and related laws that set the conditions of possibility for human flourishing. From this perspective, religious freedom is what Murray calls an ‘article of peace,’ an immunity from coercion that sets important background conditions for open and ordered dialogue oriented toward the true and the good conceived in broadly heuristic terms. Respect for religious freedom prohibits the coercive intervention of the state in matters of comprehensive commitment provided practice and expression do not run afoul of public order. The meanings and values that inform the concept of public order are the product of discourse in civil society and, at their best, reflect overlapping consensus on those constitutional essentials necessary for fuller pursuit of the common good. Informed by these rights and their remote norm in human consciousness, discourse concerning

102 Dignitatis Humanae, 2, 3, 4, 7.
103 See for example: John Courtney Murray, We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1960).
104 Dignitatis Humanae, 2.
105 Following Rawls, I would contend that these essentials ought to include not simply civil or political rights and freedoms but also those socio-economic rights that meet the basic needs of all members of a particular community.
the broader common good also takes place in civil society as individuals persuade others to accept their thick conceptions of the good. At both levels, self-appropriated citizens stand in a unique position to balance their own commitments with a permissive account of epistemic entitlement that respects difference and a fallibilism that counsels openness to the possibility of revision. In both instances, the shared commitment to a heuristic account of fulfillment may not provide ready-made answers to difficult economic, political, legal and religious questions but it does supply a shared criterion that governs the ongoing search for truth and value.

This account of religious freedom and public discourse represents a middle-ground between two broad positions that represent incomplete resolutions of the contemporary crisis of meaning. The first approach includes post-metaphysical liberal and post-modern Christian exclusivists. The former, including authors such as Rawls and Rorty, inconsistently combine a commitment to historicism with some form of post-metaphysical uniqueness that inappropriately circumscribes the right to religious freedom. Any attempt to interpret the right to religious freedom in ways that purport to respect historical consciousness and yet marginalize particular voices in public discourse is incoherent. Rawls’ political liberalism and Rorty’s antirepresentationalism hide comprehensive commitments that are no more privileged or unique than any other doctrine. The latter, including authors such as Hauerwas and Cavanaugh, reject ‘indirect’ forms of ecclesiology that appeal to natural law argumentation to ground a thin conception of the good capable of guiding public discourse.  

Natural law theorists not only fail to recognize the tradition-constituted nature of rationality, they tend to neglect the way in which the very appeal to public reason inappropriately circumscribes the public nature of the church in ways that serve alternative ideological commitments. Discourse in civil society has, according to

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these authors, been coopted or colonized by pejoratively liberal presuppositions.\textsuperscript{107} The conjunction of these claims not only supports both authors’ embrace of Christian particularity, it also tends to sanction an oppositional reading of the relationship between church and democratic practice. Notwithstanding their guarded praise of constitutional democracy, this stance appears, in the limit case, to inconsistently combine respect for diversity with a commitment to a post-modern form of Christian exceptionalism.

A second trend finds expression in certain episcopal conferences’ tendency to collapse the distinction between public order and moral truth in a way that prioritizes possession of the latter conceived in classicist terms as absolute and certain. Catholic commentators such as David Hollenbach and Charles Curran argue that these attempts to legislate ‘private morality’ misconstrue the nature of civil law in a democratic context. Both authors argue that the church’s primary public role is not to pass coercive civil laws but to shape the broader culture that informs discourse and cooperative living in civil society.\textsuperscript{108} I would add that respect for dignity militates not simply against a strong correlation between public order and private morality but also against an intra-tradition commitment to classicism that motivates legislative overreaching in the first place. A transcendental approach to natural law discerns values in the concrete, conceives particular moral principles as generalizations from particular cases, respects cultural and religious diversity, and affirms the priority of conscience and personal responsibility. These features counsel caution not simply as a result of pragmatic compromise but as a function of the nature of human knowing and choosing. When the church commends this account of the person, of public discourse and moral truth, it takes seriously the distinctively modern emphasis on human dignity.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
10.7.4 Democracy, Redemption and Religious Belief

Much of what I have argued in section 10.7.3 may have given the impression that democratic health is a foregone conclusion. In reality, however, democratic practice is subject to the same biases, whether individual, group and or general, that mark human living in general. Despite their best intentions, Cavanaugh and Hauerwas’ work can be read in ways that appear to construe the relationship between church and world along the lines of a grace-sin dialectic. By contrast, Lonergan’s attention to the infrastructural character of religious experience allows him to speak of the effects of grace beyond the confines of the institutional church in general and within democratic practice in particular. Reference to the incipient fulfillment and enrichment of the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value are essential to accounting for the authentic unfolding of democratic process and practice that Rawls appears to take for granted and that Hauerwas and Cavanaugh appear to deny. For example, the gift of religious experience conditions the possibility of those virtues that inform Stout’s process of reason-exchange and of those pro-social emotions that ground the universal expansion of capacities for empathic identification in the work of Rorty. Attention to the latter’s work, in particular, reveals that the effects of religious love may, in certain instances, be untethered from critical self-possession. In other words, even if self-appropriation is essential to the long-term health of democratic communities, there may be instances where advocates of counter-positional accounts of human knowing and choosing nevertheless mediate God’s love. This position points to a distinction between deficiencies in cognitive and existential self-appropriation that underlie otherwise authentic living and inauthentic operations whose cover-stories may include reference to truncated accounts of knowing and choosing.

If this heuristic account of redemption is essential to ongoing democratic progress, it is my contention that the latter need not, by definition, include societal consensus on the existence
of God, however conceived. This claim is grounded, in the first instance, upon the distinction between religious experience and knowledge and the related fact that many people who don’t believe in God nevertheless lead authentic lives. At the same time, it is my further contention that however strong the connection between self-appropriation and the affirmation of the existence of God may in fact be, it is impractical to expect agreement on the character of ultimate reality, even if in a very broad monotheistic sense. Respect for human dignity in the contemporary context of cultural and religious diversity would seem to counsel a form of institutional agnosticism that differs fundamentally from Rawls’ post-metaphysical restriction. The most coherent alternative would allow the state to foster and encourage the search for truth and value and the transformative effects of love. If citizens of a democracy cannot agree on whether to believe in God or how to name God in a context of cultural and religious diversity, they ought to be able to agree that all people should be treated with dignity and hence supported in their efforts to achieve fulfillment. Public education should seek to foster critical self-possession in general but the more particular answers to the question that is the human spirit should be the responsibility of intermediate associations such as the church. The health of democratic societies ironically depends on such associations’ capacities to differentiate transcendental from categorial norms and to harness commitment to the latter in ways that support the flourishing of authentic forms of democracy.109

109 The irony here is clear. Authentic forms of democratic agnosticism that seem essential to respecting human dignity often derive their most strenuous support from associations committed to very thick conceptions of human fulfillment.
Conclusion

This brief conclusion will proceed in three main stages. In section 1 I will provide a systematic restatement of this dissertation’s argument. In section 2 I will comment briefly on the significance of this work and on the challenge and promise of self-appropriation. In section 3 I will conclude with an account of this dissertation’s limitations and my future research agenda.

1. Restating the Argument

This dissertation has developed a multi-stage argument. Part I was dedicated to an exposition and immanent critique of certain influential authors on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate. If both sides in this debate share a common critique of classical liberalism, they diagnose the legacy of modernity differently and, as a result, propose constructive alternatives that differ in certain significant respects. On the one hand, communitarian authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre tend to regard modernity in fundamentally negative terms and commend, in response, a social teleological retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. On the other hand, second-generation liberal authors such as John Rawls, Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout distinguish in different ways between the deficient self-understanding of classical liberalism and those commendable features of democratic practice that may be retrieved. I argued that although both parties in this debate are at least partially correct, their shared commitment to a collection of post-modern methodological presuppositions keeps them from critically grounding their fundamental claims and from combining their complementary insights. In both cases tensions arise between the authors’ commitments to historicism and some form of metaphysical or post-metaphysical uniqueness. Either such uniqueness falls afoul of these authors’ commitments to historicism or their constructive
alternatives are relativized in relation to one another. The result is a series of often well-intentioned but inadequate or partial treatments of the contemporary crisis of meaning. Contrary to what certain commentators claim, the liberal-communitarian debate has not been transcended or won but is in fact rationally irresolvable. Neither group appears capable of accounting for conceptual innovation and debate in critically post-conventional terms.

This tension reveals itself in different ways on both sides. Despite certain fundamental agreements, I argued that MacIntyre’s constructive proposal is clouded by confusions surrounding the status of Thomism as a tradition and its relationship to historicism. Either Thomism offers transcendental standards or it is one among many particular traditions. The former points to the role that Thomism may play as a thin conception of the good capable of structuring discourse in pluralistic contexts. The latter, when combined with MacIntyre’s critique of liberalism, sanctions a form of disengagement predicated on the belief that rationality requires a shared commitment to a thick conception of the good. In siding with the latter, political theologians such as Milbank, Hauerwas and Cavanaugh appear to sanction post-modern forms of Christian exceptionalism that stand in tension with Vatican II’s embrace of constitutional democracy and religious diversity.

Similar tensions cloud significant insights present in the work of Rawls, Rorty and Stout. Despite Rawls’ best intentions, political liberalism may be read in two different not altogether consistent ways. Either political liberalism is conceived in pragmatic terms, a position that appears to resemble the very *modus vivendi* that Rawls rejects or, alternatively, it may be interpreted as post-metaphysically unique. The latter, I argued, is impossible and, in the absence of a rejection of the ‘burdens of judgment,’ collapses the freestanding conception of justice into the pragmatic position above. Although Rorty sides with the pragmatic reading of Rawls’ later work, his effort to transcend epistemological and metaphysical discourse is troubled, in different
ways, by the problematic that beset Rawls’ freestanding conception of justice. Not only does Rorty’s appeal to pragmatic utilitarianism appear incapable of answering the charges of irrationalism and linguistic idealism he fights hard to avoid, his conception of the human subject may be interpreted in ways that stand at odds with his commitment to historicism. Again one finds a restrictive form of secularism that inappropriately excludes alternative conceptions of the human good. Stout’s middle-ground approach is no doubt the closest to Lonergan’s own account of democracy, but it suffers from some of the same tensions between uniqueness and historicism that mark MacIntyre’s defence of Thomism. Rather than defending a transcendental account of democratic norms, Stout commends democracy in historicist terms as one particular tradition among others. I argued that, in the end, democratic practice requires critically robust foundations that pragmatic versions of liberalism cannot provide.

Part II of this dissertation was designed to offer a two-part response to this problematic by developing an alternative narrative of decline and retrieval capable of elevating both parties’ best insights while avoiding their inconsistencies. Inspired by the work of Bernard Lonergan, Chapter 5 began with the development of a heuristic framework for investigating a series of positions in my three-stage narrative of decline. This framework is captured by the conviction that disagreements concerning the nature of the human good are, at least in part, the function of dialectically-opposed methodological presuppositions. Developing certain schematic remarks in Lonergan’s work, chapter 6 introduced and contextualized two methodological oversights – intuitionism and voluntarism – and their relationships to classicism and the ‘longer cycle of decline’ respectively. Chapter 7 centered on the Augustinian-Aristotelian controversy and the subsequent rise of intuitionism and voluntarism in the late medieval work of Scotus and Ockham. Both oversights may be understood, in certain respects, as overreactions to certain perceived deficiencies in the Aristotelian account of human knowing and choosing. Intuitionism
combines two cognitional oversights, an overemphasis on propositional first principles and deductive logic with a naïve realist or confrontational view of reality. Voluntarist reinterpretations of the relationship between intellect and will tend to conceive divine and or human freedom as ‘unfettered’ choice. The former finds expression in historically immobile ‘classicist’ aberrations of the classical control of meaning. The latter sets important conditions of possibility for the ‘general bias of commonsense’ that initiates the ‘longer cycle of decline.’

In chapters 8 and 9, I examined the evolution of these oversights in the early modern empiricism of Hobbes and Locke and the transcendental idealism of Kant. Despite their significant differences, all three authors combine a commitment to a classicist control of meaning with some variation of naïve realism. In addition, voluntarist presuppositions combine in different ways with empiricist and idealist forms of intuitionism to shape corresponding accounts of individualism and political legitimacy. I argued that, notwithstanding important differences, both Hobbes and Locke advance accounts of the human good that represent intermediate stages in the ‘longer cycle of decline.’ My examination of Kant’s ethics and politics focused on his retrieval and interiorization of the late medieval conception of categorical obligation through reference to a fully autonomous and purely rational will. I argued that although Kant’s emphasis on human dignity helps distance his position from crudely hedonist accounts of the human good, his commitments to some form of intuitionism and voluntarism contribute to certain features criticized heavily by post-modern authors.

The third stage in my narrative brought my argument full circle. Chapter 10 opened with an extended examination of the breakdown of classical liberalism and correlative negotiation of historical consciousness in the work of MacIntyre, Rawls, Rorty and Stout. Despite post-modernity’s many strengths, I argued that the historicist presuppositions shared by all four authors represent the final stage in this series of intuitionist and voluntarist oversights. More
specifically, I contended that historicism’s rejection of transcultural norms is an unnecessary overreaction to the legitimately-criticized deficiencies of intuitionism that contributes to tensions and deficiencies in each author’s work. At the heart of this problematic stands their inability to differentiate two genuine achievements, the classical control of meaning and the modern turn to the subject, from their intuitionist and individualist expression. The result is a tendency to reduce human subjectivity to a product of socialization, a move that, in the limit case, represents the terminal expression of voluntarism.

In the rest of chapter 10 I sought to develop an alternative account of retrieval designed to avoid these oversights while sublating the best insights present on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate. Taking seriously what Lonergan calls the contemporary crisis of meaning, I argued that Lonergan’s negotiation of the modern turn to the subject – his transposition of Aquinas’ accounts of human nature and grace – can provide foundations compatible with historicity. At the heart of Lonergan’s retrieval of Aquinas’ conception of human nature is his transposition of agent intellect. Lonergan unpacks this concept in phenomenological terms as a transcendental desire for knowledge and value, the source and norm of cultural-linguistic frameworks and their ongoing revision. By distinguishing cultural-linguistic determinations from the subject’s transcendental intending, Lonergan’s transposition of human nature provides a basis for grounding or redrawing the distinction between thin and thick conceptions of fulfillment found, for example, in MacIntyre and Rawls.

Although human development begins with the subject’s socialization into a particular tradition or communal horizon, it is Lonergan’s contention that her orientation to self-transcendence is at least methodologically prior. In this context, I presented Lonergan’s work as an invitation to self-appropriation or critical self-possession. The project of self-appropriation denotes a complex process whereby the subject adverts to, objectifies, verifies and takes open-
eyed control of her ongoing personal development. According to Lonergan, although his objectification of transcendental method is tradition-constituted, the subject’s intending is transcultural insofar as it is conscious and operative prior to thematization. It is this distinction that allows him to avoid the tension that exists between transcendental standards and historicism in MacIntyre and Stout’s meta-theories of rationality. As a consequence of self-appropriation’s intensely personal character, the success of this chapter’s arguments depends at least in part upon readers’ testing Lonergan’s account of human knowing and choosing against the data of their own consciousness.

According to Lonergan, the dialectic between progress and decline – the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity – finds its resolution in a higher integration that elevates and perfects the subject’s intending. Lonergan’s describes this dimension as an experience of unrestricted being-in-love that incipiently fulfills and strengthens the subject’s yearning for knowledge and value. Just as Lonergan draws a distinction between historically-conditioned objectifications of transcendental method and the subject’s pre-conceptual intending, so too he distinguishes between the pre-verbal reality of religious love and his own heuristic interpretation of it. I argued that the corresponding emphasis on religious self-appropriation is essential to grounding a particular form of post-conciliar religious inclusivism that avoids post-modern forms of Christian exceptionalism.

In my closing sections of chapter 10 I attempted to apply Lonergan’s transpositions of nature and grace to the topic of democratic theory. At the center of my account stood a distinction between the remote and proximate norms of democratic practice. The former is roughly equivalent with the heuristic account of metaphysics or fulfillment correlative with the subject’s transcendental intending. In exploring the relationship between remote and proximate criteria I sought to walk a middle-ground path between imperialist and modus vivendi accounts
of democratic norms by drawing an analogy with the distinction between transcendental method as conscious and as objectified. I argued that proximate democratic norms such as human rights are the product of reflection on self-appropriation’s resolution of the contemporary crisis of meaning, the drawing out of self-appropriation’s implications in the context of historical consciousness. Such norms set the conditions of possibility for human flourishing by protecting and respecting the subject’s dignity, her search for truth and value in freedom and dialogue. If such secondary objectifications of transcendental method are in principle defeasible, I argued that the remote ground of such norms lies in the subject’s orientation. As a result, when self-appropriation is incomplete or truncated the results are objectifications of the norms implicit in democratic practice that stand in dialectical tension with the desire for knowledge and value.

Reference to this two-level account of democratic norms – to self-appropriation and to secondary objectifications of transcendental method captured by human rights doctrine – shapes distinctive accounts of democratic individualism and public discourse. I argued that personal freedoms are contextualized, guided and normed by communal contexts but also, more basically, by the subject’s orientation to knowledge and value. The post-conventional subject stands in a unique position to gain critical distance from, without jettisoning her heritage and to harness her personal distinctiveness in service of the common good. At the same time, the differentiation of a thin or heuristic form of metaphysics or fulfillment methodologically prior to thick metaphysical or comprehensive frameworks places newfound emphasis on the subject’s dignity. Respect for dignity and diversity counsels the separation of church from state, the differentiation of a limited constitutional order from civil society. The limited state is responsible for defending ‘public order,’ a thin objectification of the good whose content includes human rights and related laws. Religious freedom sets important background conditions for open and ordered dialogue oriented toward the true and the good conceived in broadly heuristic terms. Discourse concerning the
content of public order, along with debate between proponents of alternative thick conceptions of the good, takes place in civil society. At both levels, the shared commitment to a heuristic account of fulfillment may not provide ready-made answers to difficult questions but it does supply a shared criterion that governs the ongoing search for truth and value.

In the end, I drew two main conclusions for the role of a heuristic account of redemption and religious belief in democratic contexts. First, I argued that Lonergan’s reference to the infrastructural character of religious experience allows him to avoid interpreting the relationship between church and world along the lines of a grace-sin dialectic. Reference to the experience of religious love, even in the absence of adequate self-appropriation, is essential to accounting for, and supportive of democratic health. Second, I argued that respect for dignity would appear to counsel a unique form of institutional agnosticism that would allow public educators to encourage critical self-possession while leaving the more particular answers to the question that is the human spirit to intermediate associations such as the church.

2. **Significance and Implications**

My contention is that this dissertation has advanced scholarship in several areas. Part I of this dissertation has developed a novel reading of certain configurations of the liberal-communitarian debate. My immanent critique of select representatives in this debate has highlighted multiple strengths but also exposed a tension shared in similar albeit significantly different ways between historicism and metaphysical or post-metaphysical uniqueness. Either the latter runs afoul of these authors’ stated commitment to cultural and religious diversity or the former prevails and sanctions a form of relativism that renders the debate rationally irresolvable. Neither horn of this dilemma generates fully critical responses to the contemporary crisis of meaning.
Part II of this dissertation fills a gap in Lonergan studies by expanding upon schematic remarks found in Lonergan’s work concerning the relationship between methodological oversights and historical decline. My narrative of philosophic development from Scotus through Kant provides an account of the evolution of certain aberrations prominent in Lonerganian-inspired narrations of the history of philosophy and theology. Although these accounts are not meant to be exhaustive, they help flesh out comments made by Lonergan and his interpreters in a significantly more detailed way than has been attempted before. The canvassing of these positions highlights options that are not merely of historical interest. Contemporary variations and combinations of the work of Scotus, Ockham, Hobbes, Locke and Kant may be found in present-day political debate. Although the liberal and communitarian embrace of historical consciousness succeeds in relativizing each of these positions, their overreaction to the deficiencies of intuitionism appears to reduce the basis for selection between these options to one of irrational preference. In responding to this problematic, I developed an alternative account of retrieval. If Lonergan’s transpositions of Aquinas’ conceptions of nature and grace and invitation to self-appropriation are taken-for-granted by Lonergan scholars, rarely have they been applied to discussions of democratic practice. My closing reflections on the nature of democratic norms, individualism, public discourse, and religion’s role in a democratic context were offered in my own name and were designed to harmonize key insights on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate.

Despite my optimistic and positive reading of democracy, MacIntyre’s diagnosis of democratic political culture is to a certain extent correct. Contemporary political debate in North America and Europe suffers, at its worst, from a lack of shared premises that renders discourse interminable. If the rise of historical consciousness has called into question premodern and modern forms of classicism, post-modern historicism’s inadequate negotiation of this
achievement has only succeeded in leveling the playing field among contingent mythologies. Historicism provides no critical basis for rejecting neoliberalism’s sacralisation of the market. It limits the basis for commending human rights to conventionalist or pragmatic grounds. And it fuels two very different potentially anti-democratic forms of Christian response. Not unsurprisingly, the tendency to read the rise of historical consciousness in exclusively relativist fashion has contributed to a resurgence of diverse variations of premodern Catholic classicism. Contemporary Catholic classicists may be explicit supporters of democracy but their appeal to static forms of natural law and often implicit commitment to an absolutist form of Christian exclusivism stand in tension with a genuine embrace of cultural and religious diversity. Self-consciously post-modern Christians who welcome the deconstruction of classical liberalism’s false neutrality while failing to differentiate benign from pejorative readings of transculturality and democracy end up advocating historicist variations of exceptionalism. Both of these reactions appear to stand at odds with Vatican II’s respect for freedom, dignity, and the universality of God’s love.

The key to resolving many of these basic disagreements concerning the nature of human knowing and choosing in general and the character of human rights and Christian engagement in particular lies in self-appropriation. The future of democratic and ecclesial health is at least in part a function of citizens and believers’ relative self-possession, of their capacities to recognize the constitutive role that the desire for knowledge and value plays in their lives. Cognitive and existential self-appropriation provides an empirically-verifiable foundation for intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial discourse and practice that supports the quest for truth and value in freedom and dialogue. Fully critical responses to the contemporary crisis of meaning yields Christian subjects whose basic positions on the nature of human knowing and choosing are fundamentally compatible with at least certain variations of democratic citizenship. Contrary to the fears
expressed by authors such as Hauerwas and Cavanaugh, the church’s commitment to fostering critical self-ownership or a historically-conscious form of natural law need not deter it from a defence of Christian distinctiveness. On the contrary, as both MacIntyre and Stout note, reflexive forms of discourse do not invalidate tradition but rather aim at fostering post-conventional ways of relating to tradition. Christian formation can no longer be content with passing on beliefs but must also be concerned with teaching disciples how to think and choose as post-conventional subjects. When Christians place emphasis on the subject’s intending they stand in a unique position to commend church teaching in general and revelation in particular as an answer to the restlessness of the human spirit. By respecting the other’s epistemic entitlement to alterative answers, this latter approach takes seriously the contemporary context of cultural and religious diversity and the correlative affirmation of human dignity. It is this approach, in my judgment, that best captures the spirit of Vatican II’s embrace of historical consciousness. At the same time, the global call for cognitive and existential self-appropriation need not and should not appeal explicitly to Lonergan, except where appropriate. The success of the Lonergan project should not be measured in the number of dissertations written about his work or in the number of people who have mastered his technical jargon but in the number of people who come to self-possession in some way or another.

The success of all of this depends not only on people having the time and the motivation to attend to and reflect on their inner lives – a rare thing in today’s world – but also upon the gift of love. Although it is often only in the light of this gift that humans recognize their true orientation, the appeal to religious love need not invalidate Lonergan’s careful analysis of human knowing and choosing or a normative distinction between philosophy and theology. Religious love does not obliterate human nature but rather perfects and elevates it. Emphasis on self-appropriation must also include attention to this incipiently religious dimension of human living.
Individuals should be encouraged to reflect on the reality and effects of love in their lives, to advert to and identify moments of fulfillment in even the most mundane of contexts. When Christians emphasize the infrastructural character of religious experience they stand in a unique position to embrace the universality of God’s love and to commend Christ as the historical counterpart to the subject’s interior experience of fulfillment. The cultivation of this love by diverse constituencies is not an optional add-on but is essential to democratic health.

3. Future Research

This dissertation represents a modest and highly selective first attempt to examine the relationship between ethics, politics and religion in liberal-democratic contexts. If many of the specifically Lonerganian conclusions in chapter 10 are not original, the application of his transpositions of nature and grace to debates surrounding the character of democratic theory and practice are both personal and highly tentative. Far from being the final word on any particular topic, this dissertation is best read as an attempt to identify and articulate a heuristic structure for the further investigation of a variety of topics, both theoretical and more clearly practical. I am excited to continue my study of the nature of human rights and democratic norms and to focus more closely on the debate between universality and particularity that I hinted at in my attempt to walk a middle-ground between Western imperialism and conventionalism. Further research in these areas will include reference to criticisms of and alternative renderings of natural law theory and its relationship to democratic practice. In addition, I intend to bring my theoretical reflections on the topic of religious freedom into dialogue with Canadian and American jurisprudence. Each of these broadly theoretical investigations will provide further tools and categories for future work dedicated to examining and analyzing particular legal, political and economic decisions and policies and their implications for religious believers. At the same time,
this dissertation’s focus on self-appropriation provides the framework for further reflection on a number of intra-ecclesial themes. Such topics include but are not limited to questions concerning the nature of moral knowledge, freedom and formation of conscience, and the nature and exercise of magisterial authority. The close connection between these philosophical and theological themes and their relationship to concrete political issues testifies to one of this dissertation’s most basic conclusions. Education for democratic citizenship is compatible with formation for Christian discipleship.
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