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THE METAPHYSICAL BASIS OF EDMUND BURKE'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

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A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

JOSEPH LA-FAUSS PAPPIN III

Norman, Oklahoma

1979

THE METAPHYSICAL BASIS OF EDMUND BURKE'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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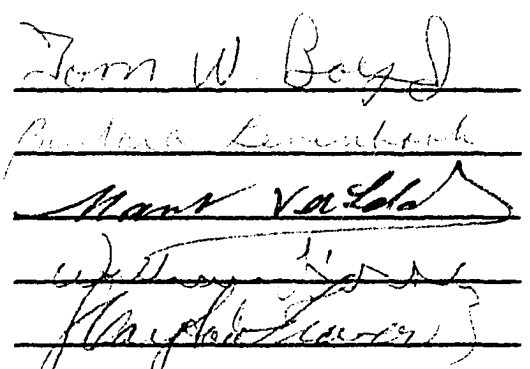

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

An unsolved problem in the literature on Edmund Burke's political philosophy is whether Burke's thought is avowedly anti-metaphysical, as some of his pronouncements indicate, or whether he rejects only a type of metaphysics and its misapplication to politics. Furthermore, if Burke has a metaphysics, as I shall maintain, what are the sustaining principles of that metaphysics? In the present work I will attempt to answer these questions in the light of Burke's political thought.

The controversy surrounding the question of a Burkean metaphysics has led to two basically opposed interpretations. On the one hand, many scholars consider Burke as belonging to the utilitarian tradition in morality and politics; on the other, many place him in the classical natural law tradition. The exponents of the former view see him as anti-metaphysical, dismissing the efficacy of speculative reason. Representatives of the latter see the evidence for natural law as a cornerstone of a metaphysics within Burke's political theory.

In order to define the nature of the problem and to contribute to its solution, I have envisioned the following aims for this dissertation. These goals are listed in the order of their importance, not according to the sequence of their development within the body of the

essay itself.

First, I aim to demonstrate that Burke's political philosophy has a metaphysical basis as does his philosophy of God and human nature. His metaphysics provides, therefore, the philosophical scaffolding and thematic guidelines for this political philosophy. This demonstration involves negative and positive elements.

Negatively, in the course of my presentation, it is important that I make two qualifications. (1) Burke is not a professional metaphysician. He is not to be regarded as another of the systematic metaphysicians belonging to a tradition from Plato through the modern rationalists. He shares many of their conclusions but little of their methodology. In fact, his metaphysical views are more matters of assumption than argued conclusions. (2) The metaphysical elements of Burke's thought are recognized by him to differ from the popular metaphysics of his day. Burke is no rationalist. As a political activist, he is sensitive first and foremost to claiming nothing politically substantial unless it be manifested in political experience. In other words, his metaphysical beliefs are not precepts brought a priori to the political arena. They are truths which, because they are revealed in and give intelligibility to experience, are necessarily experiential.

Positively, I will initially show that Burke's metaphysics features the principles of change and stability, reflecting a universe of order. To regard either principle at the expense of the other is to distort his conception of nature and, hence, of politics. These apparently discordant principles disclose a reality where, through the struggling interplay of opposed forces, a reasonable and purposeful harmony

in nature and society emerge. Therefore, Burke's metaphysics reflects the reality and constancy of change within the context of a stable, hierarchically structured universe, as created and sustained by God.

Next, I wish to consider the evidence for arguing that Burke has an anti-metaphysical position. I hope to refute any such conclusion by showing that, although through choice not a speculative philosopher, his invective is aimed against a false metaphysics--a rationalistic, deductive metaphysics, oblivious to concrete facts, imposing its utopian abstract scheme upon society. There are many general philosophic descriptions of Burke, such as utilitarian, pragmatist, empiricist, historicist, and organicist. In fairness, yet without great detail; I shall examine the most noted and comprehensive of these descriptions: utilitarianism. I intend to show that utilitarianism is an inadequate interpretation of Burke's position.

Finally, I aim to locate Burke's metaphysics on a philosophic spectrum. In other words, I intend to identify in a general way the philosophical movement with which Burke's thought is most compatible. I hope to be able to achieve this without damage to the complexity of his thought. The realist quality of his metaphysics is difficult to ignore, and I shall argue, in particular, that there are parallels with the realism of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. Yet this aim is secondary to the demonstration of Burke's metaphysics and its principles.

The above goals will be developed in the following manner. In Chapter Two, I shall discuss "The Problem of a Burkean Metaphysics." This will oblige me to search out the evidence by Burke which is often taken as reflecting an anti-metaphysical attitude. This evidence does

indeed, at least, reflect Burke's suspicion about rationalist metaphysics. Herein, I shall turn to certain utilitarian interpretations of Burke's thought, especially attending to the claimed rejection of any metaphysical foundation to his thought.

It is important to understand that I have something specific and limited in mind for this chapter. I do not want to anticipate in this chapter the main argument of my project. I want only to establish that Burke's thought is not anti-metaphysical. I do not intend to argue here that he has a particular metaphysics; that will come later. This chapter, then, is a ground-breaking for an edifice to be raised in succeeding chapters.

In Chapter Three the presentation of "The Case for Burke's Metaphysics" begins. This will first entail a consideration of what metaphysics is, and an understanding of the task of the metaphysician. The nature and task of metaphysics in this context will be traced within the bounds of the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophia perennis. It is within this realist framework that Burke's metaphysics will be shown to rest. I will present the case for a Burkean metaphysics, concentrating on those elements that seem most pivotal, and which serve best to integrate the whole substance of his thought.

In this chapter I shall focus in particular on the elements of change and stability, and their relationship to Burke's notion of substance, essence, and nature. These elements sustain the thesis of an ordered, intelligible, hierarchically, developmental, and purposive constituted reality. My thesis will gain further clarification in this chapter by way of a concise comparison and contrast with certain French

Enlightenment thinkers and with John Locke in regard to certain of their ideas concerning these elements. Finally, after separating Burke's metaphysics from a metaphysics of radical existentialism and extreme essentialism, with their inordinate emphasis upon change or stability respectively, his philosophy will be shown to reflect a favorable comparison with philosophical existentialism.

In Chapter Four these elements of Burke's metaphysics will be more specifically traced through his philosophy of God and human nature. Links between his metaphysics and political philosophy will be sought throughout this study, but they will especially come to light when the discussion of human nature is extended to a consideration of Burke's theories of liberty and equality. The philosophical principles of order as revealed in the treatment of change and stability will receive further amplification in this chapter, revealing themselves as the thematic threads that connect the various parts of Burke's metaphysics.

An example of how the elements of his metaphysics come together occurs in his view of human nature. For Burke human nature is structured yet dynamic. The essence of man remains constant amid historical and social changes. Human nature is both rational and social, although sentiment and feeling often predominate. Man exists for a purpose, this purpose being the perfecting of his nature in society. The will and designs of God, especially as known to man through the natural law, reveal in part, the universal moral laws for the perfecting of human nature.

In Chapter Five I will consider the teleological and natural law elements of Burke's metaphysics. This will underscore yet again the principles of order and the parts that change and stability play through-

out his philosophy. The element of teleology evolves from the discussion of change, God, and human nature, pointing to the purposefulness of all reality for Burke. At this point the chaotic disturbance of evil will be discussed in contrast with the telic character of reality.

An integral element of the argument for Burke's metaphysics is the concept of natural law. Although this specific link in Burke's philosophy has been the subject of recent secondary literature, it cannot be ignored it my thesis is to be sustained. More importantly, I will apply the previously outlined metaphysical principles to an assessment of the natural law foundation of Burke's politics. This law has a universal and timeless application to all mankind, sustaining the orderly yet developmental vitality of reality.

Throughout this study I will bring criticism to bear on certain points of Burke's thought or manner of philosophisizing. Although my sympathies both at the level of metaphysics and political principles lie with Burke, I will not skirt areas of weakness in his thought.

It is my hope that the relationship marked between Burke's metaphysics and political thought will not only contribute to an increased understanding of a rich and fertile mind, but that it will prove timely to those who search for a political vision with a foundation in the order of reality, not simply in ideology. The only viable setting for politics is one that seeks its support beyond the aspirations of the oppressed or the designs of utopian visionaries. Politics must reflect reality as it is, not just as we wish it to be. And to know what reality is, we need to seek a basis for political thought in a metaphysics which discloses being, and this I believe Edmund Burke has done.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROBLEM OF A BURKEAN METAPHYSICS

My concern is to support the position that Edmund Burke's political philosophy has a metaphysical foundation and to indicate what that foundation is. In this chapter I will show some of the complexities involved in discovering and securing this position.

These complexities in Burke's thought are in large part due to the following elements. First, almost all of his writings, speeches, and letters deal with the occurrence of some political event or crisis. Second, since he writes in response to specific events, such as the Catholic problem in Ireland, or the American or French revolutions, he generally engages in urging action or response to these crises. Consequently, the purpose of his writing is not that of composing a systematic political philosophy. His writing, although eloquent, is born of haste.[1] Third, much of Burke's thought is couched in the philosophical and political parlance in vogue in the eighteenth century. Yet, while using this jargon, he infuses it with his own meaning that places his thought

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[1]John Plamenatz writes of Burke's style: "I can think of no one who can argue a case at such unneccessary length without wearying the reader." John Plamenatz, Man and Society: Political and Social Theory, vol. 1: Machiavelli through Rousseau (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1963), pp. 332-33.

often at variance with the meanings given these terms by his contemporaries. He uses such terms as "utility," "expediency," and "natural rights" in a manner that neither eighteenth century natural right theorists nor utilitarians and empiricists would employ. This lends to the apparent ambiguity of some of Burke's language. Fourth, the complexities surrounding the foundations of his philosophy are heightened by the varying interpretations in the secondary literature of his thought. Those most prominent in denying a metaphysical base to Burke's politics most commonly mark him a utilitarian.[2]

Since Burke does not write in a systematic manner, one must read him very carefully in order to uncover the fundamentals of his philosophy.[3] Still, a careful reading of him will reveal a political philosophy that, far from disparaging reason, and far from being anti-metaphysical, in fact reveals a firm metaphysical grounding that is orderly and contingent upon God's creative, conserving power.

It is necessary that any false expectations a propos Burke's metaphysics be laid to rest before we proceed with our inquiry. There is no systematic treatment of metaphysical principles in Burke. Nonetheless, evidence for a metaphysical basis of his political philosophy

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[2]In the latter portion of this chapter, representative utilitarian assessments of Burke's philosophy will be considered.

[3]Frederick Dreyer considers this problem when he writes that "Burke, the philosopher, did not write a treatise in which his political theory was coherently and systematically expounded. . . . The disclosures of philosophy are at best partial and fragmentary; moreover they do not at first glance fit easily into a consistent whole." Frederick Dreyer, "Edmund Burke: The Philosopher in Action," Studies in Burke and His Time 15 (1973-74):121.

not only exists throughout his works, but such metaphysics is a necessary condition for a correct comprehension of his political thought.

To seek a foundation for Burke's political philosophy in a metaphysical position is not to suggest that Burke philosophizes in a rationalistic, deductive fashion. Far from it. The philosophical underpinings found in Burke are dogmatically stated, as if the force, clarity, and impact of the truth itself should be self-evident. He offers slight effort in argumentation. As a politician by profession, Burke speaks of himself as the "philosopher in action."[4] His actions are predicated on principles primarily bequeathed to him through the wisdom of generations past, principles which are checked against the testimony of circumstances. So, although Burke avoids speculative thought, he does present a position which, far from being anti-metaphysical, is consonant with a kind of metaphysics which is most compatible with the traditional, classical realism of the Aristotelian-Thomistic school.

Evidence for Burke's "Anti-Metaphysical" Position

Remarks abound by Burke which appear to disclose an unswerving animus toward metaphysics. A sampling of these remarks may help bring home the wrath of Burke toward abstract theorizing, especially when it occurs in the realm of politics.

In his Appeal from the New Whigs to the Old, Burke denounces the application of universals to the province of politics and morals,

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[4] Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents (1770) in The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, 12 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1866), I:530, hereafter cited as Works.

universals being the very stuff of speculative thought, whereas the realm of politics and morals reflects a world of contingency. Burke bluntly states that "pure metaphysical abstraction does not belong to these matters."[5] Unlike mathematics, itself a most fertile field for abstract thought, morality lacks exactitude. Instead, morality admits of exceptions and modifications, and these exceptions are introduced through prudence, not logic. Furthermore, "Metaphysics cannot live without definition; but Prudence is cautious how she defines."[6]

Elsewhere Burke appears to assail metaphysics as being nothing short of a pollutant of virtue itself. In his Letter to a Member of the National Assembly, he rebukes the French for the demoralization of their own young. He bemoans the loss of gallantry and refinement, where love is grafted to the virtues, and instead finds lewdness, bitterness, and all manner of corrupted dispositions, in part a result "of metaphysical speculation blended with the coarsest sensuality."[7] Again, abstract metaphysical speculation seems to lead man far from his concrete nature as historically revealed and as blended with his situation. This flight from the concrete which Burke finds in the metaphysical speculator is echoed in the same Letter when he admonishes statesmen to attend the circumstances, and search out the fortunate moment "not in the conjunctions and oppositions of men and things."[8]

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[5] Appeal from the New Whigs to the Old (1791), Works IV:80-81.

[6] Ibid., p. 81.

[7] Letter to a Member of the National Assembly (1791), Works IV:31.

[8] Ibid., p. 44.

A general metaphysical impulse is at the bottom of all theorizing which ignores the concrete reality of politics while attempting to dictate by blueprint the behavior of government and peoples. This theme becomes most pointed in Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America. Here he attacks "refined policy," that is, detached, removed analysis of what government should be doing without actual attention to the circumstances involved. In this instance, it fit the Parliament's conception of the colonies completely that they were under the suzerainty of the British empire. And, as subjects, they were bound to contribute to the fiscal needs of the empire; and Parliament, as the rightful representative of said empire, was well within its prerogative to tax the colonies. Burke acknowledged this prerogative, the "right to tax," but he renounced the prudential application of this right when the result could be the revolt of the colonists. Burke concludes that refined policy is ever "the parent of confusion."[9] Here he urges his fellow members of Parliament to rule according to the circumstances, not by abstract ideas of right, nor by general theories of government.[10]

As for himself, Burke prefers politics to be shaped consonant with tradition, not speculation. In this spirit he determines to distrust his own abilities and to denounce every speculation.[11] By doing so, he is simply affirming the wisdom of generations over that of the

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[9] Speech on Conciliation with America (1775), Works II:106.

[10] Ibid., p. 109.

[11] Ibid., p. 145.

single individual, however endowed with genius he may be. Tradition reveals the historical interests of man, and man, Burke notes, acts on interest, "and not on metaphysical speculations."[12]

In his Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians Burke declares that no rational man governs himself by abstractions and universals; as with man, so with governments.[13] The metaphysical realm of universals flies in the face of the factual sphere. Both the actions of men and governments are practical matters. They affect the lives of individuals. Burke claims that the doctrine of free government is not an abstract question concerning metaphysical liberty and necessity.[14] In fact, the extreme notion of liberty as sometimes abstractly conceived, where the various liberties vouchsafed to man become almost absolutized, is a type of abstract perfection which becomes its real fruit.[15] Burke appears to zero in on the act of theorizing as a flight from reality, a symptom of an unhappy populace. While people are happy, they are unconcerned with theory.[16]

The scathing criticism Burke invokes against theorists and metaphysicians continues in his Reflections on the Revolution in France. He is particularly scornful of those who, in a dream-like fashion, from

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[12]Ibid., p. 170.

[13]Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Works VII: 41-42.

[14]Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol (1777), Works II:228.

[15]Ibid., p. 229.

[16]Ibid., p. 230.

their unleashed imaginations, speculate upon a science of government in a priori fashion. Instead, the science of government is not a deductive science but an experimental science.[17] By experimental science Burke continues to call us back to the circumstances that color and distinguish every system of government, rendering them all unique. Those who disregard the circumstances surrounding politics, yet in their theorizing devise a list of rights for individuals which governments are bound to honor, have ignored Burke's admonition. The "rights" extolled by theorists, Burke maintains, insofar "as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false."[18] We are not urged to ignore reason, but to attend to a special kind of reason called "political reason." Burke denies that this is a metaphysical sort of reasoning; rather, "political reason is a computing principle: adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing, morally and not metaphysically, or mathematically, true moral denominations."[19]

Metaphysical distinctions appear to evoke a brooding, loathing reaction from Burke, a sentiment which is also reflected in his Speech on American Taxation. Burke writes that "I am not here going into the distinctions of rights, nor attempting to mark their boundaries; I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions; I hate the very sound of them."[20]

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[17] Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), Works III:311. Hereafter cited as Reflections.

[18] Ibid., p. 313.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Speech on American Taxation (1774), Works II:72-73.

By now the very term "metaphysics" appears to have an opprobrious ring for Burke. The thesis that Burke's political philosophy has its basis in a metaphysical position seems severely tested by the weight of evidence presented thus far.

Evidence for Burke's Metaphysical Position

What Burke vilifies is not so much theory or metaphysics per se, but its application to the highly contingent realm of morals and politics, especially when theory ignores the circumstances of a nation, in the case of politics, about which it proceeds to theorize. A view of false theory begins to emerge when it is contrasted with a view of what should be required of theory. Burke warns that there is no theory apart from circumstances. Without seeing the circumstances, "without a concurrence and adaptation of these to the design, the very best speculative projects might become not only useless, but mischievous. Plans must be made for men."[21] Burke further notes that considering theories divorced from circumstances has led to much havoc, and that without tending to circumstances, "the medicine of today becomes the poison of tomorrow."[22] So it is not theory which is misguided, but an incomplete theory, untouched by the concrete, practical, less refined air of the mundane world.

Earlier Burke's Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians was cited to the effect that rational man acts without regard to abstrac-

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[21] Letter to a Member of the National Assembly (1791), Works IV:43.

[22] Ibid., p. 46.

tions and universals. Burke goes on to say that he does not urge the total dismissal of abstract ideas, for to do this would be to dismiss principles as well. Without principles to act upon there emerges a jumble of confusion about facts.[23] By implication, Burke here suggests a distinction between abstractions and universals, and principles. Obviously, the universal realm lacks all contact with the realm of practice, whereas Burke's use of the word "principle" suggests a fusing of the two, and the fusion, for Burke, takes place in prudence. In Aristotelian language, the realm of universals concerns sheer speculative wisdom, whereas the notion of principles concerns practical wisdom. The distinction is better brought forward by Burke when he speaks about political problems in the Appeal from the New Whigs to the Old. The resolution of political problems does not concern truth or falsehood, but good or evil. Burke remarks that "what in the result is likely to produce evil is politically false; that which is productive of good, politically true."[24]

Burke's position on theory now invites qualification. It is not so much theory or metaphysics per se, but their false application, mindless of the infinite array of particulars brought to bear in the realm of morals and politics by the concrete world. In this world that which is true politically is that which is good. The good is not pronounced ex cathedra, as it were, and embraced without a view towards the extant political, social, economic, historical circumstances. These

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[23] Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Works VII: 41-42.

[24] Appeal from the New Whigs to the Old (1791), Works IV:169.

and other details the statesman must consider as he shapes the laws and policies of a nation. As Burke states in his Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians:

> Circumstances are infinite, are infinitely combined, are variable and transient: he who does not take them into consideration is not erroneous, but stark mad . . . A statesman, never losing sight of principles, is to be guided by circumstances; and judging contrary to the exigencies of the moment, he may ruin his country forever.[25]

Burke recoils from a blueprint for society that fails to account for the peculiarities, the differences in customs and traditions in which each nation is steeped. Utopian designs are best left in the thin air of speculation. They are, quite literally, "nowhere." No ideally conceived plan of government or society could in any way account for the infinite diversity which obtains in reality.

Burke the politician is suspicious of theory that fails to account for the circumstances in which a people find themselves. He does not relegate theory to some remote area where it can harmlessly spin its solitary thought as an Aristotelian "absconded God." He clarifies his position on theory thus:

> I do not vilify theory and speculation--no, because that would be to vilify reason itself . . . No; whenever I speak against theory, I mean always a weak, erroneous, fallacious, unfounded, or imperfect theory; and one of the ways of discovering that it is a false theory is by comparing it with practice.[26]

Burke serves warning that speculative theory, when it comes into the practical, contingent sphere of morals and politics, is inade-

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[25] Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Works VII: 41-42.

[26] Speech in Commons (1782), Works VII:97.

quate to guide man. It must be tempered by political reason, a prudential guide to man's practical endeavors. The metaphysicians--Burke generally has in mind the French philosophers of the Enlightenment--can scheme and theorize to their hearts' content, but it is the circumstances that, as Burke claims, "render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind."[27]

It does not appear that Burke is any more extreme in his limitation of the scope of reason than Aristotle or Aquinas. They qualify the use of speculative reason and urge its guarded application in the field of politics. They recognize a separate reason, a practical reason, separate in its application or function, not in the very unity of reason itself.

Burke, therefore, does not attempt to deny that characteristic or quality that distinguishes man in his very essence, namely, man's rationality. Burke's fear is an errant reasoning, a reasoning that attempts, for example, mathematical exactitude in the area of morality. It is, in short, to ask of reason the unreasonable. But, again, this is not to foreclose a principled assessment of moral or political behavior. Rather, the principles fail to spell out in a precise way and for every occasion what is right and what is wrong. For this man has to develop and practice his practical reason. Is all this so far removed from Aristotle or Aquinas? Far from it.

Burke would not indulge flights of utopianism. He does not have to learn his lesson as did Plato, a lesson the latter incorporates

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[27] Reflections (1790), Works III:240.

in the Laws. As the Republic extols a state where the virtues of man attain perfection, and as the Laws take into account man's fallible nature, so Burke refuses the fetching cry of utopia, the perfectibility of man. Man possesses both an incomplete perception of the good--a limitation of his intellect--and an inadequate desire to pursue the good--an imperfection of the will. No reorganization of government, no radicalization of society can succeed in overcoming this internal battle which occurs in the very heart of man. At best, in this fallible world, man can hope to minimize the evil, and increase the good somewhat.

So, for Burke, metaphysics practiced in a deductive, a priori manner expresses utopian thought and a neglect of man's concrete nature. Utopianism assumes the impossible: the perfectibility of man. And in doing so, it attempts the absurd: an overthrow of existing society with all of its positive blessings and admitted failings, in hopes of a heaven on earth. This flies in the face of all that history reveals about this passionate creature who is man.

Burke, as our thesis maintains, does not decry the legitimate function of metaphysics. His own philosophy, it will be shown, is spawned from Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical roots. This is clear from our reconsideration of even a superficial reading of Burke. Nonetheless, a sizeable secondary literature places Burke within an anti-metaphysical, utilitarian framework of philosophy, steeped in English empiricism. This requires our attention and response.

The Utilitarian Interpretation of Burke's Political Philosophy: A Look at Selected Secondary Literature

As noted earlier, Burke neither gives us a convenient summary, nor systematic presentation of the fundamental tenets of his thought. His works are strewn throughout with words that have a unique meaning and usage sometimes peculiar to Burke alone. For example, he speaks of "prejudice" and "habit" as social virtues leading to the cohesiveness of society, where today "prejudice" is a form of opprobrium and "habit" may be thought to stymie social progress. These are some of the difficulties impeding a correct understanding of Burke's political philosophy. And these difficulties primarily emerge from the incorrect assigning of premises to Burke's thought which easily lead the interpreter far afield. This is the case with those who mistakenly lump Burke with the utilitarian school of writers such as Hume, Bentham, and Mill. This is not to say this lumping process has not taken place without some discrimination. Yet notable errors remain. A review of certain select utilitarian interpretations of Burke's thought should help highlight misunderstandings and misgivings over a metaphysical basis for Burke's political philosophy.

In his A History of Political Theory, George Sabine combines his consideration of Burke with that of David Hume. This is not unusual for historians of political thought. Two reasons help to explain why this is the case. First, Burke, as presented by Sabine, "accepted Hume's negations of reason and the law of nature."[28] Of course, all are familiar

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[28]George Sabine, A History of Political Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 607.

with Hume's scrutiny of reason. Reason reveals no certainty concerning matters of fact. At best, it is useful in comparisons of ideas, yet inadequate for the confirmation of any necessary truths about reality or of eternal verities concerning the law of nature or of morality. So fruitless, for Hume, is reason in the comportment of man that it is to be subservient to the dictates of the passions.[29] In truth, this is the positivist element in Hume, and Sabine sees this same mode of thought as prevalent in Burke. For Burke, Sabine holds, society is not structured on reason, but it is a product of convention. It is artificial and contrived, not natural. Further, Burke's politics form the natural sequel to Hume's in that Burke showed

> the reaction that was to follow upon Hume's destruction of the eternal verities of reason and natural law. Sentiment, tradition and idealized history stepped in to fill the vacancy left by the removal of self-evident rights . . .[30]

This interpretation of Burke indicates that Hume's scepticism of the ability of human reason to know eternal truths is acceptable to Burke. And that with the removal of rational insight into such truths man is forced to consult sentiment and tradition in order to acquire direction for life. Truths come to be revealed not through abstract reason, but through man's natural instincts and passions. Sabine maintains that not only does Burke accept "Hume's negations of reason and the law of nature," but that in the place of reason Burke considers society to rest upon "obscure instincts and propensities--even on prejudices," and, further-

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[29]All of those points are ratified by Sabine, pp. 599-600.

[30]Sabine, p. 607.

more, "that its standards are conventions."[31]

Burke's apparent rejection of reason as depicted by Sabine--an interpretation this study hopes to refute--of itself does not render Burke a utilitarian. Nor do other apparent convergencies between the thought of Burke and Hume result in such a categorization of Burke's thought. This is in part due to the fact that Hume's own relationship to utilitarianism is somewhat ambiguous. This ambiguity may be resolved, along with Burke's relationship to utilitarianism, through a clarification of the meaning of utilitarianism.

As there is much diversity within the utilitarian tradition, it is not as easily characterized as one might think. All are familiar with Bentham's famous definition of "the principle of utility" by which "is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question;" likewise, with John Stuart Mill's definition of the "Greatest Happiness Principle" which "holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain."[32] Antedating both Bentham and Mill "as the proper founder of utilitarianism

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948), p. 2, and John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism in The Great Books (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 43:448.

is David Hume."[33] Hume provides the later utilitarians with the word "utility" and, more importantly, the pleasure and pain principles.[34] Concerning these principles Hume writes "that virtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment, or character, gives us by the mere view and contemplation."[35]

With an emphasis upon pleasure as virtuous and pain as vice it is easy to mistake utilitarianism for egoistic hedonism. To desire only one's individual pleasure without deference to the greatest happiness principle is to end with an incomplete utilitarianism. The greatest happiness principle requires that the pleasure sought be the happiness of the greatest number possible. Anthony Quinton remarks that "utilitarians have generally taken it for granted . . . that happiness is a sum of pleasures." Implementing the greatest happiness principle Quinton constructs the following definition, claiming that "the rightness of an action is determined by its contribution to the happiness of everyone affected by it."[36] It is the aim of the state to ensure that the greatest happiness principle is achieved and that selfish interests are reconciled. Consequently, the purpose of the state for the utilitarians is not to protect any putative natural rights, "but

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[33]John Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 22.

[34]Ibid., p. 28.

[35]David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1911), II:183.

[36]Anthony Quinton, Utilitarian Ethics (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 1.

to give men more abundantly the happiness they always seek."[37]

Interestingly, Burke also rejects the claims of the "rights of men" protagonists, but for different reasons. It is not the purpose of the state to reconcile conflicting selfish interests between men in order to better pave the way toward happiness that Burke considers basic. Rather, it is the state which should assist man where possible in the perfecting of his nature through the development of his reason and the development of the virtues; in short, the state helps to civilize man.[38]

In considering the province of reason in utilitarian thought, the results vary. For Hume, reason is to be subordinate to the passions, for "it is impossible that the distinction betwixt moral good and evil can be made by reason."[39] Hume is indicating that our passions determine the proper ends we are to choose, not our reason, although reason can aid the passions in the means of obtaining pleasure. Reason, for Bentham, provides a calculating function which can be used to determine where man's happiness lies. It functions to aid man in obtaining happiness; that is, reason serves a function of utility.

For the utilitarians, it is experience which reveals to us what is pleasurable and what is painful. They underplay the role of reason in the sense of an a priori, deductive determination of what is good

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[37]Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians, p. 12.

[38]Burke writes, "They conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection: He willed therefore the state: He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection." Reflections (1790), Works III:361.

[39]Hume, II:171.

or bad for man. This is not to discount the valuable assist reason renders mankind in securing pleasure. Yet, as Plamenatz records, "It is experience that teaches us which actions usually have pleasant consequences and which have painful ones; and learning from experience involves the use of reason."[40]

From this consideration of utilitarianism it is apparent that, as J. R. Dinwiddy writes, "Utility . . . means conduciveness to happiness or pleasure."[41] Consequently, when we take note of such terms as "utility," "prejudice," "expedience," and "convenience," all used frequently by Burke, one might hastily conclude that Burke is a utilitarian of some type. Nonetheless, as Wilkins notes, such terms are often contrasted "by concepts such as justice, equity, law of nature, and natural right."[42]

Before making a determination on the matter of Burke's supposed utilitarianism, and the lack of a metaphysical basis for his politics, I will consider further select utilitarian interpretations of his thought.

Other alleged bases for Burke's utilitarianism are found by John Plamenatz and Elie Halevy. In The English Utilitarians, Plamenatz cites Halevy for providing the criteria for Burke's utilitarian philo-

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[40]Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians, p. 29.

[41]J. R. Dinwiddy, "Utility and Natural Law in Burke's Thought: A Reconsideration," Studies in Burke and His Time 16 (1974-75):105.

[42]Burleigh T. Wilkins, The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 11.

sophy.[43] Those criteria stem from the latter's theories of prescription and prejudice. These theories all note that the fact of social institutions, constitutions, customs, and traditions "having lasted a long time is itself proof of [their] utility, of its conduciveness to human happiness."[44] Its duration proves its utility in outlasting decay and disintegration. There is a presumption favoring what has served well in meeting the needs of man throughout the years. That presumption supposes that the durable in terms of institutions, customs, and traditions has a utility for men in society, and is therefore beneficial for man.

Plamenatz draws back from putting Burke squarely within the utilitarian tradition. In fact, he seems indecisive as to how to locate Burke on the utilitarian continuum, indicating in one place that he comes close to being a genuine utilitarian; in another he speaks of Burke's utilitarian bias; and, yet in another, Plamenatz writes that "Burke was not primarily a utilitarian; but in so far as he was one, he was closer to Hume than to any other representative of the school."[45]

Halevy designates Burke as being a "conservative utilitarian." He writes of Burke as "making use of the principle of utility;" as "adopting the point of view of utility;" as deducing "an anti-democratic political theory . . . from a Utilitarian philosophy;" and as being a

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[43]Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians, p. 56, and Elie Halevy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism, trans. by Mary Morris (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1928).

[44]Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians, p. 56.

[45]Ibid., pp. 56-58.

forerunner to theological empiricism.[46] Rather than asking the question of right, notes Halevy, Burke asks the one of "political expediency." For Halevy, it is Burke's utilitarian stance that underscores his refutation of the "rights of man" theorists.[47] Men receive their rights not from any abstract theory of rights or hypothesized state of nature but from such theories as that of prejudice. For Burke, "it is prejudice, preconceived opinion and ready-made ideas which give unity and continuity to the life of the honest man, and make of virtue a habit."[48]

The theory of prescription for Halevy and Plamenatz provides the other pillar supporting Burke's utilitarianism. Prescription sanctifies an ancient right by the fact that it has endured for many ages. When such a right is contested by claims for rights based on rational principles then "the presumption is in favour of the ancient right which claims itsorigin from prescription, that is to say from experience."[49] Halevy summarizes Burke's political philosophy with the following statement: "Burke's political philosophy is an empiricism, a philosophy of experience: the duration whether of an idea or of an institution, its mere persistence through time, is a presumption in favour of the idea or of that institution."[50] So in Burke Halevy finds a thinker of utili-

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[46]Halevy, pp. 157-64.

[47]Ibid., p. 157.

[48]Ibid., p. 159.

[49]Halevy, pp. 163-64. Also Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians, p. 57. It is from Halevy that Plamenatz all but lifts verbatim his arguments for Burke's utilitarianism.

[50]Halevy, p. 163.

tarian stripe, who offers an empirically grounded philosophy, emphasizing the theories of prescription and prejudice.

Harold Laski is yet another writer who positions Burke's thought in the utilitarian tradition of Hume. Writes Laski, "The metaphysics of Burke, so far as one may use a term he would himself have repudiated, are largely those of Hume."[51] Laski writes of the emphasis Burke places on habit, social instinct, the inadequacy of reason, resistance as a measure of last resort, the disavowal of the social contract notion, and respect for order as being staples of his political thought.[52] Further, "Burke was a utilitarian who was convinced that what was old was valuable by the mere fact of its arrival at maturity."[53] The various elements of Burke's philosophy such as prescription and prejudice are bound together by the underlying sentiment that what is old is valuable, conjoined with a deep religious presentiment of Burke's part, religion itself having utility. For Laski, that Burke sees religion as foundational to the state, amounts to the grounding of social facts mystically, and to a

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[51]Harold Laski, Political Thought in England (London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1932), p. 122. To say that Burke's metaphysics "are largely those of Hume" seems an odd statement. Surely Hume is noted for his rejection of metaphysics and, as Laski acknowledges, Burke's language appears to repudiate metaphysics. How is it that one adopts the metaphysics of one whose thought constitutes a sustained rejection of such philosophizing as does Hume's? I can only find a solution for such a statement by Laski in assuming that both Burke and Hume, as Laski sees it, reject that province of reason in discovering timeless, eternal truths of thought or being, so their common metaphysics must be, instead, a common epistemology. But, even here Laski is in error.

[52]Ibid., p. 123.

[53]Ibid., p. 182.

depreciation of reason.[54]

A more recent author, Frank O'Gorman, speaks of Burke as a practical politician and propangandist, but not a philosopher.[55] O'Gorman cites Burke's "constant pragmatism and undogmatic realism which informs so much of his political philosophy."[56] So unprincipled is his pragmatism evidently that when Burke makes obvious use of the natural law as he does in his Tracts on the Popery Laws, O'Gorman reduces this use of the natural law to a "polemical technique."[57] O'Gorman forthrightly underscores Burke's anti-metaphysical bias, going so far as to speak of "Burke's anti-rationalism."[58] For O'Gorman, Burke's "philosophy--even its most basic assumptions--amounted to little more than an unthinking acceptance and reiteration of some of the traditional themes of political and intellectual life . . ."[59]

Summary and Reply to the Utilitarian Interpretation

In what follows I wish to point out some of the basic themes that emerge from the foregoing assessments of Burke. First, the deprecation of reason in ascertaining the first principles of politics is readily cited. Rather than exploring by the light of reason the founda-

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[54]Ibid., p. 183.

[55]Frank O'Gorman, Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 11.

[56]Ibid., p. 92.

[57]Ibid., p. 19.

[58]Ibid., p. 108.

[59]Ibid., pp. 143-44.

tions of society, Burke is seen by these writers as recoiling from such an inspection, the only effect of which would be to diminish the veneration and awe that hallows the ground of morality and society.[60] Again, the emphasis imputed to Burke is that the old is good because it has endured, and this endurance is an indication that it has served, and is serving, a worthwhile purpose for man.

As we have urged earlier, Burke does not reject reason. What he rejects is a certain vainglory that so readily elevates the a priori conjectures of the single individual, or small group of intellectuals, above the demonstrated wisdom of the ages. He writes, "We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason . . ."[61] "The individual is foolish . . . but the species is wise, and, when time is given to it, as a species, it almost always acts right."[62] Burke is not discounting the single individual, nor a prudent use of one's reason. What he objects to is those individuals who discount the wisdom of the past as outdated and irrelevant. I will show in the next chapter that both the universe and man's social existence give evidence, for Burke, of reason and intelligibility. It is no mere expedience, or a simple, indiscriminate prejudice for what <u>is</u> that forms the substance of Burke's

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[60]Peter Stanlis, one of the important sources for placing Burke in the Thomistic tradition of natural law, notes that "Burke despised men who were constantly digging at the roots of established institutions in order to compel them to justify their existence . . ." Peter Stanlis, "Reflections on Dinwiddy on Mill on Burke on Prescription," <u>Studies in Burke and His Time</u> 18 (Autumn, 1977):194.

[61]<u>Reflections</u> (1790), <u>Works</u> III:346.

[62]<u>Speech on the Reform of Representation of the Commons in Parliament</u> (1782), <u>Works</u> VII:95.

thought.

A second theme in the literature just presented is that the theories of prescription, prejudice, and expediency are the main principles supporting Burke's political philosophy. Indeed, these theories do carry great weight, but they do so only in so far as they are grounded in Burke's metaphysics of a God-created universe, divinely ordered, purposefully moved, and grounded in the natural law. Burke clearly favors that which has stood the test of time. The venerable rust of tradition is sanctified because it reflects a continuity required by the universe and the social order. Burke writes that prescription is not, "formed upon blind, unmeaning prejudices."[63] That which has stood the test of time is more likely to be hallowed in the eyes of mankind since ". . .it is in the nature of man . . . to defer to the wisdom of times past, whose weakness is not before his eyes, than to the present, of whose imbecility he has daily experience. Veneration of antiquity is congenial to the human mind."[64] Prescription and prejudice are valuable not simply by rendering a majority happy. Rather, both are valuable as reflective of the created universe of order; they are valuable, for Burke, because they reflect the continuity and permanency that obtains in reality.

An institution may be useful because it brings pleasure. But, as John Stuart Mill came to recognize, the useful must be consonant with man's nature, a nature which Burke recognizes as rational. For Burke, the standard for expedience lies outside that which simply and at present

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Tract on the Popery Laws (1766), Works VI:338.

is; or that which brings the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people. Rather, the standard for these principles lies within the reasonable and ordered nature of both the physical and moral universe. As Burke notes in his consideration of the taxation of America by Britain, it is not what "I may do, but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I ought to do."[65]

Third, the above writers speak of Burke's empiricism and of his philosophy of experience. These features indeed play a pivotal part in Burke's philosophy. Hume and Burke both sought to supplant pure abstractions with concrete experience. But to make this claim does not warrant placing Burke in the tradition of Hume, especially as embodying British empiricist epistemological premises. All that restrains certain of Burke's interpreters from doing as much is Burke's religious orientation--hence the rubric, "theological empiricism or utilitarianism." Burke's emphasis on experience is in part to counter the deductionistic theorists of the rights of man, such theorists who hypothesize a state of nature and a list of abstracted natural rights to fit this state. As in certain other matters, Burke and Hume both reject the natural rights thesis. In addition, experience and empirical observation and the effects of nature reveal the crucial principle of causality, which principle for Burke leads the mind of man to assent to God himself. And here Burke and Hume part company. Consequently, Burke's concern with experience is crucial to his thought, but not sufficient to render him a utilitarian with no metaphysical grounding.

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[65] Speech on Conciliation with America (1775), Works II:140-41.

Finally, the role of religion is seen by some of Burke's interpreters as crucial to an understanding of Burke. While correct in this assessment, I believe they are mistaken in the part they assign religion in Burke's thought. For example, in the interpretation of Laski, religion serves for Burke both the function of obscuring the ultimate ground of social facts and supplying the ultimate foundation for society. Implying the sacred and the reverent as religion does, it too easily serves to dissuade adequate inquiry into the ultimate, humanly knowable principles of society and the universe, so Laski suggests. Religion serves to further secure that which has already been deemed venerable through time. Two thoughts emerge here: first, religion feeds Burke's anti-rationalism and, second, it is useful in maintaining the conventions, customs, and traditions of society.

Religion is more than this for Burke. It is true that religion, especially the state religion of the Anglican Church, does secure order, and order is willed by God. The church should not simply secure any order, but a just order, one that comports with original justice. This is indeed of utilitarian value. But it is neither simply the utility of the status quo nor the utility of a faction of society, but the utility of justice as set forth by the original archetype of both justice and man's nature: God.

The role of utility and religion in the thought of Burke does not allow the label of "theological utilitarian." While God certainly wills man happiness, he also wills the acquisition of virtues and the preservation of order--not simply as these serve to enhance man's happiness. God calls us to fulfill our station in life and the duties that

come with our position in society. These duties and the virtues necessary to their fulfillment engage Burke's attention more than does the question of happiness. He remarks that God has "virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned. We have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special voluntary pact."[66]

There is a "positivist" presupposition in the utilitarian interpretation, revealing the empiricist epistemological basis of its claim. This echoes the Humean empiricism which grounds our ability to know exclusively in the empirically observable world. It undercuts and disavows any inductive move from this world of observation to the recognition of eternal verities. It is for this reason that Hume wishes to side with man's natural feelings and passions which find a warm responsiveness to custom, habit, and tradition, bringing an ordered, happy populace. Burke himself is also responsive to "ancestral wisdom," and to experience. He wishes the great bulk of men to rest content with what the generations before have bequeathed to them. In doing so they maintain their invaluable links with the stabilizing ties of tradition, eschewing the "spirit of innovation."[67] Yet, he does believe that one can, through reason, come to know those ultimate principles and standards which serve as judge over this tradition. And these principles and stan-

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[66] Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:165-66.

[67] Burke, writing on the abuses of the revolution in France, states: "A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors." Reflections (1790), Works III:274.

dards are found in Burke's implicit metaphysics, to which I now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CASE FOR BURKE'S METAPHYSICS

In the second chapter, primary and secondary sources were utilized to confront squarely the evidence against a Burkean metaphysics. In each instance arguments were advanced to refute the anti-metaphysical interpretation of Burke's thought, and to lay the groundwork whereby the task of presenting metaphysics might proceed. It is to this latter work I now turn.

Before searching out the elements of a Burkean metaphysics it is necessary to ask, "What is metaphysics?" What is the province of metaphysics and the role of the metaphysician? And, what is Burke's position on these issues?

The metaphysical tradition with which Burke's philosophy is most compatible is that of the perennial philosophy of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition with its common sense realism.[1] It is appropriate

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[1] Various authors have noted Burke's compatibility with this tradition through the similarity of his conception of natural law with Aquinas' conception. Note: Whenever reference is made to the realist tradition in this essay, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition will be the one intended. Concerning the Thomistic conception of Burke's philosophy one should consult: Peter J. Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), Francis P. Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke (Durham: Duke University Press, 1960), and Burleigh T. Wilkins, The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy.

to underscore the word "compatible." Burke is not a systematic philosopher, and certainly not a speculative philosopher. Yet he recognizes the legitimate role of the metaphysician and relies upon and makes use of fundamental metaphysical principles throughout his works. He writes that "it is the business of the speculative philosopher to mark the proper ends of government. It is the business of the politician, who is the philosopher in action, to find out proper means towards those ends, and to employ them with effect."[2] Despite his objections to certain kinds of metaphysics, this statement affirms Burke's appreciation of the legitimate province of the metaphysician.

Although Burke is not a systematic philosopher like Aristotle, it is important to call attention to the life-giving principles of Burke's thought and to note their points of compatibility with realist metaphysics. Hence, in what follows some of the concerns and interests of realist metaphysics will be stated enabling a favorable comparison with Burke's own metaphysical orientation.

Aristotle begins his Metaphysics with the statement that "All men by nature desire to know." Burke similarly considers the improvement of one's own rational nature so vital in principle that he finds the prevention of this improvement to be the worst kind of tyranny.[3] Man is in the possession of a reason whose natural inclination is toward gaining wisdom.

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[2] Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents (1770), Works I:580.

[3] Letter to a Peer of Ireland on the Penal Laws Against Irish Catholics (1782), Works IV:228.

What is the relationship between wisdom and metaphysics? Writing on Aristotle, Copleston states, "Metaphysics is . . . Wisdom par excellence, and the philosopher or lover of Wisdom is he who desires knowledge about the ultimate cause and nature of Reality, and desires that knowledge for its own sake."[4] Wisdom is knowing reality as it most essentially is, which, as this quote suggests, means knowing the causes of reality. This suggests that wisdom at its penultimate is knowledge for its own sake. Does this further suggest, either for Aristotle or Burke, that pure, undefiled wisdom is to be put to no further use? It does not. Knowledge of reality as it most essentially is should provide valuable insight into how one conducts himself. Knowledge of one's nature should provide some guide to life. But the knowledge or insight wisdom brings is not initially knowledge for human conduct. Instead, it is knowledge fulfilling one's desire to know for the sake of knowing. This allows knowledge to reveal reality for no other purpose than that of the disclosure of being. Surely the kind of knowledge thereby obtained would more nearly approach the truth of reality, that is, as reality is in itself, than the knowledge of reality obtained for an end beyond itself. Therefore, wisdom, both for Aristotle and Burke, is initially to be sought for its own sake. This leads Burke to declare the prevention "of the means of improving our rational nature to be the worst species of tyranny that the insolence and perverseness of mankind ever dared to exercise."[5] To so obstruct reason and its natural bent

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[4]Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, 9 vols. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1962-1977), I, 2, p. 31.

[5]A Letter to a Peer of Ireland (1782), Works IV:228.

toward wisdom is to deform man. And yet the search for ultimate principles when done from a motive lacking in piety or reverence toward the mystery and awesomeness of being, can prove subversive to the very wisdom that is our heritage.

The ancestral wisdom upon which succeeding generations may rely in conducting their affairs in society is a wisdom that is cumulative and practical. Such wisdom is removed from pure metaphysics and constitutes the realm where principles seek a practical application, namely, prudence. For the individual to disregard the cumulative wisdom of mankind is to err through pride. Therefore, our recognition of the infinity of reality and the finitude of any single individual's capacity to know the same should induce and increase man's humility.

There is no prescribed definition of metaphysics in Burke's writings. There is, though, a warning against too much inquiry into the ultimate foundations of reality, and of society in particular. Those who constantly set about to inquire into ultimate principles too often serve to undermine what those principles help to secure. Our allegiance to our domicile, to our community and our nation are not to be obtained by a rational assent to a philosophically extolled principle, but through our natural feelings and sentiments. But this is not to denigrate wisdom, or man's love of the same. Burke is incensed by the prying intellect that seeks to elevate an individual's reason against the ancestral wisdom of generations, especially if that individual prides himself in discovering previously undiscovered principles.[6] Man's

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[6]Burke's concern on this point is itself a point of concern. It

humility is increased through the recognition that wisdom brings to him, namely, that reality in its infinity transcends the limits of the human mind. This recognition is not to terminate the increase of knowledge; rather, it is to evoke a fundamental awe and a sense of piety over the limitless range of reality. It is this reason, not an anti-intellectualism on Burke's part, that leads him to sound the warning for the "prying intellect." The search for wisdom should inspire a reverential awe.

Burke's love for wisdom is obvious. Many saw in him one of the outstanding intellects of England for his time.[7] Yet he resents an investigative type of search for knowledge, as one who seeks to solve a problem. There is a sense of mystery that surrounds Burke's own inquiry concerning the ultimate principles of reality disclosed to reason, a sense that tells him that as he searches for knowledge he draws most near not only to the sustaining principles of society but to Deity itself.[8]

This appreciation of the ultimate mystery surrounding one's inquiry is certainly part of the Thomistic tradition. Jacques Maritain draws the distinction between mystery and problem in terms of philoso-

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is one thing for an intellectual to properly appreciate and appropriate the wisdom of the past. It is another thing to cower in deference to such wisdom. Free inquiry demands a certain spirit of inquiry, a spirit that Burke does not always encourage.

[7]Samuel Johnson remarks: "Yes; Burke is an extraordinary man. His stream of mind is perpetual." From James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, eds. Anne H. Ehrenpreis and Irvin Ehrenpreis (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1965), p. 244.

[8]Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:166.

phical inquiry. For Maritain, a problem is something for the intellect to solve, such as finding the solution to a mathematical problem. This is the attitude of modern philosophy, Maritain maintains, an attitude which reveals a loss of reverence for the ultimate mystery of being. For Maritain, and, it is evident for Burke as well, so overwhelming is the object of our metaphysicalinquiry that it must be a science in which mystery predominates.[9] This gives a good insight into what to many appears to be Burke's anti-rationalism. Although he is highly sceptical of the fruits of speculative inquiry, especially those which bear on the existing social conditions of man, he gives little doubt concerning the steady and august principles that sustain reality, however cloaked they may be in the depths of God's being. He would find agreement with Maritain's statement that a "philosophy unaware of mystery would not be a philosophy."[10]

Burke does not lack a concern with the "ultimate cause and nature of Reality." Aristotle sees metaphysics as dealing with the first principles of all reality and Burke's thought consistently embraces and reflects the use and knowledge of certain of these principles. These principles or causes for the realist philosopher are obtained, Copleston notes, through an interpretation and understanding of the data of experience.[11] "The metaphysician," continues Copleston, "first consi-

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[9]Jacques Maritain, A Preface to Metaphysics (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), pp. 4-5.

[10]Ibid., p. 5.

[11]Frederick Copleston, Aquinas (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 32.

ders the intelligible structure of things . . . and the fundamental relationships between them."[12] He considers the "categorical structure of empirical reality." The metaphysician seeks to "isolate and analyse abstractly the most general principles and categories" which inform man's practical life, whether or not man is aware of them. This is not due to the determination of "purely subjective forms or categories;" rather, these categories are apprehended implicitly in experience.[13]

Several points are noteworthy in Copleston's depiction of the metaphysician's task. Restated, the task of the metaphysician is to abstract from the data of experience the intelligible, categorical structure of empirical reality; to analyze these resultant principles and categories of reality as revealed through experience; and to note their interrelationships with one another and with the realm of reality, seeking an adequate explanation of the latter consonant with the metaphysical principles already revealed.

What are these intelligible structures of reality for Burke? If any intelligible aspect of reality reveals itself to Burke it is that of change and stability, so interwoven as to display an invariable order in reality. That there is a structure to reality, a structure which accommodates change, in itself a metaphysical principle, allows the intelligibility and the reasonableness of things manifesting themselves to the human intellect. The unfolding or development of reality within the structures of the universe demonstrates a constancy of design and

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[12]Ibid., p. 33.

[13]Ibid., p. 34.

purpose. Change and development is not the result of caprice or chance. This would be unreasonable, as reason reveals itself for Burke through order. Consequently, he can say that "whatever has its origin in caprice is sure not to improve in its progress, nor to end in reason."[14] This statement has ready application to the order and structure of all reality, although it occurs within the context of what he sees to be the mindlessness of the French Revolution. Order does not imply a static order, but structured change, where certain principles and realities retain their essential sameness, yet accommodate and order the necessary changes of reality. This structure discloses a divine order, prompting Burke to claim: "I know that there is an order that keeps things fast in their place: it is made to us, and we are made to it."[15] This order is not without purpose or design, a notion to be taken up later when we come to Burke's teleology.

This Burkean emphasis upon order is not the refuge of an antiquarian conservative. The old is not to be preserved simply for its own

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[14] Third Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:459.

[15] Speech on a Motion Made in the House of Commons (1782), Works VII:101. One might reasonably object that such statements made by Burke in the context of a speech before Parliament amount to little more than fasionable pious pronouncements calculated simply to gain a receptive audience. Furthermore, one might also regard such effulgent rhetoric flashes occurring often as they do within Burke's speeches as characteristically a result of a certain zealousness on Burke's part, and hardly fit evidence for scholarly argumentation. Wilkins, in considering this problem specifically as it pertains to Burke, and especially in the setting of his speeches before Parliament, concludes with a generalization that he applies in Burke's case: "I, therefore, think it wise to assume that an author or speaker means what he says in the absence of overwhelming evidence to the contrary." For Wilkins, such evidence to the contrary does not exist in Burke's case. Wilkins, p. 12.

sake. The appellation "pure conservative" as Whitehead applies it when he writes, "The pure conservative is fighting against the essence of the universe," cannot be assigned to Burke.[16] Taking Whitehead to mean that the essence of the universe is process, the conclusion follows that the conservative is one who resists change and who resists process. This is clearly not the case with Burke, who affirms change without embracing it as coterminous with reality. Burke writes, "We must all obey the great law of change. It is the most powerful law of Nature, and the means perhaps of its conservation."[17] Burke accentuates change, yet grounds it in the enduring essences of things. He would agree with Andrew Reck that, "Change goes on within substances; it is the process of translating their potentialities into actualities . . . While changing, substances endure . . ."[18] The concepts of essence and substance refer to the abiding, stable feature of the universe.

Burke's philosophy both in its application to the universe in general and politics specifically demonstrates a balanced view of change moderated by stability. In referring to the theories of Parliament, he lauds the principle of renovation that attends to the "union of permanence and change," declaring "that in all our changes we are never wholly new." Yet there is to be "enough of the new to invigorate us," that we

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[16] A. N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 354.

[17] Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792), Works IV:296.

[18] Andrew J. Reck, "Being and Substance," The Review of Metaphysics, vol. 31, no. 4 (June 1978):546-47.

"may have the advantage of change without the imputation of inconstancy."[19]

Most of Burke's utilization of the concepts of change and stability are to be drawn from his political concerns. Yet he makes it clear that political reality "is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts." In this vein he writes of "a condition of unchangeable constancy," which, "by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain, we are never wholly obsolete."[20] Thus, the metaphysical elements of change and stability or permanence are to be found on both the physical and political realm of the universe for Burke. The interplay of change and stability results in an orderly universe.

Change, with the aid of human wisdom, must be orderly and almost imperceptible. Slow change avoids what Burke considers the inconveniences of mutation. Yet this governance of change, this attempt to moderate its speed and impact is not to bridle an otherwise fast flow of nature; rather, it is to temper change according to nature's way. This position is confirmed by Burke in the following statement: "It would be wise to attend upon the order of things, and not to attempt to

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[19]Edmund Burke, Notes for Speech, November 30, 1774, in The Philosophy of Edmund Burke: A Selection from His Speeches and Writings, eds. Louis I. Bredvold and Ralph G. Ross (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 157.

[20]Reflections (1790), Works III:275.

outrun the slow, but smooth and even course of Nature."[21]

Change is not to be radical, or nihilating. It is to be ordered. The term "development" helps clarify the use of the word "change" in this instance. Development implies that there is or should be an orderliness to change, not a random or dissociated series of events succeeding one another in a chaotic or annihilating fashion. Burke's "law of change" suggests the development of possibilities through expansion and growth. Change should improve and preserve. That which exists, whether it be man, society, the nation, or social institution should be altered and developed if a static, atrophied world is to be avoided, yet without violence to essential structures. For example, each man should seek to improve through knowledge and virtue, but without violence to his rational human nature. Yet, throughout these changes, something remains abiding, substantially and essentially unchanged.

Burke's thought is replete with many concepts utilized in traditional metaphysics. He often speaks of "essences" and "substances" and "natures."[22] He writes of categories, quantity, change, habit, and alteration in addition to his use of Aristotelian-Thomistic concepts used in ethical works, such as cardinal virtues, moderation, temperance, et al. But more than that, he gives these terms the same sense

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[21] Speech on the Plan for Economical Reform (1780), Works II: 329.

[22] For our purposes these terms will be used, for the most part, interchangeably as they appear to be used by Burke. Substance is more likely to refer to the concrete unit of existence itself, which essence or nature defines. Aristotle demonstrates the relationship of substance and essence in Metaphysics, Book VII, Chapter 6.

as that given in a realist metaphysics. He recoils from any theory of evolution, process, or historicism which might suggest the inevitability of progress. If such theories also call for the rejection of essences or natures as something static and recalcitrant to change, Burke refuses this point as well. It is this emphasis upon change analogously applied to the social realm that the revolutionary philosophes see as written into the very nature of things, a law born to bear fruit, fruits generated from the corruptible ruins of monarchy. It is, as Burke interprets the thought of the radical French ideologues, as if the active principle of reality is to assert itself in society and politics through force, enterprise, and talent without the tempering restraint of a passive principle. This is change incarnate without restraint; for Burke such change spells chaos, rather than order.

Burke's sensitivity to the proper use of a conceptual framework is apparent.[23] In formulating a principle of change, or, as applied to the political realm, a principle of reformation, he writes, "I would not exclude alteration neither, but even when I changed, it should be to preserve."[24] The use of the term "alteration" suggests a qualitative change, whereby the substance of a thing is modified, perfected, or further determined. Burke continues, "I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building."[25] That is, the abid-

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[23]John Plamenatz touches upon the apparent paradox of Burke's thought when he states: "If he is among the least systematic, he is also among the more consistent of political philosophers." Plamenatz, Man and Society: Political and Social Theory, I:333.

[24]Reflections (1790), Works III:561-62.

[25]Ibid., p. 562.

ing essence is to be sustained, but not without the qualitative improvement thereof.

The problem of change and stability relates to the notion of substances, essences, and natures. It is necessary to deepen our understanding of the metaphysics of change and stability through a review of Burke's use of these terms which suggest an intelligible structure of reality. This review will better be served by a contrast with the empiricist tradition which informed the intellectual milieu of Burke's time and impressed les philosophes of the French Enlightenment.[26]

In light of the growth of empiricist philosophy, especially in England after Locke, one might expect Locke's meaning of substance to infuse that of Burke's. This is not the case. When Locke uses the term "substance," it carries with it the idea of a substratum, foundation or support for qualities. This use of the term brings to mind the idea of substance as pincushion.[27] The idea of substance as a support for accidents or qualities is not that of Aristotle, Aquinas, or Burke. Rather than standing under, evoking the spatial imagery that it does, substance in the realist tradition is more of a permeation of the entire entity. Substance for Aquinas "means the ultimate subject which is not predicated

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[26] Les philosophes is the term used to signify certain French eighteenth century philosophers such as Voltaire, Condillac, Diderot, d'Holbach. Les philosophes were often opposed to both the religious and political institutions of their times, and their thought is seen to be at least partly responsible for the turning from monarchy to bourgeois democracy, advocating the natural rights of the people.

[27] Concerning the etymology of the term "substance," see Leo Sweeney, A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 47, footnote 14.

of any other thing. . . ." but which is capable of being modified through individual, accidental perfections. The subject referred to here "is the particular individual in the genus of substance. In another usage," Aquinas continues, "substance means the form or nature of the subject."[28] Whereas for Locke, the substance lies beyond experience as an unknown substratum, for Aquinas substance is a distinction made within the total datum of experience.[29] For Hume there is no idea, properly, of substance. Hume says "the idea of a substance . . . is nothing but a collection of simple ideas that are united by the imagination and have a particular name assigned them."[30] How does this compare with Burke?

For philosophers in the empiricist tradition the language of metaphysical substances becomes superflous and lacking in the kind of empirical evidence their epistemology demands. Burke, on the other hand, while constantly and everywhere asking us to consult our experience, and wary of an a priori deductionistic metaphysics, does not discount as unreal essences or substances due to their abstract, metaphysical char-

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[28]Aquinas, Disputed Questions on the Power of God in The Pocket Aquinas, ed. Vernon Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), p. 98.

[29]That experience reveals much that is rich in metaphysical content is confirmed in the following statement by John Wild:

> The original data of experience are very rich and various, including existence, both subjective and objective; essence; and forms of order that are internal as well as external, temporal as well as spatial; value and disvalue; contingency; potency; change; and active tendency, all intermixed and merged in a vast confusion.

John Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), p. 72. It is unnecessary to observe a thing called a "substance" or an "essence," rather, it is possible to discover aspects of metaphysical import within the data of experience itself.

[30]Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, I:24.

acter. It is not simply the abstract character of speculative thought which Burke discounts, for, as the following statement on abstract ideas indicates, to ignore in a priori fashion abstract thought is to remove the light of reason:

> I do not put abstract ideas wholly out of any question; because I will know that under that name I should dismiss principles, and that without the guide and light of sound, well-understood principles, all reasonings in politics, as in everything else, would be a confused jumble of particular facts and details, without the means of drawing out any sort of theoretical or practical conclusion.[31]

Burke's use of substance, essence, and nature, along with the realist school of metaphysics, shows that something may be altered or modified without being substantially changed. Commenting on the essence of a nation, he notes the substantial and enduring presence of a commonwealth amid the passage of generations; "Individuals pass like shadows; but the commonwealth is fixed and stable. The difference, therefore, of today and tomorrow, which to private people is immense, to the state is nothing."[32] The essence of a commonwealth includes the people yet it is more. It includes the people as morally linked to one another through various associations, groupings, and incorporations. In a passage from his First Letter on a Regicide Peace Burke seeks to identify the essence of the French nation. It is not mere locality. It includes the "majesty of [the] throne . . . [the] dignity of [the] nobility . . . the honor of [the] gentry . . . the sanctity of [the] clergy . . ." and various other associations and "the respect due to [the] movable sub-

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[31] Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Works VII:41.

[32] Speech on the Plan for Economical Reform (1780), Works II:330.

stance represented by the corporations of the kingdom. All these particular moleculae united form the great mass of what is truly the body politic in all countries."[33] The essence of a nation is more than the several identifiable parts separately open for inspection. There is a unity that permeates and grafts the parts together, that remains intact beyond the separate existence of the several parts themselves. For Burke, the "nation is a moral essence, not a geographical arrangement, or a denomination of the nomenclator."[34] France, for instance, transcends simple space and time. He declares that "France is out of her bounds, but the kingdom is the same."[35] Still, the essence of a nation is not different from but includes all the duties, stations, property, social classes, and beliefs that comprise it.

Burke's use of the concept essence brings forth the following conclusions: first, essence is that which identifies and renders distinct an entity; second, essence endures specifically unchanged throughout time; third, it is not separate from, nor identifiable with any of its particular parts, yet it permeates and unifies these parts into a substantial whole. This places Burke's notion of essence firmly within the realist tradition.

Burke's metaphysics indicates the inclusion of two fundamental principles; one for change and one for stability. In the tradition of realism the principles accounting for change and stability, according

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[33] First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:326.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

to whether the change is partial or substantial include the following: partial change entails the principles or components of substance and accidents, and substantial change entails those of substantial form and prime matter. No such combination of principles are developed by Burke. Yet Burke's recognition and respect for the lawfulness of reality, its ordered dimensions, and the principles that fix our nature and guide our actions indicates his concern with principles of change and stability. And his recommendation of the Aristotelian list of categories to les philosophes would suggest some familiarity with the metaphysics of the Stagyrite. Burke's recognition that there are principles permeating the very substance of our being is evident when, in the context of writing about the principles of morality and politics, he states: "The principles that guide us in public and private, as they are not of our devising, but moulded into the nature and essence of things, will endure with the sun and the moon."[36] The principles of change and stability, substance, essence, and nature vitalize Burke's political philosophy, even though he fails to develop a metaphysical analysis of these principles, accepting them as givens of his thought. This failure is a severe weakness in Burke, one that has hampered the assessment and assimilation of his philosophy into its proper realistic framework. While not subjecting his metaphysical principles to analysis, he does show the result of incorrectly held principles, especially for society.

The points made thus far about Burke's metaphysics and the

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[36]Edmund Burke, Draft of Letter to the Bishop of Chester (1771) in The Philosophy of Edmund Burke, eds. Louis I. Bredvold and Ralph G. Ross, pp. 16-17.

conceptual framework employed are not simply noteworthy but pivotal to an understanding of his philosophy. Burke's universe is not a static, ossified universe of sheer permanence. It is a changing, yet orderly, universe and the metaphysical elements of his thought reflect this order and change. His metaphysics is developmental, assimilating change, allowing for the actualization or realization of the essential structures of reality, be they such as the improvement of man's essential rationality through increased wisdom, or the directing of the commonwealth toward increased good or virtue, hence further realizing its moral essence. Burke's framework of order is not meant to inhibit change, but rather to found it upon the timeless principles that govern nature and, when applied to nations, to the political system.[37]

This is important for an understanding of his metaphysics and also for seeing its value in Burke's critique of les philosophes. Les philosophes see nature as ever changing, in a sort of lawful yet chaotic manner, defying conceptualization.[38] For them, surely no realist philosophy, saturated with substances and essences at the heart of things, could capture the dynamic, constant change and flow of reality. Amongst les philosophes, Denis Diderot is instructive on this point.

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[37]Ruth Bevan, in comparing Burke and Marx, writes that they "posit a changeable yet ordered ("rational") universe of which man is a vital member . . . The real world then for Burke and Marx is the phenomenal (die sinnliche Welt) in ordered activity. Were the world static or unchanging order, knowledge of it would be beyond man." Ruth Bevan, Marx and Burke: A Revisionist View (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1973), p. 58.

[38]Burke's critique of les philosophes is important for grasping his political philosophy, especially in light of the French Revolution, which provoked Burke to his profoundest philosophical reflection.

Diderot maintains that nature is not static but is being ever born anew. In raising certain "Questions" in his work On the Interpretation of Nature he writes that if phenomena are not linked there can be no philosophy. "But if the state of this world of phenomena is one of perpetual change, if nature is still at work on it, then despite the chain that links all phenomena, there can still be no philosophy."[39] Immediately the false dichotomy rises up as one between seeing nature to be static or to be in change, with no middle ground. The inadequacy of a metaphysics imprisoned by language which excludes rather than reveals nature is implied by Diderot. Copleston writes that for Diderot "we cannot . . . give a permanent interpretation of Nature in terms of our conceptual schemes and classifications."[40] Diderot's concept of nature is one of flux and change, ever new and never old. Surely for him no realist philosophy would accommodate such horizons, enmeshed as it appears to be in a static conception of the world as governed and stagnated by a transcendent realm of fixed, immutable essences.

The view of a metaphysical realism that places essences snugly away in a transcendent realm is more consonant with what may be termed the radical essentialism of Plato than the realism of the Aristotle-Aquinas lineage.[41] For Plato the sensible world of change and flux is

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[39]Denis Diderot, On the Interpretation of Nature in Diderot's Selected Writings, ed. Lester G. Crocker (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 86-87.

[40]Copleston, A History of Philosophy, VI, 1, p. 57.

[41]Aquinas notes "the opinion of Plato, who asserted that the species of things subsisted separately from singular things." St. Thomas Aquinas, The Summa Theologica (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., vol. I, 1947), I, 29, 2, reply obj. 4, p. 157.

the shadow world of unreality, a faint glimmer of the immutable realm of essences or forms. This type of transcendent essentialism is typically and wrongfully seen as most representative of realist philosophy, which invariable gives rise to a static, changeless conception of reality. If anything should emerge through our study of Burke to this point, it should be that he accommodates both change and stability. There is nothing static about his conception of reality in an absolute sense, as for Plato. His metaphysics does provide a framework for change, a change which does not overthrow the timeless and eternal principles of reality or the essences of actual existents, but a change that seeks to improve, to renew, and to perfect these existents.

The real is neither a ceaseless, ever new and changing flux, nor is it timeless with a realm of essences aloof from mutability. Things of this world do not gain their reality through some mysterious participation in Platonic Forms. Essences inform and saturate the material realm before us. Yet they do not so determine things as to preclude change within the material existent itself, or, by analogy, with the physical and the social order within a commonwealth.[42] Room for reali-

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[42] In referring to Burke's conception of essences we have so far generally employed examples form the social order. Thus, Burke's understanding of essences has occurred primarily in the context of discussions on nations and commonwealths. The use of analogy is in operation here because of the difference between the essence of an actual, physical existent and that of a commonwealth. Burke notes this difference when he writes that "commonwealths are not physical, but moral essences. They are artificial combinations, and, in their proximate efficient cause, the arbitrary productions of the human mind." First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:234. This artificiality does violence neither to the commonwealth nor to human nature, since it is a tenet of Burke's philosophy that "art is man's nature." So, in

zation of what one essentially is and potentially can be allows for improvement, as well as degeneration. The fabric of Burke's metaphysics is so suffused with the elements of change and stability as to ensure that "in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete."[43]

Here surfaces another principle of improvement, further securing the developmental aspect of Burke's metaphysics. This principle is mentioned by Burke in the context of his discussion of the idea of inheritance as including a principle of improvement. In considering inheritance he notes that it secures what it acquires while leaving acquisition free. He refers to this and other principles, such as the one of conservation and transmission, as being maxims upon which the state may proceed. These principles are not those of politics solely, somehow divorced from nature. The state's following of these principles makes its actions analogous to the "pattern of nature."[44] And here emerges still another component of Burke's metaphysics, his principle of analogy. Together these principles further clarify the more fundamental ones of change and stability. Just as nature struggles, falls, and improves, so does society. Neither man nor nature starts each day

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producing the commonwealth man helps realize his social nature. And in seeking to understand Burke's metaphysics we are not being misleading to use examples from the social and political order--as this is the focal point of Burke's thought--as he finds reality and its principles analogous between the natural and social order; between the order of the universe, decreed by God, and man. Shortly, philosophic analogy will be discussed.

[43] Reflections (1790), Works III:275.

[44] Ibid.

and age de novo. Instead, both build on what has gone before, and in building sustain, and in sustaining renew. It will help to look more closely at Burke's position on analogy and to see its importance for understanding the overall metaphysics.

Burke speaks of "the spirit of philosophic analogy" in the context of the idea of inheritance as a factor of social stability. Although he does not specifically discuss "philosophic analogy," he brings this concept forward in the midst of a passage replete with analogies drawn between the "order of the world" and the "method of nature."[45] It is important to note these analogies in order to see that Burke's metaphysics bears directly on his political philosophy. It should further our conviction that the language of substance, essence, and nature used in a social or political context by Burke are not removed from, but are the outgrowth of his understanding of reality. These concepts reflect a coherent picture of reality, a reality not speculatively bifurcated from the lived-world of politics, but a reality that is fundamentally consistent. A review of some of Burke's uses of analogy will be of assistance.

In the short space of slightly over one page Burke draws parallels with the political scheme of things and nature in five separate references. In succession he refers to the political and social policy of entailed inheritance as the "happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it;" to "a constitutional policy working after the pattern of nature . . .;" to "the institutions of

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policy . . . [and] the gifts of providence" as being handed down "in the same course and order of the world;" and, finally, "a conformity to nature in our artificial institutions."[46] There is no explication of the meaning of analogy as used here by Burke, yet it is apparent that the natural realm and the political realm are analogous to each other in that each reveals a method or design that is orderly yet alterable. We will see later that the ultimate source of order and change transcends this world, yet is present to it, this being God. "Decay, fall, renovation, and progression" are the possible alterations that occur in nature and in the state. This discussion is useful in that it helps demonstrate that metaphysical principles such as those of change and stability, substance and essence, which are grounded in reality, find a ready application to politics for Burke.

My focus to this point has been upon the elements of change and stability, substances, and essences in Burke's metaphysics. It is a fact that individual existents have an essence lending intelligibility to reality. Yet, as we have seen, in recognizing the substantial and essential character of reality Burke did not slight change as the most basic law of nature. This emphasis on change gives a primacy to existence as dynamic activity in Burke's thought. This is not to say that reality is change or process, and nothing more. It is not to deny that things have essences reflecting a stable presence in beings. As John Wild notes, "Action and existence are never found without structure and

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[46]Ibid., pp. 274-76.

essence."[47] The effect of Burke's position that the "law of nature is change" is to place a primacy on existence as opposed to an essentialism which focuses upon the fixed and static properties of being, to the detriment of its active and dynamic character. To emphasize either extreme, that of existence or of essence, to the exclusion of either principle is to misrepresent and arbitrarily divide being against itself. This is why the recognition of the primacy of existence in Burke's thought is so crucial. To do otherwise is to fall prey to a view of Burke as either a reactionary or status quo conservative. For this to be the case would be entirely to contradict the thrust of Burke's metaphysics. As change is the dynamic and active aspect of being, and as this aspect received first place in Burke's assessment of reality, Burke could concur with Wild when he writes, "The act of existing is dynamic and temporal."[48]

Why is this so crucial to our understanding of Burke? It is crucial in that, with a lack of sustained philosophical argumentation on Burke's part, one is forced to isolate those principles which emerge from a patient reading of his works. Nowhere is there to be found in Burke an explicit anticipation of philosophical existentialism. In part, through the prism of existentialism and from the vantage point of our century, one can better note the emphasis upon actual, concrete existence by Burke. His very hesitancy over all philosophizing and metaphysics in

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[47] Wild, p. 197.

[48] Existence is contrasted by Wild with essences, which he describes as "fixed and timeless." Wild, p. 242.

particular is a hesitancy over losing one's intellect in a swirl of abstractions and universals which are peculiar to essentialism. One cannot ignore theory, granted; but one must shun a theory that separates man from existence. This is a recurring theme in Burke. It is this understanding of existence that makes Burke's conservatism different from a conservatism too enthralled with the structures of reality. Although Burke emphasizes order and structures, it is to preserve and ensure the smooth and even flow of change and the directionality of the same rather than to praise order for order's sake.

Yet Burke's "existentialism" is quite unlike a Sartrian view where existence precedes and determines essence through a freely chosen project. For Burke, in a manner that Maritain would find compatible with his view of existentialism, no existence exists independently of essence, nor essence of existence, just as no change exists without stability, nor stability apart from change.[49] Beyond this, it is almost impossible to go with Burke without beginning to force a philosophical mould upon him foreign to his thought. This understanding of Burke's metaphysics is pivotal to a comprehension of his political philosophy and conservatism.

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[49]Maritain chooses "to affirm the primacy of existence, but as implying and preserving essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme victory of the intellect and of intelligibility." Maritain calls this "authentic existentialism." Maritain contrasts "authentic existentialism" with that of "apocryphal existentialism." The latter also affirms "the primacy of existence, but as destroying or abolishing essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme defeat of the intellect and of intelligibility. For Maritain the notions of existence (the esse, or "act of existing" of Aquinas) and essence are reciprocally related. To abolish one is to abolish the other. On this, Maritain and Burke are in basic agreement. Jacques Maritain, Existence and the Existent (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 3.

Burke's is a conserving conservatism, not a status quo or reactionary conservatism. His metaphysics reveals an existentialist thrust in that change and activity receive preeminent consideration and that man is considered in his concrete and historical condition. Yet this is tempered by an accommodation and recognition that existing things have a determinate characteristic about them, a "whatness" that marks things off from one another. Essences render things intelligible yet, and Burke notes this danger well, their very intelligibility easily leads the intellect not firmly grounded in existence into a world of abstractions.

This brings us near the heart of Burke's metaphysical argument for freedom and liberty.[50] One realizes one's existence in the fullness of freedom by becoming what one most essentially is.[51] Here, the elements of the metaphysics of change and stability are drawn together in a unified manner. The freedom of an individual, or analogously, a nation, is obtained through activity in accord with one's nature. Burke's philosophy consistently sustains this position, echoing the realist precept that "action follows nature." This is the matrix of a Burkean metaphysics with an emphasis upon the primacy of change in the context of order.

A radical spirit of freedom is often conjoined with a rejection of essences, and this radical spirit Burke found in the French

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[50] An argument to be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

[51] Other philosophers feel that it is the rejection of "metaphysical essences" that liberates man and allows him to become that which he chooses to be. In contemporary philosophy Maritain refers to Sartre's "project" as the existentialists' equivalent of essence. Maritain, Existence and the Existent, p. 7.

radicals. Burke's philosophy is so metaphysically grounded as to reject this spirit as excess, a spirit which in the political scheme of reality elevates the individual's rights above the good of the commonwealth.[52] For Burke there is a hierarchy of existence that not only unveils to man his true interests, but his place in the universe itself. And his place is not above or outside of society, in a pre-social state of nature, possessing a hypothetical freedom. His place is essentially an integral part of the commonwealth where the individual neither reigns supreme, nor is swallowed up by Leviathan or the commonwealth or by the levelling spirit of les philosophes. Here Burke's metaphysics clearly vitalizes his political philosophy.

Both Burke and les philosophes place great emphasis upon change.[53] Yet the latter, as Burke construes their thought, are more expectant of a change that brings inevitable progress, a change more likely to shed the mantle of the past as so much unwanted baggage. In order to understand more fully Burke's metaphysics it is necessary to take a representative view of Enlightenment thinkers whose thought is in opposition to that of Burke. This view will include a primary philosophical influence in the thought of Enlightenment thinker, John Locke.

Among certain of les philosophes the rejection of essences

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[52]For Burke "the spirit of freedom leads in itself to misrule and excess." Reflections (1790), Works III:276.

[53]As Dante Germino indicates, it is not certain that the conservative opponents of les philosophes such as Burke had even consulted the works of the Enlightenment thinkers to any great extent. And that Burke was probably responding to what he took to be their position. Dante Germino, Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1972), p. 153.

appears akin to the rejection of metaphysics conjoined with certain empiricist tenets. This anti-metaphysical impulse for Enlightenment thinkers like Diderot and D'Alembert castigates metaphysics as going beyond the bounds of what can be verified by sense experience. Despite Burke's suspicion of les philosophes as embracing a rationalistic, deductive metaphysics, many Enlightenment thinkers had been quite taken by Locke's empiricist philosophy and the success of science and the experimental method. D'Alembert, for instance, rejects any knowledge of metaphysical essences maintaining that metaphysics must either remain in vain speculations or illusions, or become a science of facts. In sum, for D'Alembert the realm of phenomena and the empirically verifiable impose a limit to our knowledge, and essences suggest an airy flight into the unverifiable.[54] Copleston records that for Diderot, due to Nature's changeable and elastic qualities, nc "permanent interpretation of Nature" can arise "in terms of our conceptual schemes and classifications."[55] Diderot lays emphasis upon the experimental method and the need for thought to remain open to empirical reality. Here we see the emphasis placed on the flux of reality. Reality is in process, changeable and elastic, not amenable to either conceptualization or schematization, and unable to reveal such occult properties as substances or essences. For Diderot, so constant and on-going is change that only the infinite whole is permanent.

Although Enlightenment thinkers are by no means strictly

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[54]Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, VI, 1, pp. 60-61.

[55]Ibid., pp. 56-57.

materialistic in their philosophies, materialism plays a dominant theme for both Diderot and D'Alembert. This focus upon change and the disavowal of substances and essences suggests a certain revulsion with "is-ness," which Jeffrey Hart terms a mood of "antiontologicality."[56] The language of essences suggests for them a freezing of reality, an imposing of static immutable concepts upon the world of mutability, change and progress. This view of nature, this radical existentialism, where change is supreme and essences taboo, fuels a philosophy which sees progress as abetted by change. While progress need not necessarily be the outgrowth of change, it appears to be so for Diderot and D'Alembert.

The rejection of metaphysical essences has its philosophical antecedent for the Enlightenment thinkers in Locke. The view of essences as fixed and stable and as standing apart from the real world, like Platonic archetypes, of which natural things partake is rejected by Locke as being incompatible with available empirical data. Locke does assert another type of essence as more reasonable, whereby "natural things . . . have a real but unknown constitution of their insensible parts, . . ." and since unknown, incapable of being abstracted. Yet his thought tends more to a nominalism where a name is given to individual things having some characteristics in common.[57]

For les philosophes, the idea of essence and nature is the idea

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[56]Jeffrey Hart, "Burke and Radical Freedom," The Review of Politics 29 (April 1967):227.

[57]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Raymond Wilburn (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1948), p. 213.

of something that stands apart from and in opposition to reality, which is a world of flux and change. Instead of being, they opt for becoming, hence their "antiontologicality." The choice, however, is not simply between being and becoming; between a fixed and immutable world and a world of change. Neither Parmenides nor Heraclitus exhausts the possibilities. Aristotle offers a middle ground which accounts for both being and becoming, through the notions of being-in-act and being-in-potency. Fundamental to this is the realization that forms and essences do not exist in a world apart, but, together with matter, constitute the essence of individual material substances. In a sense, every substance possesses the potentiality of becoming what it is, a capacity to actualize more completely its form or essence. It is this middle ground which Burke's metaphysics occupies, avoiding on the one hand the extremes of radical essentialism and on the other hand radical existentialism. Instead, his thought reveals a metaphysics much nearer the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, a tradition enhanced, for Maritain, by Aquinas' authentic existentialism.[58]

There is not enough evidence in Burke to make such fine distinctions among the elements of his metaphysics to so warrant the conclusion that his philosophy is exactly in accord with Aristotle, Aquinas, or Maritain. For example, the emphasis placed on esse, or the "act of existing" by Aquinas, over ens, or being, as signified by the formal

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[58]Concerning this point Copleston concludes that Aquinas, "while retaining the Aristotelian analyses of substance and accident, form and matter, act and potency, places the emphasis in his metaphysics, not on 'essence,' on what a thing is, but on existence, considered as the act of existing." Copleston, Aquinas, p. 79.

element of the substance, is, of course, lacking in Burke in this refined sense. If we can say that change for Burke equates with esse, the "act of existing," rendering a substance actual; and if change, as existence, has primacy over the formal or essential aspect of an existent, constituting an individual as it does; and if we were allowed by the evidence of Burke's writings to discover such a refined metaphysics, then we might say with more authority that Burke's metaphysics is strictly compatible and consonant with the authentic existential metaphysics of Aquinas. But that is not the case, although Burke's thought is sufficiently replete with points of compatibility and indications of an Aristotelian-Thomistic influence to place him within the mainstream of classical realism. The judicious and cautious affirmation of this point by Canavan is advisable: "The basic premises of Burke's mature political thought . . . strongly resemble those of medieval Christian Aristotelianism."[59]

The evidence from Burke bears out the conclusion that his political thought is based on a firm, classical realist metaphysics. Burke's metaphysics affirms an ordered yet changing reality. Change takes place in conformity with the structuring principles of reality reflecting a fundamental predominance of order over chaos. In short, reality is intelligible, giving evidence of the governance of reason. Furthermore, such metaphysical concepts as essence, substance, and nature, as they structure change and stability, are applied and revealed by Burke in a consistent fashion. All of this, I have argued, serves to

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[59]Canavan, The Political Reason Edmund Burke, p. 205.

sustain the thesis that Burke's political thought is grounded in a realist metaphysical conception of reality.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GOD AND HUMAN NATURE

With the fundamental metaphysical principles of order, change and stability, substance and essence presented in the previous chapter, it is now possible to develop further the specifics of Burke's metaphysics. Turning to his treatment of God, the first principle and cause of all reality, and human nature, we see the constancy of order both in the designs of God and in the nature of man. These thematic elements of Burke's metaphysics will be more fully elaborated.

Our present focus upon God and human nature will bring us closer to the contingent realm of politics which Burke's metaphysics makes more intelligible. The final portion of this chapter will concern Burke's conception of human liberty and equality, still in the context of human nature. First, a consideration of the existence of God and His rational knowability.

Philosophy of God

Burke affirms the existence of God. This affirmation is not given an in-depth demonstration by Burke. Nonetheless, he does not rule out the knowledge of God through either man's intellect or feelings. Burke states that "atheism is against, not only our reason, but our

instincts. . . ."[1] The use of the word "reason" in this context may receive more than one interpretation. First, it may connote the idea that, given a rational demonstration, man's natural light of reason could affirm God's existence independent of faith and/or revelation. Second, it may mean that it is not unreasonable for man to believe that God as posed to reason escapes man's grasp. Burke believes that God is knowable in the realm of the intellect, but he does not provide rigorous demonstrations for God's existence.

Burke holds that it is possible, through the effects of nature, to come to know God's existence and attributes, thus affirming the causal principle of reality. That we can know God's attributes is shown by Burke when he writes, "It is by a long deduction, and much study, that we discover the adorable wisdom of God in his works."[2] Elsewhere in Burke's Inquiry we find that one may know God's attributes through His works: "But because we are bound by the condition of our nature, to ascend to these pure and intellectual ideas,"--that is, the ideas of God's attributes--"through the medium of sensible images, and to judge of these divine qualitites by their evident acts and exertions, it becomes extremely hard to disentangle our idea of the cause from the effect by which we are led to know it."[3] While affirming Burke's belief that God can be known through his effects, this passage, nonetheless, reveals

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[1] Reflections (1790), Works III:351.

[2] A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), Works I:185.

[3] Ibid., p. 142.

his hesitancy over the excessive reliance upon speculative reason. Beyond Burke's basic acceptance of the knowability of God by reason's consideration of the sensible world lies his assent to the teachings of the Church.

It is evident that Burke held to the traditional teachings of Christianity, especially as confessed by the Church of England. This included his belief in a transcendent Deity, a Creator God who is a Provider for His creation. References to God and His Providential care for the world occur throughout Burke's works. These references to divinity especially emerge in Burke's battle with the Jacobins of the French Revolution who, by way of their radical atheism, as Burke saw it, sought to undermine the very foundations of society. These foundations are ultimately rooted in God. God is not only intimately linked to individual man as the cause of his existence, but God is the "great Master, Author, and Founder of Society."[4] God has created man in His image, denoted by man's nature as a rational animal.

God creates man in His image and imprints upon him his unique character. Burke refers to "him who gave us our nature, and in giving impressed an invariable law upon it."[5] God does not create man to turn him loose upon his own designs. He creates man according to His own plan. God is a God of order, and, as cited previously, Burke states, "I know that there is an order that keeps things fast in their place:

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[4] Reflections (1790), Works III:354.

[5] Tract on the Popery Laws (1766), Works VI:322.

it is made to us, and we are made to it."[6] How does Burke know this? Primarily all knowledge of these matters pertaining to God stem from religion, which he labels that "grand prejudice . . . which holds all other prejudices together."[7] To speak of religion as a prejudice is not to suggest an irrationally held opinion. When speaking of religion or the "Church Establishment . . . [as] the first of our prejudices," Burke adds that such a prejudice is not "destitute of reason, but involving in it profound and extensive wisdom."[8] The "prejudice" of which Burke speaks is the ancestral wisdom that is the living deposit passed on from one generation to the next. It is this wisdom that is the product of man's nature, and this "nature . . . is wisdom without reflection and above it."[9] This nature, being man's instinctive response to moral values and religious assent, proves, Burke believes, that God exists.

For the sophisticated philosophical mind all of this is somewhat simplistic. It is not that some of his ideas, such as that concerning prejudice as a source of our knowledge about God, could not be developed or arguments for them presented. Notions about a collective mind or collective consciousness have been developed by intellectuals

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[6] Speech on a Motion Made in the House of Commons (1782), Works VII:101.

[7] Letter to William Smith (1795), Works VI:367.

[8] Reflections (1790), Works III:352. Canavan writes that "prejudice, in the sense in which Burke praises it, is not irrational. Yet there is a sense in which it is opposed to reason. The reason to which it is opposed is that of the thorough individualist, who is primarily concerned with his own rights and interests . . ." Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, p. 75.

[9] Reflections (1790), Works III:375.

from diverse disciplines.[10] Yet Burke has not set out to do this and, consequently, for the philosopher who gives him serious consideration, part of his effectiveness is diminished. On the other hand, academic philosophers were not the usual public for which he wrote, so criticism of him on this point should be somewhat tempered.

In creating us with a particular nature and ordering us for a specific end, Burke may seem to imply that God determines our specific acts. Some of his writings, in fact, give this impression. In Burke's Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs, he writes:

> . . . . I may assume that the awful Author of our being is the Author of our place in the order of existence,--and that, having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic, not according to our will but according to His, He has in and by that disposition virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned us.[11]

We may ask ourselves, has God created an automaton? Does the "divine tactic" order our every move or does He invite us to cooperate in His plan and by a free acquiesence to participate in the ends God has ordained for us? For Burke, the providential ordering of God secures neither man nor universe against change. It does secure both against chaos and purposelessness.

Burke's God is the God of classical theism.[12] Not only has

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[10]For example, Carl Jung in psychology and Emile Durkheim in sociology.

[11]Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:165-66. Burke makes no effort to support his claims concerning God, taking them to be "assumptions" or "tenets" of faith. In light of the atheism that he identifies to be at the base of the revolutionary philosophy he loathes, it is puzzling that he refuses to subject his beliefs to a more sustained scrutiny by reason.

[12]The label "classical theist" is the one given by Charles

God brought the world out of nothing into existence, but all of existence, down to the minutest details, remains in a state of dependence upon its Creator. In assessing Burke's position on this point, Canavan concludes, "It follows that the actions of all creatures, even the free actions of men, are fully under the dominion and direction of God, and this direction is called divine providence."[13] Canavan continues by identifying two features of Burke's doctrine of providence. They include man's freedom of choice and God's "supreme and ineluctable guidance of history."[14] Burke, as is the case in most of his philosophy both political and otherwise, assumes this doctrine of providence, making no attempt to prove it. Therefore, Burke "believed both in God's supreme dominion over history, and in a genuine, though limited, human freedom within history."[15]

In speaking of God in such magisterial ways as "the Sovereign Disposer," "The Awful Author of our nature," and the "great Master, Author and Founder of Society," Burke is not indicating a God who superimposes His will upon man. Man is free to respond to God's will. Thus it is that God orders the basic course of mankind's march through history. Man's own individual behaviour and his practical knowledge of what is just and good is informed through several sources such as Holy Writ,

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Hartshorne to those philosophers who conceive God to be "Eternal Consciousness, Knowing but not including the world." Philosophers included by Hartshorne in this tradition include Philo, Augustine, Anselm, al'Ghazzali, Aquinas, Leibniz, et al. Charles Hartshorne, Philosophers Speak of God (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 17.

[13]Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, p. 178.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

the traditional teaching of Christianity, the manifest wisdom of civilization, and society's manners, customs and the chartered rights of man. Additionally, man is in possession of fundamental moral instincts. All of these sources provide ways in which man gains a partial insight into the designs of Providence. As Gerald Chapman remarks:

> The idea of Providence working in history . . . never lost its hold on Burke, who believed that emergent situations in the historical process, though their causal origins may be obscure, always stand under a judgement, a disposing law and intention, with which it is willful disaster not to cooperate.[16]

God creates for a purpose. His existence ensures the stability of the moral law as a defense against the caprice of brute force. Burke writes that "if no Supreme Ruler exists, wise to form, and potent to enforce, the moral law, there is no sanction to any contract, virtual or even actual, against the will of prevalent power."[17] God has given us a particular nature. Burke writes that "the Author of our nature has written it strongly in that nature, and has promulgated the same law in His written word, that man shall eat his bread by his labor."[18]

Through the mysterious and unknown machinations of Providence, man finds himself placed within an historical epoch, a situation and environs apart from any choice of his own. He finds that the situations and horizons that surround his life are decreed by God, situations which

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[16]Gerald Chapman, Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 271.

[17]Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:205.

[18]Two Letters to Gentlemenin Bristol (1778), Works II:260.

determine his duties.[19] Burke often calls attention to man's duties--duties not chosen but nonetheless incumbent upon man to perform. He may ignore them but he does so by contravening his own nature, natural feelings and dispositions. In this regard we find a moving letter which reveals Burke's deep religious convictions. It is a letter written by Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam in reply to the latter's letter of condolence on the death of Burke's son Richard. In this letter he refers to the "common Providence of God," and to the feelings "that God and nature have implanted in me." Also, he alludes to the things he must do as God has ordained which he will submit to with God's grace.[20]

Although history to some thinkers seems to betray a certain dynamism in obedience to a law of nature, Burke would not go so far as to conclude that every nation is inevitably succumbing to a predetermined destiny. If God allows civilization to decay and demoralize, He may well be doing so as a punishment to rebellious man. Yet Burke does not assent to a type of providence resulting in historical determinism:

> I doubt whether the history of mankind is yet complete enough, if even it can be so, to furnish grounds for a sure theory on the internal causes which necessarily affect the fortune of a state. I am far from denying the operation of such causes: but they are infi-

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[19]"When Burke says that God assigns men their place in the order of existence," Canavan writes, "he should not be understood as denying that men can choose their place. . . . But, the doctrine of providence teaches, and Burke profoundly believed, that even the free choices of men fall under the supreme guidance of God, and that the history both of individuals and of nations is ruled by a higher will than ours." Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, p. 180.

[20]Thomas W. Copeland, gen. ed., The Correspondence of Edmund Burke. 9 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958-1970), Vol. 7: 1792-1794, by P. J. Marshall and John A Woods, eds., pp. 568-69.

> nitely uncertain, and much more obscure, and much more difficult to trace, than the foreign causes that tend to raise, to depress, and sometimes to overwhelm a community.[21]

If states and civilizations follow some ineluctable pathway from inception, development, preeminence, decay and finally destruction, this pathway remains obscure to man. Burke, instead, is struck by the incredible influence the lives of single individuals can exercise upon the destiny of nations:

> The death of a man at a critical juncture, his disgust, his retreat, his disgrace, have brought innumerable calamities on a whole nation. A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune, and almost of Nature.[22]

One might wonder if such potential on the part of the individual does not jeopardize the law of nature as it comes from God.

To make such a bold claim on behalf of the importance of the individual does not invalidate the natural law. First, the natural law gives substance to rights and wrong but does not detract from free choice. It is not a deterministic force in the life of man, save that the violation of the law comes at a price. Second, Burke's regard for the impact of the single individual is an acknowledgement of the dignity through freedom which man possesses. When the circumstances are fitting, the individual, through his choices, can effect for good or evil the course of a nation. Thus, Burke's view of history and God's providential role in it, again, does not conflict with the freedom of the individual.

God has created the universe and has placed man therein with a

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[21] First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:235.

[22] Ibid., p. 236.

nature that is both fixed and alterable. Burke writes in the Reflections that "they conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection: He willed therefore the state--He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection."[23] God gave man his nature and the means to its perfection. This brings us to a consideration of Burke's philosophy of human nature.

Philosophy of Human Nature

The complexity of man's nature is readily apparent. Ultimately, he is composed of body and soul, passion and reason. Man, a reasoning being by nature, may allow his passionate nature to enslave his reason. Burke writes, "Strong passion under the direction of a feeble reason feeds a low fever, which serves only to destroy the body that entertains it."[24] Here rings the note of a fundamental struggle at the core of man's being with a passionate nature threatening to disrupt a precarious balance between itself and reason. But complexity, inward struggle, and strife express only one side of human nature. Out of this struggle between reason and the passions can emerge a harmony. This is not meant to be a harmony where the passions are completely suppressed in deference to rationality. This would deny a crucial component in man's complex nature. Rather, the passions can and should be placed in service to reason, and through this service can emerge at least a partial harmony. Burke con-

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[23] Reflections (1790), Works III:361.

[24] Second Letter on a Regicide Peace, Works V:407.

tinues:

> But vehement passion does not always indicate an infirm judgment. It often accompanies, and actuates, and is even auxiliary to a powerful understanding; and when they both conspire and act harmoniously, their force is great to destroy disorder within and to repel injury from abroad.[25]

Peter Stanlis sees Burke's typification of man's nature as being so complex and variable as almost to defy generalization.[26] Burke himself notes in his Reflections: "The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and, therefore, no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature or to the quality of his efforts."[27] How does this complexity affect the moral nature of man?

Man, for Burke, comes into being neither totally corrupt nor sublimely good. He has an intricate, complex nature modified by his environment, religion, habits, and a myriad of other variables, all informing his existence. Man findsa proper development of his potential for goodness through the enrichment of his social nature.[28] His nature and God's will ordain his sociability. This is confirmed by Burke as he writes:

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law, p. 286, fn. 39.

[27] Reflections (1790), Works III:312.

[28] Concerning this aspect of man's nature and its implications for freedom, Stanlis writes: "Like Aristotle, Burke believed man was by nature a political animal, so that true liberty must be 'social freedom,' a condition which required restriction on raw will and prevented anyone from exercising arbitrary power." Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law, p. 67.

> Men are not tied to one another by paper and seals. They are led to associate by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies. It is with nations as with individuals. Nothing is so strong a tie of amity between nation and nation as correspondence in laws, customs, manners, and habits of life.[29]

Burke denies any anarchical claims to extreme individual freedom. Anarchy tends to absolutize individual freedom at the expense of society's claims on the individual, thereby ignoring man's social and political nature. Yet man's social nature is inescapable. "Men are never," Burke says, "in a state of total independence of each other. It is not the condition of our nature."[30]

Through a common social nature, all men maintain an identity with one another. This identity, however, does not preclude differences. The question is, how can mankind be united to one another by a common nature while the world bears witness to so much pluralism among customs, traditions, and laws? Burke tackles this problem when he considers the role of the ancient legislators as they addressed the legislative problems of their times. Burke writes that the ancient legislators,

> . . . had to do with men, and they were obliged to study human nature. They had to do with citizens, and they were obliged to study the effects of those habits which are communicated by the circumstances of life. They were sensible that the operation of this second nature on the first produced a new combination; and thence arose many diversities amongst men, according to their birth, their education, their professions, the periods of their lives, their residence in towns or in the country, their several ways of acquiring and of fixing property, and according to the quality of the property itself--all which rendered them as it were so many different species of animals.[31]

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[29] First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:317.

[30] Ibid., p. 321.

[31] Reflections (1790), Works III:476-77.

It is clear that man's so-called first nature, his human nature, entails his second nature, his activity as a citizen of society. Man is naturally social and his sociability, and the varying circumstances in which the plurality of men find themselves, results in a diversity of habits and customs among men. The Aristotelian categorical distinction between substance or essence and accident has a ready application here. The fusion of man's circumstantial or conditional nature, as one might call this second nature, and his human nature, or first nature--which is a social nature--does not eliminate in terms of priority, in terms of its most fundamental aspect, this first nature. Indeed, the very peculiarity of man's first nature, its social quality, lends itself to the constant development that man undergoes in the infinite diversity of the social world. Through this development of his social nature, man substantially retains his distinctiveness as man.

All of this is compatible with Burke's metaphysical principles of change and stability. Essentially, human nature is fixed. There is no dimension of process on the level of the essential nature of man. But the dynamic, developmental aspect of reality is accommodated by man's social nature, or second nature. This social nature renders one man distinct from another. Through the confluence of a variety of forces impinging on man, together with the choices he makes, the individual becomes something distinct, something unique, while retaining his essential humanity. The entire social order is created and exists for the purpose of man's perfecting of his being, that is, for the dignity of man. Burke ties together these notions when he states:

> Every sort of moral, every sort of civil, every sort of politic institution, aiding the rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding and affections to the divine, are not more than necessary, in order to build up that wonderful structure, Man,--whose prerogative it is, to be in a great degree a creature of his own making, and who, when made as he ought to be made, is destined to hold no trivial place in the creation.[32]

Two things now become clear. First, Burke affirms causality. God is causally present to the universe not only in His role as Creator, but also as sustainer and, beyond that, as the end of the universe, urging man toward perfection, calling for man's cooperation in the pursuit of justice. Second, the effect of God's causal presence is intelligible to man. Man can recognize through reason God's hand in the universe, although, more important for Burke man apprehends God's handiwork according to his natural feelings. Further clarification on Burke's philosophy of human nature regarding man's rationality is needed.

Man is a rational animal.[33] Burke makes this clear in the following: "For man is by nature reasonable; and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated and most predominates."[34] This claim of man's rationality does not preclude irrational behavior, or suggest that human reason is always in firm and dispassionate control of human conduct.[35] It does assert,

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[32]Ibid., p. 353.

[33]In discussing this aspect of human nature, I am necessarily prescinding from what Stanlis rightly refers to as Burke's view of "man as a rational and emotional being . . ." Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law, p. 161.

[34]Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:176.

[35]Wilkins records that Burke sometimes speaks of a struggle between reason and the passions although he concludes that "Burke

as Canavan notes, "that man is, with all his faults and weaknesses, a rational animal. . . ."[36]

Man is not only a rational animal. To claim that man is purely rational is to strip him of other characteristic properties; it is to distort and oversimplify his existence. His rationality affirms his essence, but his essence is to be a human being of flesh and blood, not to exist as pure intellect.[37] Burke confirms this when he states, "Politics ought to be adjusted, not to human reasonings, but to human nature; of which the reason is but a part, and by no means the greatest part."[38] When a comparison is drawn between this quotation and the statement where Burke notes that "man is by nature reasonable," there may appear to be a contradiction. On the one hand, Burke is proclaiming man's natural state to be where reason is "best cultivated and most predominates." In the succeeding quote, he maintains that reason though part of human nature, is "by no means the greatest part." In the first instance reason is elevated; in the second it is subordinated. This

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believed in a fundamental accord or harmony between reason and the passions." Wilkins, The Problem of Edmund Burke's Political Philosophy, pp. 102-3.

[36]Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, p. 80.

[37]On this point, note Ruth Bevan's discussion and her favorable comparison of Burke with Marx in Marx and Burke: A Revisionist View, pp. 55-79. Also, Stanlis states, "By 'reason' Burke did not mean the immediate logical deductions of individuals, but the complex, historical, corporate revelations of the whole human race, as embodied in historical continuity and prescriptive artificial institutions. Burke distrusted intensely the tradition of individual logical reason." Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law, p. 162.

[38]Observations of a Late Publication on the Present State of the Nation (1769), Works I:398.

possible contradiction is resolved within the context of Burke's writings as a whole and the purposes for which he wrote. Burke wars with those students of politics who determine what the political state of affairs ideally should be in stark contrast to what they in fact are. Such is the case with the Jacobin writers of the French Revolution. They draw up blueprints for society, analytically consistent yet devoid of an historical appreciation of man. To Burke's mind, the Jacobins ignore the weight of traditions and customs which, while limiting man's political horizons and restraining the itch for novelty, nonetheless ground man in his past. These traditions preserved men from the machinations and designs of utopian political writers. Thus, when Burke denigrates reason, he generally does so to rebuke those writers who ignore the whole, complex creature who is man. Reason belongs to a being who retains much of that animality shared with the brute world. Man's reason is not a faculty independent of man's physical or emotional state or able to separate itself from environmental influences. Yet, reason can, at least in part, transcend its own creaturely existence.

When Burke calls for the subjection of reason he means a reason which divorces itself from the concrete, being-in-the-world existence of man. He calls this "a priori" reasoning, a reasoning that reflects more man's wishful thinking than the actual state of man.[39] So the force of the quotation from Burke where reason is cited as "by no means the greatest part" of human nature is to urge us not to isolate oneaspect of man, however significant, at the expense of the entire

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[39] Reflections (1790), Works III:311.

individual. As he states in the Reflections: ". . . The nature of man is intricate . . ."[40]

In considering the essence of human nature, we cannot ignore the complexity of man's existence, an existence that, through a ceaseless array of changes, modifies and develops man's social nature. When we speak of human nature, we are calling to mind those qualities which apply to all men, not just to some. Burke maintains that all human beings are both rational and religious by nature. This too is but one essential aspect of man's complex nature. Regarding man's religious nature, Burke states, "We know, and it is our pride to know that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason, but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long."[41] The person who denies that which is by nature part of his very being does so at a price. He is at war with himself. And, as a consequence, he is at war with all mankind. Atheism, for Burke, gnaws at the very foundations of society. So basic to man's being is his religious nature that religion holds first place among the values of life. "On [the Christian] religion, according to our mode, all our laws and institutions stand, as upon their base. That scheme is supposed in every transaction of life . . ."[42] From these reflections on human nature emerges a further consideration.

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[40] Ibid., p. 312.

[41] Ibid., p. 351.

[42] Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works VI:112.

Does Burke consider man good, evil, or morally indifferent by nature? Is man's fundamental tendency in the direction of a self-centered egotism or toward a natural harmony with his fellowman? Burke provides a general answer to this question in his work entitled Thoughts on the Cause of Our Present Discontents where he writes:

> We must soften into a credulity below the milkiness of infancy to think all men virtuous. We must be tainted with a malignity truly diabolical to believe all the world to be equally wicked and corrupt. The elevation of the one, and the depression of the other, are the first objects of all true policy.[43]

Other political philosophers, such as Hobbes and Rousseau, suggest different viewpoints. Hobbesian man in the state of nature, whose prominent note is self-interest, can only transcend his natural selfishness through the discipline of the state. By contrast, Rousseau, in his idea of the noble savage, sees man as naturally good yet corrupted by social institutions. Burke disavows both extremes. As man is not innately good he does not suffer from the regimentation that falls to him while living in community, under the governance of laws. In fact, without society and upon his own man lacks the ability to develop and perfect his personality. At the same time, not being totally, and naturally, depraved, too much social regulation bridles unnecessarily the individuality of man. A balance is to be struck. Human nature, after all, is a product and reflection of divine intelligence. Man is an

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[43] Thoughts on the Cause of Our Present Discontents (1770), Works I:471. Contrast this with Frank O'Gorman's mistaken notion of Burke's position where O'Gorman states: "Burke believed in the essential weakness and corruptibility of human nature, in the incapacity of the average man to resolve his problems in a rational manner, in the irrelevance of most 'rational' solutions to political problems . . ." O'Gorman, Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy, p. 142.

intelligent being--being created in God's image--not simply a bundle of passions. He has the potential for good. Further, man's social or second nature, an extension of his human nature, helps make him an adaptable rather than a rigid, inflexible being. He possesses a nature of ordered proportions. Yet his nature invites uniqueness and change without dissolving into an amorphous existence that rescinds man's humanity. It combines identity in difference. Man as man has a common nature, yet each society develops uniquely, not uniformly. Again, Burke's metaphysics of change and stability, with the emphasis upon order and development, draws together the elements of his philosophy. The possibility of the passions giving way to chaos remains. For social order to prevail as is meant, man must freely choose to cooperate.

In light of man's nature as a reasoning, religious, social being, what does Burke maintain concerning the elements of human nature which help connect his metaphysical principles with his political philosophy? As previously mentioned, two crucial concepts emerge here, both being important for an understanding of Burke's philosophy of man and his political philosophy. These are the concepts of freedom and equality. Burke's thought on these concepts serves to illustrate further, in a different context, his principles of order, change and stability, and essence and nature.

Human Freedom

In this section I wish to discuss the nature of human freedom as it exists both on the personal and social level for man. My purpose is to show further how man's nature, reflecting Burke's metaphysical

principles of change and stability and of a lawfully ordered reality, comes to bear in a more specific way in his political philosophy.

Freedom for Burke is natural to man. It flows from his very nature as a reasoning being. Burke writes of "the rational and moral freedom of individuals . . . that personal liberty" that contributes so much "to the vigor . . . and dignity of a nation."[44] Man is not compelled to behave in any determined fashion. There is nothing about his nature which denies him freedom. Created to be free by God, to enjoy liberties as a social being, man is not created to be free without restraints.[45] Man's freedom is not by nature infinite, but rather finite and structured. Freedom is vital, not static.

Freedom is not simply limited by the order of the universe; rather it is secured by the same. Because of its finitude, man's intellect is limited in its range of knowledge, consequently reducing that upon which he can act. An essential thrust of fallibility is plunged into the depths of man's being. Man cannot come to know completely the entire panaroma of life which places demands upon him. Man is limited--limited in the scope of his activity and the knowledge upon which he can act. Consequently, Burke's conception of liberty is one of limited freedom. Freedom without limits and structure spells license and chaos. The theme of limit brings order to man's freedom. The Sartrean view of freedom, denying all limitation as a circumscription on being-for-

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[44] Letter to a Member of the National Assembly (1791), Works IV:49.

[45] "Liberty, too, must be limited in order to be possessed." Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol (1777), Works II:229.

itself, has no analogue in Burke.[46] Nor is a Marxian-type man, whose social consciousness is a reflexion of extant material and economic conditions, compatible with Burke's viewpoint. Instead, man has by nature a structured freedom. What about this structure?

The essence of man's freedom is structured for society. Man's metaphysical structure makes of him a being located in space and time, a structure that demands realization, not at an ideal level of abstraction, but within the historical and social moorings unique to each individual. These limits, or determinations of man's metaphysical structure, provide a backdrop which roots man and provides him order. Man is at the interstices of the physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of a reality which, though universal, are uniquely experienced as his. And these real dimensions of his life impose a boundary which does not suffocate his natural freedom rooted in rationality. Rationality structures freedom, reminding man there are limits to this uniquely human possession called freedom. Man's nature places him squarely within the social arena where, as Burke concludes, men are never totally independent of one another.[47]

Man is radically free in that his freedom is at the very core of his essence. Freedom is man's birthright, his dignity as man. It is not earned; it is a gift due him as a rational being. Speaking of

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[46] Sartre draws the following conclusion: "I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free." Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966), p. 566.

[47] First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:321.

liberty, Burke states his belief

> that all men who desire it, deserve it. It is not the reward of our merit, or the acquisition of our industry. It is our inheritance. It is the birthright of our species. We cannot forfeit our right to it, but by what forfeits our title to the privileges of our kind. I mean the abuse, or oblivion, of our rational faculties . . .[48]

This freedom, with its potential for excess, is mediated on the social plane, becoming what it is meant to be, a social freedom. This is not an unnatural abridgement of what is otherwise an absolute freedom, but it is the necessary requirement for the realization of man's essence. Man's social interdependence is a condition of his fulfillment and, in another jargon, his self-actualization. Here, the continuity of man's essential nature affords the backdrop for his development as man; while retaining his essential sameness, man's existence expresses itself dynamically.

One finds in Burke a positive and negative thrust to man's freedom. Freedom is positive in that it is rooted in man's nature as a rational being, conceiving alternatives, capable of acting upon them. Burke states, "I shall always, however, consider that liberty as very equivocal in her appearance which has not wisdom and justice for her companions . . ."[49] Freedom is negative in that man is quite limited both in intellectual endowment by the limits of time and space, and the historical constraints of his social situation. I have already noted

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[48] Edmund Burke, Letter to Mons. Dupont (October 1789) in Louis I. Bredvold and Ralph G. Ross, eds., The Philosophy of Edmund Burke: A Selection from His Speeches and Writings, p. 71.

[49] Reflections (1790), Works III:409.

the warning of Burke when this positive thrust of freedom recognizes no bounds. The unlimited nature of freedom-in-itself leads to an overthrow of the vital structures of man's social life.[50] Freedom must be curbed not only as a condition of man's social existence, which is the province of political philosophy, but the notion of a structured, ordered freedom is central to his philosophy of human nature.

The fusion of the themes of limit and the unlimited--of freedom according to one's nature and absolute freedom--find their analogue in the twin features of Burke's metaphysics, stability and change. Stability, permanence, and continuity of one's nature--all of these echo the theme of limit, while change echoes that of the unlimited. The universe as orderly underscores the theme of restraint, moderation, or limitation. On this point Canavan quotes Burke thus: "'I love order so far as I am able to understand it . . . for the universe is order.'"[51] The universe is order, yet order can be threatened by its opposite, disorder. In the political realm disorder prevails when freedom is admitted without limit. Burke warns of "the spirit of freedom, leading in itself to misrule and excess . . ."[52] For Burke, freedom in its unbridled form spells chaos. He warns that to make freedom a gift "only requires to let go the rein . . ." Yet he continues by emphasizing that true freedom demands tempering "together these opposite elements

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[50] Ibid., p. 276.

[51] Burke to the Archbishop of Nisibi (December 14, 1791) in Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, p. 19.

[52] Reflections (1790), Works III:276.

of liberty and restraint in one consistent work . . ." and this requires "deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind."[53]

From this the following conclusions emerge. First, freedom in itself is unlimited and potentially destructive if not checked by some restraining limit. Second, the extreme of limitation and restraint without freedom is equally destructive. In this vein Burke states, "It is better to cherish virtue and humanity by leaving much to free will . . . than to attempt to make men mere machines . . . The world on the whole will gain by a liberty without which virtue cannot exist."[54] Third, freedom and restraint, the unlimited and limited, are best brought together in a tempered harmony. The universe reveals a clash of opposites which may be reconciled on both the physical and political planes of existence. Burke reminds the French that under the old regime they "had that action and counteraction which, in the natural and in the political world, from the reciprocal struggle of discordant powers, draws out the harmony of the universe."[55]

Co-active principles of reality such as the limited and the unlimited are perennial in metaphysics. The most fundamental Pythagorean doctrine was, as Kirk and Raven note, "the ultimate dualism between Limit and Unlimited, . . ." principles which "underlie the whole universe."[56]

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[53]Ibid., pp. 559-60.

[54]Ibid., pp. 368-69.

[55]Ibid., p. 277.

[56]G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts (Cambridge: The University Press, 1969), p. 229.

From this pair of opposites the principles of the limited gives rise to the good, while the principle of the unlimited is represented by the answering evil according to the Pythagorean table of opposites. Limit therefore, includes that "unity, rest, goodness and so on," Kirk and Raven state.[57] Such specific metaphysical considerations are missing from Burke's philosophy, but the themes of limitation, restraint, liberty, and structured social freedom echo the metaphysical principles of the limited and unlimited. The need for restraints on man's freedoms is not simply a capitulation to his social condition, but is imperative for human nature.

True enough, man is possessed of a reasoning capacity, but man's passionate nature too often chafes at the controls of reason. Yet these very controls channel the passions of man in a way that lends harmony both individually and socially to man's being. For Burke the potential metaphysical rupture at the heart of man is the very secret of man's success as man. The unlimited thrust of the passions and the spirit of freedom desire and seek fulfillment in the just rule of reason. As Burke points out, society demands the subjugation of the passions; such a subjugation is a condition of his social existence and such an existence is the natural realization of man's nature.[58]

What has been said about freedom as a part of Burke's philosophy of human nature applies universally to man, entailing an essential, natural equality between men. Understanding Burke's theory of equality

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Reflections (1790), Works III:310.

is a key to furthering our grasp of the metaphysical foundations of his political philosophy.

Human Equality

Man as man is born equally into society, and from this common social bond a rich variety of differentiation emerges, a process which is pivotal for the growth of society. If metaphysical speculation ignores or denies this process of differentiation, then the purpose of metaphysics--to make known the principles of reality--is truncated, and metaphysics fails its goal. Metaphysics cannot falsify or obscure reality; rather it must reveal reality. A false metaphysics, which reduces us to a contrived egalitarianism, such as the Jacobins perpetrated, cannot for Burke be permitted.

At certain levels of reality men share natural equality, at others a natural inequality. In terms of equality, men all share in a common nature, possessed of reason, having a natural tendency toward society, and under the governance of the law of nature.[59] Though the rudimentary endowments alluded to in this list are shared by all, the degree to which they are possessed varies sharply. So it is acknowledged as true, and as a fundamental tenet of Burke's theory of equality, that all men are born equally. One way in which this equality is made manifest is their equal subjection to the pre-existent natural law of which God is the source. But again, inequality emerges, as not all men are actually, nor by design, meant to be fused together in a monotonous similarity. How does a natural equality on the level of a common human

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[59] *Tract on the Popery Laws* (1766), *Works* VI:323.

nature give way to a natural inequality? Does the apparent discrepancy occur at two different levels of existence? In order to answer these questions we must first consider Burke's treatment of men's rationality as it relates to equality.

It is true that all men possess the ability to reason. It is just as true, however, that the ways individual men have cultivated their powers of reason, or the ways in which they have corrupted or abused reason, result in a permanent alteration of one's nature. Sound reason, Burke maintains, is a condition of a virtuous life. To live without reason is to invite the madness of a mean and wretched existence.[60] Such a life may not completely annul man's basic human nature, but it does degrade him. Moreover, a life of intemperance and immoderation, where all reason and lawfulness are disavowed, leads to the loss of freedom and to personal enslavement. Burke writes, "It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters."[61] In short, men must "put moral chains upon their own appetites . . ."[62] Man's experiences permanently affect the kind of person he is. Here we see that man's

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[60] Letter to a Member of the National Assembly (1791), Works IV:24.

[61] Ibid., p. 52.

[62] Ibid., p. 51. Use of the metaphor "chains" makes virtue sound, indeed, like an arduous task. Interestingly enough, a recent author, Isaac Kramnick, argues that Burke himself had to employ severity over his own passionate nature, and that his battle with latent homosexuality threatened continually to disrupt his own psychic stability. Isaac Kramnick, The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977).

social or second nature impinges upon and affects without essentially altering his human nature.

So we have equality with inequality. Circumstances may affect the natural equality that prevails between men through their possession of a common nature. This is not to say that circumstances alone alter a natural equality. Men naturally vary in abilities. Circumstances, conjoined with man's exercise of his abilities, permanently enhance or diminish him. Whatever these actual variations--some men being more dexterous of hand, others of mind--it is natural for men to manifest a variety of abilities. There is, quite obviously, the superior and inferior in nature and in society. A simple levelling of conditions, a uniformity of experiences, an equalization of social conditions, would not, and should not, eliminate this natural inequality between men. Why is this the case?

A levelling of social conditions to obtain a social equality is not only utopian idealism, but it defies a natural inequality realized in the order of nature itself. For Burke, the notion of contract as linking something subordinated to a superior, the idea of the natural order of things requiring each of us to occupy a definite place in the hierarchy of nature, is conveyed in his following remarks:

> Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place.[63]

Not only does the physical, natural order of things find

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[63] Reflections (1790), Works III:359.

itself linked and ordered to the rest of nature, but so does the moral and social world. We are naturally and fruitfully subordinated by convention and by nature one to another, giving evidence of a proper and fitting social inequality. How else could true politea be obtained save that some should lead and others follow? It is the natural condition of man, society, and physical reality itself to be interdependently related to some distinction of rank or chain of being that superordinates some things and subordinates others. And, for man and society, such conditions help achieve the common good. A condition of social inequality, not arbitrary or capricious, but one consonant with a natural and moral order brings an inequality "which the order of civil life establishes as much for the benefit of those whom it must leave in a humble state, as those whom it is able to exalt to a condition more splendid, but not more happy."[64] It is not only just but necessary for there to be a hierarchical arrangement for society. This hierarchy should not be one of increase in privilege and status alone, but one where higher status brings increased social responsibility.

Just as reality possesses an ordered diversity, a hierarchy of being, there likewise is a social grading that in part reflects the needs of society and the condition of men. Burke recognizes an ancient order in society that assists individuals in knowing their station and consequent duties. He writes: "Our country is not a thing of mere physical locality. It consists, in a great measure, in the ancient order into which we are born . . . The place that determines our duty

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[64]Ibid., pp. 279-80.

to our country is a social, civil relation."[65] It is the existence of this order that structures change and permits a purposeful development within society, achieving an equality that equally meets the needs of man as man, and man in society.[66] A social hierarchy suggests for Burke, a natural equality and inequality. That Burke's theory of equality reveals both a natural equality and inequality does not imply a contradiction within Burke's philosophy. Equality and inequality occur at two different levels. Man's natural equality occurs at the level of his humanity. All men share in those singular qualities which make them men. Yet their humanity bears in its essence those very qualitites which lead to their natural inequality.

Man is by nature a social being. His human nature is expressed in a social nature which flourishes and realizes itself uniquely in each person. It is the Jacobins who go awry, led by their falsely construed metaphysics, to seek an equalization of conditions among men, thinking thereby that they serve some metaphysical imperative.

Who are these Jacobins? For Burke, they are those who

> . . . resolved to destroy the whole frame and fabric of the old societies of the world, and to regenerate them after their fashion . . . As the grand prejudice, and that which holds all the other prejudices together, the first, last, and middle object of their hostility is religion.[67]

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[65] Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:167.

[66] Johnson remarks, and Burke would concur, "that order cannot be had but by subordination." James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, p. 382.

[67] A Letter to William Smith on the Subject of Catholic Emancipation (1795), Works VI:367. Francis Canavan writes that "during the French Revolution, anyone who criticized the existing order in the name

The Jacobins err both in terms of their theories of equality and of liberty. In their championing of the natural rights of men, they posit what for Burke is that infamous state of nature where all men equally possess liberty. They assume, forthwith, it is the nature and mandate of government to liquidate all inequalities in order to unleash this primal state of equality amid a putative state of natural liberty. Whoever the Jacobins were and whatever their philosophy could be, there were basic tendencies to their thought that became conceived in the extreme in Burke's mind. A spirit of radical egalitarianism was one of these tendencies. This desire to reduce all levels of society to a basic equality, this compulsory equalization tendency of the Jacobins, could only have squalid results. Burke notes that from the movement toward egalitarianism

> a perfect equality will, indeed, be produced,--that is to say equal want, equal wretchedness, equal beggary, and, on the part of the partitioners, a woeful, helpless, and desperate disappointment. Such is the event of all compulsory equalizations. They pull down what is above; they never raise what is below; and they depress high and low together beneath the level of what was originally the lowest.[68]

Soren Kierkegaard likewise expresses a fear of this levelling

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of 'the rights of man' was a Jacobin to Burke." This imprecise use of a term to lump together all of one's opponents in such a complex event as the French Revolution may appear to be intolerable to some. Canavan argues that this should be no "cause for surprise. Burke was not a scholar, but a practising statesman, and neither by profession nor by temperament was he inclined to make distinctions among ideas all of which he regarded as dangerous to society anyhow." Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, p. 106. I believe this explanation is quite lame. Carried to its extremes it should suggest that not even a monarchist keen to the excesses of the regime and anxious to see alterations to secure the substance of monarchy could voice his dissent lest he fall under the vague rubric of "Jacobinism."

[68] Thoughts and Details on Scarcity (1795), Works V:142-43.

process in terms of what it would do to the individual. Obviously, Burke also feared that the very force that was to free the individual from social servitude, namely the spirit of equality, would be that very force that reduces the individual to an indistinguishable number among the teeming masses of the state. But Kierkegaard and Burke differed in another respect concerning the levelling process. Kierkegaard writes in The Present Age,

> No society or association can arrest that abstract power, [the process of leveling] simply because an association is itself in the service of the leveling process. . . . The abstract leveling process . . . is bound to continue, like a trade wind, and consume everything.[69]

Burke does not believe that all association results in the annulment of the individual, Kierkegaard's prized existential category. To associate in society is basic to human nature. What is not basic to human nature for either Burke or Kierkegaard is to lump mankind together without distinction as to position or station in life.

The speculative thinker who fails to see a natural inequality and diversity between men is one blinded by misconceived social theories. In the Reflections Burke opines that:

> the ancient legislator would have been ashamed that the coarse husbandman should well know how to assort and to use his sheep, horses, and oxen, and should have enough of common sense not to abstract and equalize them all into animals without providing for each kind an appropriate food, care, and employment, whilst he the economist, disposer and shepherd of his own kindred, subliming himself into an airy metaphysician, was resolved to know nothing of his flocks but as men in general.[70]

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[69]Soren Kierkegaard, The Present Age in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (New York: The Modern Library, 1946), p. 262.

[70]Reflections (1790), Works III:477.

To treat all men alike as if there are no differences between them, is an error. Consider the area of employment. Burke holds that while all honest occupations are worthwhile and deserving of the state's respect, not all are honorable. For to claim a position as honorable, he remarks, is to "imply some distinction in its favor."[71] But some occupations are servile in nature. To consider men employed in these occupations of equal rank with truly honorable occupations is to be "at war with nature," rendering in fact a false equality.[72]

The spirit of equality, of course, serves as a convenient ideological weapon against the monarchy and nobility because, if men were indeed equal, then the social differences between them demands a justification nature does not provide. There are differences between men which are a result of prevailing social conditions. But these differences are not unnatural; it is not unnatural for there to be gradations within society. "Some decent, regulated pre-eminence, some preference (not exclusive appropriation) given to birth is," Burke writes, "neither unnatural, nor unjust, nor impolitic."[73] It may be quite fortuitous for some men to receive noble parentage while others do not. The refinement that comes with such a noble birth--or at least Burke hoped such refinement would follow--attests to the welding of man's two natures together making for a real difference. Without this inequality society cannot exist and man's social nature and his very existence goes wanting.

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[71] Ibid., p. 296.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., p. 299.

The question is whether or not the levels of society, the variety of social classes, harmonize together to make for a healthy social entity, in pursuit of the common good, allowing each man an arena within which he can perfect himself.

The metaphysicians who incur Burke's wrath are those who in their efforts to equalize instead pull down the scaffolding of society and mankind with it. Burke condemns these levellers thus, and with them singles out a false metaphysics of equality:

> They have attempted to confound all sorts of citizens, as well as they could, into one homogeneous mass . . . They reduce men to loose counters, merely for the sake of simple telling, and not to figures whose power is to arise from their place in the table . . . The troll of their categorical table might have informed them that there was something else in the intellectual world besides substance and quantity. They might learn from the catechism of metaphysics that there were eight heads more in every complex deliberation which they have never thought of . . .[74]

False theories of equality attempt to do the impossible, imposing an equality on men, removing all differences between them, opting for masses over classes. All of this continues to underlie the fundamental distinction between Burke and the Jacobins on the nature of society. For the latter, as Burke viewed them, society is a convention, an artifice which constricts the natural freedom of man. Being artificial, hence unnatural, the social differences that exist within society do violence to man's nature. The rule of one class over another imposes a hegemony by convention that does not obtain in a state of nature where man is naturally free. This constitutes a restatement of the dilemma which remains at the very center of Burke's controversy with

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[74]Ibid., p. 478.

the Jacobins, a controversy which Burke's metaphysics seeks to overcome.

Burke holds that the legitimate and natural social inequalities, such as those found in class distinctions within society, are conducive to the common good. He writes "that every such classification, if properly ordered, is good in all forms of government, and composes a strong barrier against the excesses of despotism, as well as it is the necessary means of giving effect and permanence to a republic."[75] As a buffer against despotism and a buttress to a sound republic, social classes and the distinctions they entail are necessary to a nation. Furthermore, a hierarchy of social classes does not suppress those who should lead, nor elevate those who should follow. Instead, such suppression results from the levellers of society, the enforcers of equality, such as the revolutionaries in France. They would, Burke states, "lay low everything which had lifted its head above the level," and while attempting to level, fail to equalize.[76] Burke maintains that

> In all societies, consisting of various descriptions of citizens, some description must be uppermost. The levelers, therefore, only change and pervert the natural order of things; they load the edifice of society by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground.[77]

I believe that Burke rightfully recognizes that social order demands some manner of social inequality through class distinctions. Yet in his efforts to stem the revolutionary fervor which he identified with the

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[75]Ibid., pp. 478-79.

[76]Ibid., p. 475.

[77]Ibid., p. 295.

Jacobins he skirts too easily the poverty and unnatural inequality that prevailed in eighteenth century France. While one can argue that the urgency of the revolutionary threat and what it portended for England forced him to ignore a balanced and dispassionate assessment, this is not sufficient justification for the student of his thought to dismiss an imbalance in his critique of the French Revolution.

For Burke, there is a class of people, the aristocracy, who provide natural leadership for a nation. Primarily, one is a member of his class by birth. The aristocracy and its position is ensured through hereditary wealth and the disproportionate share of the nation's property that belongs to them. Burke writes that "the power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself."[78] Among the duties of leadership belonging to aristocracy is "to be employed as an administrator of law and justice, and to be thereby amongst the first benefactors to mankind."[79] Society should protect and preserve the aristocracy in this role while aristocracy should offer principled direction for the nation, tapping the vast reservoirs of wisdom that tradition has delivered intact to society. And it is this natural leadership which reflects the dictates of reason over passion, of man's higher nature over his lower nature. It is an inequality that is equitable for it reflects the nature, not only of man, but of an ordered universe whose order is the design of the

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[78] Ibid., p. 298.

[79] Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:162-77.

Creator himself.

The metaphysical elements of Burke's philosophy discussed in Chapter Three are reflected in his philosophy of God and human nature, liberty and equality. Burke's thought on God and man sustains the thesis of a developmental conception of reality, one that is not essence-free. The metaphysical principles developed in Chapter Three find a ready application to the political concepts of liberty and equality. Liberty assists man in realizing his essential nature in becoming what he potentially is. His choices, to be truly free, are made according to what is consonant with his nature. Concerning equality, we see Burke's disavowal of any movement toward egalitarianism that would violate the hierarchically structured nature of reality. Each thing has its place and its purpose, including man. Burke's view of reality discloses a lawful and purposive design, forming an important element in the fabric of his metaphysics. The elements of teleology and natural law as they pertain to Burke's metaphysics are our next concern.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE METAPHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF TELEOLOGY AND NATURAL LAW

It is necessary in this final chapter to accomplish several objectives. To begin with, a brief review of the argument to this point for a Burkean metaphysics is in order. Next, the elements of teleology and natural law in Burke's metaphysics will be presented in such manner as to demonstrate the basic connection with the previous elements examined. Finally, concluding remarks in support of my thesis, including some criticisms of Burke, will be offered.

Recapitulation of Burke's Metaphysics

Burke's metaphysics is one of order. The two main features of this order are change and stability. Order is realized in the physical and moral natures of things as they are bound in an orderly hierarchy linking both the visible and invisible world. Such an order is achieved by bringing into harmony change and stability, which of themselves are in opposition. To bring change and stability into a unity requires reason. Divine providence provides this reason, bringing about the harmony of things in such a way as to preserve the freedom and dignity of man. Consequently, the tendency of things to remain what they are, yet to change and improve, demonstrates the dynamic, developmental character

of reality.[1] Reviewing, order is desired and ordained by God, revealed in physical nature, human nature, and society alike. Order is grounded in and sustained by the essential nature of the various existents throughout reality, both in isolation, interrelationship, and in reality as a whole. Yet this order is not static, but developing, tending toward the perfection of each thing.

The existence of order does not impede development or improvement. Both man and society are perfecting, not perfected. The principle of improvement received attention earlier, as did that of analogy. Man, society and physical nature can all be improved. That possibility exists, and is to be sought, although complete realization of the nature of things or beings is not to be expected. Such is the nature of reality that its essential structures sustain a dynamic, not static, order. John Wild makes the following comments, including a quote from Kierkegaard, which are pertinent to this discussion:

> Action and existence are never found without structure and essence. . . . Man possesses no unlimited freedom, and determinate law is not opposed to the limited freedom he possesses. As Kierkegaard himself pointed out: '. . . without law freedom simply does not exist. . . . It is the law which gives freedom.'"[2]

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[1]Copleston in similar fashion characterizes Aquinas' understanding of the world as featured by "permanence and change." He writes that Aquinas

> presents us with a changing and a developing world. . . . This aspect of Aquinas' metaphysics, namely the presentation of a world combining permanence and change . . . presents an abstract theoretical picture of a developing universe which has at the same time sufficient permanence and intelligibility to make knowledge possible.

Here development and change are combined without loss to permanence and, in Aquinas' metaphysics, to essential structures. Copleston, Aquinas, p. 105.

[2]Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism, p. 197, and Soren

Burke's philosophy, with its acknowledgment of change as the first law of nature, attests to the accommodation in his thought of both essence and existence, structure and action. The same proportion of essence and existence is maintained by the features of stability and change. Yet speculative reason, through abstraction, fastens initially upon essences. It is the tendency of the intellect, as Wild notes, to abstract essences with comparative ease. "When separated from existence in this way, they are viewed as a system of universal, timeless, inactive objects bound together by necessary logical relationships."[3] Burke's thought reflects an existentialist thrust through its recognition of the significance of change for man, through its appreciation of man's actual circumstances, and through the importance of history for the understanding of man. Thus, while not himself an existentialist as the term is technically applied today, Burke does place importance on the fact of existence, and on its living, dynamic qualities. To exist fully in the social realm is to be what one is by nature and to fulfill one's station in life, to accomplish one's duty and to have an opportunity for happiness.

Also, God's creative, designing role, giving man a nature which is rational, emotional, and social, has been presented in Chapter Four. God imparts his image to man and creation reflects God's will to order. Harmony, moderation, temperance, the restrained appetites and the

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Kierkegaard, Works of Love, tr. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 32-33.

[3]Wild, p. 3.

will of man and the actions of the state are to be submitted to reason. Yet this reason is expressed not simply through the reasonings of individual men, but through the ancient living wisdom contained within the customs, traditions, manners, and laws of a nation. The world as ordered and seeking order is an intelligible expression of its divine creator.

The existence of an orderly universe as harmoniously expressed through the interplay of change and stability gives structure to a dynamic, developmental, social reality. Order is achieved in the social realm through an existing, changing society, the essential structures of which steer society from chaos and ruin. The structures of society are in part secured through the purposes for which society exists. Both human nature and society possess a telic quality, each having a proper end according to the essence of each. Yet their essential structure possesses a telic nature. Order does not exist for the sheer sake of order, neither does society exist for its own sake as if devoid of purpose.[4] Both the order of the universe and of society possess a teleological element. It is this telic dimension of Burke's metaphysics that constitutes our next concern.

From a consideration of the teleological aspects of his philo-

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[4]The image of Burke that predominates is generally that of the unflinching defender of monarchy and traditional society as in the case of the French Revolution. What is overlooked is Burke's attacks on the status quo, not in its essence, but in its excesses. This was so in his critique of the East India Company under Warren Hastings, and the violence and arbitrary authority exercised and tacitly condoned by the government against the native people of India. Burke was a staunch defender of American rights and the rights of Irish Catholics as well, positions not taken to curry favor from the status quo. Nevertheless, these were position consonant with Burke's principled politics.

sophy there is a coherent movement to the natural law elements of Burke's thought. For it is the natural law that, in a principled and general way, helps reveal to man's reason the goals and patterns to be sought in his social activity, acting as a final court for the activity of men and nations alike. And together, both the teleological and natural law elements of Burke's thought will serve to further illuminate the metaphysical basis of Burke's political philosophy.

Teleology

There is an end or goal for which things exist. In realist metaphysics this has been spoken of as final causation. God creates for a purpose, not capriciously. Consequently, the universe as God's creation is purposive. Mention has already been made of the role of divine purpose in history. The divine purpose is manifested in the telic nature of man and society. Thus, it is necessary to consider the teleological dimensions of Burke's thought, especially as they pertain to his political philosophy.

For Burke the aim or telic quality things possess reflects the objective order of reality. The purpose of one's life or of a civilization is not simply what any person or collectivity determines it to be.

For Burke the aim or telic quality things possess reflects the objective order of reality. The purpose of one's life or of a civilization is not simply what any person or collectivity determines it to be. It is in the order of things that all creation should by its very nature be created with a purpose. This purpose is not simply the

expression of an epoch or moment in the historical unfolding of reality. Teleology, therefore, is an element of Burke's metaphysics because it concerns the purposive nature of creation as ordained by God.

Reality is not simply a random or even lawful mechanistic interplay of parts. Embedded in the essential structure of things is the purpose for which things exist. This purpose is not experienced in isolation, where each being somehow fulfills its design in ontic, monadic autonomy from all the rest. Things exist in interaction and interplay. Society, for example, is not simply what we experience today. It is a living social body. Burke writes,

> Society is indeed a contract. . . . It is to be looked on with other reverence. . . . It is . . . a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.[5]

What <u>has</u> been is part of what <u>is</u> today. It is constituted by an intricate and vast network of relationships connecting the customs and mannerisms from the past, with the interchange of peoples past and present in a bonded unity. This unity does not simply exist; rather, it exists for a purpose. The purposive quality of its being may or may not be realized. A nation, comprising an organic unity of constituent parts, is informed and infused in its essential core with a reason for being. This reason exists within it and before it urging it to growth, development, and change. The ideal of its growth, the felicity of the parts and the whole, is achieved in degrees. Yet the nation has a reason, and reality has an end.

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[5] <u>Reflections</u> (1790), <u>Works</u> III:359.

There is a two-fold aspect to this telic quality of reality. As an aim for existence and a goal to achieve there are both transcendent and immanent aspects of existence. The telos for human nature and its natural expression, society, transcends man in a dual way. It does so in that the purpose for man's existence is ordained by God. As the cause of man's reason for being, this telos transcends man as residing in God. This constitutes its ideal component. Man, fallible by nature, an admixture of both good and evil, will never in this life become fully what he was created to be.[6] There can be no utopian expectations indulged by man while being true to his condition. Man cannot become in this life what God eternally conceived him to be. The second aspect of the transcendent quality of man's purpose resides in the ideal to be aimed for. The ideal of human nature, being an ideal which transcends what reasonably can be obtained, entails for Burke the subordination of the passionate side of man's nature to his reason. Burke claims that "the passions give zeal and vehemence. The understanding bestows design and system. The whole man moves under the discipline of his opinions."[7]

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[6]Burke notes the ignorance and fallibility that attends human nature when he writes that those forefathers who helped, over the course of time, give shape to the British constitution "acted under a strong impression of the ignorance and fallibility of mankind. He that had made them thus fallible rewarded them for having in their conduct attended to their nature." Reflections (1790), Works III:562.

[7]Second Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796), Works V:361. As Wilkins notes, for Burke man's nature is hierarchically arranged, with the will and appetites subordinated to his reason. Wilkins, The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy, p. 105.

An immanent aspect also reveals itself. Both man and society actually possess the potential to improve and to more nearly achieve their own essential purpose here and now. It is reasonable to seek the fulfillment of one's nature, a nature that reveals the telos of one's being. And the ability to become what one potentially is constitutes a fundamental aspect of what the essence of a thing is.

Burke's metaphysics, therefore, has a teleological component. The pertinent aspect of this point for Burke lies not in the realm of cosmology, but in his understanding of man and society. First, I shall consider the telic quality of human nature, and second, that of society. This should serve as another link between Burke's metaphysics and his political thought.

In examining human nature Burke concludes in a very early writing that "man is made for speculation and action; and when he pursues his nature he succeeds best in both."[8] The end of human nature is twofold: the discovery of truth and activity aimed toward the common good. This twofold end of human nature is best stated through contrasting the end of the speculative philosopher and that of the philosopher in act. In the realm of speculation, only truth will suffice. As noted earlier, the speculative philosopher's purpose is to mark the end of government, whereas the philosopher in action is concerned with the proper means to those ends. For Burke, both the speculative and practical side of human nature serve a purpose in the realization of the individual and society.

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[8] H. V. F. Somerset, ed. A Notebook of Edmund Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 86.

It is not any truth or any good that perfects human nature. Man is obliged to submit to the truth and choose the good which is consonant with the natural order of things. This order binds the entire universe together into one integrally linked "eternal society." Burke speaks of

> . . . the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures each in their appointed place. This law is not subject to the will of those who, by an obligation above them, and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law.[9]

This unity is found in nothing less than the natural law.[10] Man perfects his nature only when he acts in accordance with the law of nature. To elevate one's will over nature's law as ordained by God, Burke considers folly. Burke writes, "We may bite our chains, if we will, but we shall be made to know ourselves, and be taught that man is born to be governed by law; and he that will substitute <u>will</u> in the place of it is an enemy to God."[11] God has placed all natures, Burke reminds us, in their appointed places, in proper relationship to one another.

For Burke, if it concerns man or his affairs, the question is "Does it suit his nature in general?--or does it suit his nature as modified by his habits?"[12] This indicates that the standard of human

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[9] <u>Reflections</u> (1790), <u>Works</u> III:359.

[10] I shall consider this further in the second portion of this chapter.

[11] <u>Speech on Impeachment of Warren Hastings</u> (February 16, 1788), <u>Works</u> IX:453.

[12] <u>Speech on Reform of Representation of the Commons in Parliament</u> (1782), <u>Works</u> VII:97.

endeavor is itself human nature, not in abstraction, but as it actually is realized in society.

In speaking of man's nature "as modified by his habits," Burke is referring to man's second or social nature. The imperative of his rational social nature to seek a prudential, virtuous happiness in in society finds its realization in the particular, contingent moment of this lived-world. This emphasis upon the actual, concrete world of the here and now underscores the existential thrust in Burke's thought. His political philosophy is not utopian, or abstract in character, charting some ideal view of man and his destiny. His political thought is conditioned by the present moment, ripe with all the dilemmas, anxieties, and joys that this spells. Burke would agree with John Macquarrie that "man is temporal through and through."[13]

This realization of one's nature requires both the social context which supplies the conditions of man's fulfillment, and liberty and virtue as the proper way to realizing one's telos. It is necessary to consider in more detail the purpose civil society provides for man.

Civil society exists for the express purpose of providing man with the means and conditions of enjoying his natural rights. This, for Burke, is the "ultimate purpose of civil society."[14] But man has no right inconsistent with virtue, especially prudence. Rights must be consistent with nature. Burke states, "Men have no right to what is not

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[13]John Macquarrie, Existentialism (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1976), pp. 220-21.

[14]Tract on the Popery Laws (1766), Works VI:333.

reasonable and to what is not for their benefit."[15] It is a social purpose and not an expression of bourgeois individualism which is implied by Burke's mention of "natural rights." The rights of men in society are not absolute, demanding fulfillment without qualification. Rather, "the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights."[16] Man does not renounce certain freedoms to obtain the security of group affiliation; instead, the freedoms man possesses are social freedoms, not freedoms antedating some mythical entry into society through a social contract. Burke does not maintain a social contract theory of society. The individual is not prior to society, nor is society simply an artificial construct of man. Instead, man is born into society. True, society is a convention, hence an artifice of man. But "art is man's nature."

The Jacobin view of society is antithetical to a teleological conception of society. The Jacobins tend to elevate the individual and his desires above that of the state. They insist on enumerating lists of rights as a check list for governments to meet. Society becomes subservient to man. Burke's use of terms like "natural rights" illustrates his concern for society as a living, growing organism, and man's duties and obligations to the same. These duties, if fulfilled, make for a happier society both in the whole and in its parts than would otherwise be the case. Consequently, civil society is natural to man; more than that, it is demanded by man's nature in order to attain the purposes and

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[15] Reflections (1790), Works III:313.

[16] Ibid., p. 310.

ends for which it exists.

In this regard, as Peter Stanlis notes, the state as the political expression of society is a divine instrument for man's social salvation.[17] The state has a moral purpose: to facilitate the perfection of human nature. The political arrangements of the state exist for social ends, and "it is a moral and virtuous discretion," Burke advises, "which keeps governments faithful to their ends."[18]

In concert with the utilitarians Burke aims to make "government pleasing to the people." But there is a standard for bringing pleasure to the people, one that towers over gratifying their changing fancy, that standard being "the limits of justice."[19] His notion of justice will be shown later as part of the argument for natural law as a component of his metaphysics.

Elsewhere the purpose and aim of man and society is further marked off by Burke, so marked as to reveal the telic nature of reality as a component of Burke's metaphysics. Teleology as an element of his metaphysics further underscores the reasonableness and the intelligible structure of reality. When speaking, for instance, of Parliament he declares it to be "a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole--where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the gen-

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[17] Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law, p. 210.

[18] Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians (1792), Works VII:42.

[19] Edmund Burke, An Address to Bristol in Defense of the Catholic Question in R. Hoffman and P. Levack, eds., Burke's Politics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 146.

eral reason of the whole."[20] The end to be sought for society is that of the common good, wherein individual man finds the fulfillment of his personal good. And the common good which is man's end both individually and corporately is a reasonable end. It is reasonable in that it is conceived and willed by God, and that it meets the rational, social, and emotional needs of man and society.

Man's telos as included in the common good entails a choice. Man must exercise the freedom that is essentially his. The exercise of that freedom must be lawful and must be in accordance with virtue. Man's telos is a moral one, and virtue must mark the path toward its realization. What is the telos of liberty and virtue? What purpose does liberty serve, taking virtue, especially prudence, as a guide?

Liberty aids man and society in perfecting their nature. To be deprived of liberty is to be reduced below the level of one's humanity. Liberty is not the exclusive province of any class of society. Liberty, Burke writes, "is the portion of the mass of the citizens; and not the haughty license of some potent individual, or some predominant faction."[21] For order to prevail in society, liberty must exist. Society cannot long prevail without liberty and order. And since society is the condition for "the perfection of which [man's] nature is capable," where liberty and order do not obtain, society becomes divided against itself.[22] Without order and peace the common good, through the virtuous

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[20] Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll (1774), Works II:96.

[21] Letter to Richard Burke, Esq. (1793), Works VI:390.

[22] Reflections (1790), Works III:448.

state, cannot be achieved. Burke is not simply speaking of happiness. Happiness is more likely to come to the good man than the bad; it is more likely to be a permanent staple of his life that the transitory, futile pleasures of the corrupt. But happiness is not the final end of our existence. We are first of all obliged to a life of virtue, the achievement of our station in life, the meeting of our obligations, and the courageous commitment to those we love and to those, in our own peculiar condition, life has, by her providential hand, placed in our company. Our lives are filled with all manner of duties, yet these same burdens make for a meaningful, fructuous life, and lend to the cohesiveness of the community. We are at liberty to do good, and that which we do is not counted good unless freely chosen. We choose our social bonds because they affirm our essential humanity.

Liberty does not spell chaos. Rather, liberty, conjoined with virtue, is at the basis of society. Burke explained himself on this point to the electors of Bristol prior to his election from that city: "But the liberty, the only liberty, I mean is a liberty connected with order: that not only exists along with order and virtue, but which cannot exist at all without them. It inheres in good and steady government, as in its substance and vital principle."[23]

Why does liberty require order? Wilkins provides an answer stating that for Burke "man is not wholly rational," therefore, he needs both "social discipline and self-restraint."[24] This may sound like the

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[23] Speech at his Arrival at Bristol (1774), Works II:87.

[24] Wilkins, p. 112.

medicine of the intransigent conservative, one who seeks only the preservation of the current order, whatever the price. Such a vision of Burke does not stand up against a close reading of his Works or scrutiny of his life. Recalling that Burke was a Whig, a member of the Rockingham opposition, should be sufficient to remind us of the struggle continuing between the Crown and Commons as pursued by the Whigs. Burke stood shoulder to shoulder with Charles James Fox in his qualified opposition both to the imposition of Grenville's Stamp Act in America and the war being waged against the colonies.[25] Also, he pushed hard for the economic reform of the civil list and, in doing so, forfeited his own potentially vast emoluments that would have accrued to him as Paymaster general, an office he acquired when the Rockingham Whigs came to the head of the administration. Burke's politics appear at one moment revolutionary and at another moment reactionary. Regardless, his principled politics are evident in his conception of an ordered social liberty. And virtue, mothering, preening, assisting in the flowering of liberty, through her discretionary comportment sees to the fidelity of government to its designs.

Burke values virtue as conducive to the perfecting of human nature. The spirit of all virtue is the spirit of moderation. It is a powerful, ordering, virtue whose rein within society makes for a firm, cohesive social structure. "Moderation . . . is the virtue only of

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[25]I say "qualified" in that for America and Ireland he wished them both to remain within the Imperial rule of Britain. This was not simply for a jealous protection of colonial hegemony, but because he felt the strong tradition of liberties vouchsafed to the British peoples best be preserved within the umbrella of British heritage and protection. Other enemies, Burke feared, loomed to confront a disjoined empire, especially France for Ireland.

superior minds. It requires a deep courage, and full of reflection, to be temperate when the voices of multitudes . . . passes judgement against you."[26] Burke perhaps could not help but recall his own position on the French revolution even at the expense of long time Whig associates who were dismayed by his stance on this matter. They believed the revolution reflected Whig principles. Burke saw many aspects of this monumental event which did not square with his view of politics, Whig or otherwise, not the least of which was the overthrow of the monarchy and the notion of universal sufferage. These were immoderate positions that broke much too radically with French traditions, which threatened, in the extremity of the change urged, to overthrow the essence of the nation itself.[27] Consequently, as a restraining, moderating principle, virtue in man helps to preserve the nature of things, being, as it is, lawful in its essence.

Liberty is essential to morality. Burke had grown in his despair over the path of civilization after a long and rather futile fight over the East India Company followed so closely by the havoc

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[26]Edmund Burke, Letter to Mons. Dupont (October 1789) in Louis I.Bredvold and Ralph G. Ross, eds., The Philosophy of Edmund Burke: A Selection from His Speeches and Writings, p. 38.

[27]Burke's social and political relationships became most strained during the period of the revolution. Carl B. Cone, a recent biographer, writes that "It was about this time that he began making himself socially disagreeable, disrupting private gatherings by his passionate attacks upon the Revolution. Whether at a meeting of the committee on Johnson's monument or at the Club, Burke made himself unpleasant." Carl B. Cone, Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the French Revolution (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1964), pp. 302-3. It seems that often Burke was incapable of restraint and moderation, virtues which play so vital a part in his philosophy, reflecting his metaphysics of order.

reeked in France, all of which combined to cloud his optimism concerning the future of an ordered, social freedom. Still he knew what liberty was and what it was not, and he did not fail to note its relationship to morality, as he did in the Reflections: "In some people I see great liberty indeed; in many, if not in most, an oppressive, degrading servitude. But what is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is a folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint."[28] Here liberty, the freedom that belongs to man, reveals its lawful, social, reasonable quality. It also reveals the ever present danger of evil which demands the restraints on our passions to preserve order. How does man's fallible nature and the problem of evil effect the ends of society?

Burke's philosophy of man prevents a facile philosophical optimism about society. If the purpose of civil society is the perfecting of human nature, then there is much in the very heart of man to obstruct this occurrence. Man is a fallible creature--not totally depraved, yet marked with imperfection. No plans of government, regardless of the care with which they are drawn, will be enough to overcome man's inherent fallibility. Man's fallibility impedes the desired progress of nations. Burke indicates that all we can do is to make sure things don't come to worse, given the imperfect ways of man. This does not call forth gloom or despair. Though no utopian, Burke does see the real possibility of improvement, but for every step forward there is the risk of two steps backwards. Yet the good is within reach, leading Burke

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[28] Reflections (1790), Works III:559.

to write that "there is nothing that God has judged good for us that He has not given us the means to accomplish, both in the natural world and the moral world."[29]

What is the good spoken of here? It is not simply the will of the people expressed at any moment in history. Rather, it is the will of the people expressed within the identity they have achieved through deep ancestral linkeage with the generations and wisdom of the past. Burke states, "The Constitution of a country being once settled upon some compact, tacit or expressed, there is no power existing or force to alter it, without the breach of the covenant, or the consent of the parties."[30] The will of the people is an outgrowth of all the nation is and has come to be. Furthermore, their will must not abrogate their nature. Instead, it must be compatible with the natural law, and natural law is itself a metaphysical category in Burke's thought.

Natural Law

Recent writers on Burke have recognized the classical natural law foundation of Burke's political philosophy.[31] There is not, however, unanimity among current scholars on the importance, if any, of the natural law for Burke. Among those current writers who continue to place Burke in the utilitarian camp and dismiss the natural law as an important element of his philosophy is Frank O'Gorman. O'Gorman considers Burke's

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[29] Speech on the Plan for Economical Reform (1780), Works II:357.

[30] An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791), Works IV:162.

[31] The works by Canavan, Wilkins, and Stanlis mentioned throughout this study are most prominent.

references to, and use of, the concept of natural law as being "usually a polemical technique."[32] O'Gorman maintains that Burke is too suspicious of abstract ideas, too unsystematic in the elucidation of his thought, and too pragmatically concerned with the pressing political events of the day to give articulation to the concept of the natural law.[33]

It is my contention that the concept of the natural law is an integral part of Burke's metaphysics and therefore foundational also to his political theory. I will show that the natural law or law of nature is a law reflective of God's will and justice. Additionally, it is necessary to show that the principles of the natural law reflect both an abiding and changing aspect, making it the same law, yet universally applicable in all historical epochs and societies. Furthermore, the natural law is reasonable, and as a reflection of God's being, it is a part of the objective structure of reality and, at least in its essence, capable of being apprehended by the human mind. As opposed to O'Gorman, I maintain that Burke does not have recourse to the notion of the natural law for sheer polemical purposes. Rather, this concept is a crucial component of his metaphysics.

First, an overview of Burke's philosophy of law is in order to better comprehend his natural law position. An early work of Burke, the Tract on the Popery Laws, sets out what he takes to be the basis of law.

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[32] O'Gorman, Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy, p. 19.

[33] Ibid., p. 13. For a more detailed critique of O'Gorman's interpretation of Burke and the natural law see the present writer's review of O'Gorman's book. Joseph Pappin III, "The Case Against Burke," Modern Age: A Quarterly Review 19 (Fall 1975):431-32.

The Tract was written in response to the conditions of Catholics in Ireland at the time. Throughout this work his arguments are grounded in a natural law conception of human nature. In this work Burke identifies two requisites for the establishment of the law: first, a competent authority, able to declare and, when necessary, modify the law; second, a constitution, equitable in its essence, which the authority shall have the right to make binding on its citizenry.[34] If these comprise the requisites of law, what makes up the foundation?

For Burke, "there are two and only two foundations of law; and they are both of them conditions without which nothingcan give it any force: I mean equity and utility."[35] Continuing, Burke writes: "With respect to the former [that is, equity,] it grows out of the great rule of equality, which is grounded upon our common nature, and which Philo, with propriety and beauty, calls the mother of justice."[36] Equity is justice grounded in natural law, whereas

> The other foundation of law, which is utility, must be understood, not of partial or limited, but of general and public utility, connected in the same manner with, and derived directly from, our rational nature: for any other utility may be the utility of a robber, but cannot be that of a citizen, the interest of the domestic enemy, and not that of a member of the commonwealth.[37]

As the two foundations of law, both equity and utility are derived from "our rational nature." Equity and utility make certain

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[34] Tract on the Popery Laws (1766), Works VI:321.

[35] Ibid., p. 323.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

that the law is grounded in the natural order of things. This order imposes certain duties and secures certain rights for man, for the source of both duties and rights is, as Canavan notes, "The objective, divinely founded moral order. . . ." Canavan continues, "The most basic moral obligations thus rest upon the metaphysics of a created universe and are the source of all subsequent and subordinate obligations . . ."[38]

Equity, then, signifies a common, rational nature, equally shared by man. Equity ensures in society the real rights of men. Burke sees these rights as the advantages that life in civil society can offer him, and the rights men have of living by law. The equitable society does not view man as simply an individual claimant for personal freedoms and rights. Rather, it sees all men in a partnership with one another, each having equal rights. But as equity is grounded in the nature and order of things, it must likewise express a recognition to the order and distinctions among men. Consequently, Burke records, "In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things."[39] All rights must be consistent with virtue, especially prudence. Ultimately, rights are to be checked against the standard of reason and to what benefits man and society in conformity with nature.[40]

Two points are worthy of note. First, the order of things, an order reflecting reason, grounds Burke's notion of equity. This order as

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[38]Francis Canavan, "Burke on Prescription of Government," The Review of Politics 35, no. 4 (October 1973):458.

[39]Reflections (1790), Works III:309.

[40]Ibid., p. 313.

a ground provides continuity to the varying historical expressions of equity, expressions, prudently rendered, which afford an application of rights and law befitting the changing circumstances. Ruth Bevan notes that though "all men have equal rights before the law," due to the multiple differences in talents and activities of persons, "equal compensation cannot be expected. Otherwise the indolent and the industrious must therewith be given equal dividends."[41]

When we turn to utility, the same ground is discovered as that for equity, namely "our rational nature." Although the touchstone of utility is our common nature, utility does not allow a uniform application in all circumstances. Law can be adjusted with considerations to what has utility for a nation, yet that utility cannot detract from the "substance of original justice."[42]

Turning from the foundations of law, we find that there is a law prior to any human law which itself is permanent.

> We are all born in subjection,--all born equally, high and low, governors and governed, in subjection to one great, immutable, pre-existent law, prior to all our devices and prior to all our conveniences, paramount to all our ideas and all our sensations, antecedent to our very existence, by which we are knit and connected in the eternal frame of the universe, out of which we cannot stir.[43]

This is an unmistakable reference to the natural law to which everything that <u>is</u> must ultimately submit. In that we are all subject to it, there is equality. In that we comport ourselves with it, there is liberty.

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[41]Ruth Bevan, <u>Marx and Burke: A Revisionist View</u>, pp. 123-24.

[42]<u>Tract on the Popery Laws</u> (1766), <u>Works</u> VI:323.

[43]<u>Speech on Impeachment of Warren Hastings</u> (February 16, 1788), <u>Works</u> IX:455.

When we violate its precepts we can no longer shelter ourselves in it, but must reconcile ourselves to it.

All human law possesses, as was anticipated earlier, a telic quality. Burke claims that the "law is a mode of human action respecting society."[44] This activity, as for the activity of individuals themselves, must be governed by the eternal rules of equity. Whatever the law, one thing particular is required of it: all law must be made for the common good.[45] This, indeed, was the major thrust of Burke's concern as he wrote the Tract. The Catholics constituted the majority of the population of Ireland, although the country was ruled by the so-called Protestant Ascendancy, a ruling faction who had successfully curried the favor of the British Crown. It was the goal of the faction to stop at nothing short of totally extirpating Catholicism from Ireland. Two methods were being employed within a legal framework. One method implied the other. First, penal laws were written to punish even the practice of the Catholic faith. Second, laws were written barring all Catholics from holding any public office. On a purely visceral level, this constituted a radical violation of Burke's sense of justice. On the level of principle, it violated all rules of law, forever etched in the eternal framework for all law: that is, the natural law.

Burke maintains that no faction of a community, especially a minority, can legislate in its own interest particularly when this legislation renders an injustice to the rightful interests of the majority.

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[44] Tract on the Popery Laws (1766), Works VI:323.

[45] Here the telos of law is that of human nature as well.

This underscores his position that the essence of law requires that it exist for the common benefit: "Partiality and law are contradictory terms."[46] The type of "partiality" Burke has in mind is the type that does violence to the pre-existent law, that is, the natural law. There can be a *just* partiality, one that benefits the social order, one that enhances virtue and liberty, in short, a partiality which reflects the natural order of things.[47] This point is confirmed by the following statement Burke makes concerning the economic reform of government: "Law, being only made for the benefit of the community, cannot in any one of its parts resist a demand which may comprehend the total of the public interest."[48] Implied within this remark is a justification of the partial curtailment of the individual's liberties if it is in the interest of the whole.

It is in the order of things that certain privileges and concomitant obligations are due to each station of society, from aristocrat to peasant, and that these privileges and obligations are dissimilar. Burke affirms this when, as noted above, he writes, "All men have equal

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[46] *Tract on the Popery Laws* (1766), *Works* VI:325.

[47] Concerning the social order, Plamenatz writes, "Burke suggested that God, working through men, had made it what it was." Plamenatz, *Man and Society: Political and Social Theory*, I:433.

[48] *Speech on the Plan for Economical Reform* (1780), *Works* II:329. In this passage Burke goes on to suggest an important criterion for all law, stating that "no law can set itself up against the cause and reason of all law." And before this he says that "if the barriers of law should be broken down, upon ideas of convenience, even of public convenience, we shall have no longer anything certain among us." This should help to show that human laws seek the good of the people when ultimately gauged against the most fundamental law of nature and not simply the will of the people as voiced at any particular time.

rights; but not to equal things."[49] But it is not in the order of things that law should grant a liberty to one faction of society that would destroy the liberties of another, nor that this destruction should be in such manner as to decimate the common good. Here, the principles of right embodied in the natural law allow us to discriminate concrete instances of threats to the common good.

Burke maintains that it is absurd to find a rule of justice in constitutions, or to believe "that laws derived their authority from the statutes of the people, the edicts of princes, or the decrees of judges. If it be admitted that it is not the black-letter and king's arms that make the law, we are to look for it elsewhere."[50] From where and from whom, then, are laws derived? Burke identifies a superior law the principles of which no subsequent law can abrogate, and "which it is not in the power of any community, or of the whole race of man, to alter. I mean the will of Him who gave us our nature, and in giving impressed an invariable law upon it."[51] Not only is the law of God superior, but its extension appears to reach all spheres of law, even down to the laws of business. In an essay which contains his philosophy of economics Burke warns us not to break the laws of commerce because in doing so we break the laws of nature, and thereby, the laws of God.[52]

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[49] Reflections (1790), Works III:309.

[50] Tract on the Popery Laws (1766), Works VI:322-23.

[51] Ibid., p. 322.

[52] Thoughts and Details on Scarcity (1795), Works V:157.

Only God is above the law, not as being outside the law, but as the source of all law. The law itself is an expression of God's being. Thus, God is the supreme metaphysical principle as the cause and foundation for all other principles and of all reality. It is in his abiding, unalterable nature that one of the two chief principles we have identified, stability, receives its ground. And the natural law, itself as an element of Burke's metaphysics, likewise finds its source and ground, as Burke notes, in the existence of God.

We see in this chapter a further elaboration of Burke's metaphysics through the components of teleology and natural law. Reality as created is not mute and mechanistic in its substance. Rather, it is purposive, giving evidence of design. And there is a natural law, the principles of which the human mind can apprehend. These additional components of Burke's metaphysics complement the ones already elaborated. Both the telic nature of man and the laws governing his existence demonstrate a sameness and continuity throughout man's history. Yet the ends for which man exists are realized in unique ways in concert with the singular moment of his historical epoch. The laws governing his existence, coming as they do from the creator, are constant in their principles yet flexible enough to find a fresh application to the changing social situation in which each new age is thrust.

General Conclusion

The main goal in this study has been to demonstrate that Burke's political philosophy is grounded in a realist metaphysic, one that is basically consonant with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

It is necessary, first, to see if our goal has been realized, and second, to offer some critical remarks concerning Burke's position.

Not only has it been demonstrated that Burke's political philosophy is indeed grounded in a metaphysical realist position, but further, it has been shown that no adequate understanding of Burke's political thought can be achieved apart from an understanding of his metaphysics. Without grasping Burke's underlying metaphysical base, one might mistakenly conclude him to be an empiricist or utilitarian. In large part the thrust of this work has been to make explicit the implicit metaphysical core of Burke's political thought.

Burke's political philosophy is grounded in a metaphysics that discloses order. This order reveals itself to man through experience. Our experience of reality is an experience of a vital, developing reality, where change is in constant evidence. The reality with which Burke most concerns himself is the social and political reality of his day. Change in the political realm is a vitalizing, renewing force, but a force that is structured by abiding elements in the realities of the social and political realm. And this fabric, giving evidence of order by way of the elements of change and stability, reflects and expresses nature itself and the designs of God. Consequently, if we were to synthesize Burke's metaphysical elements of change and stability as revealed in his political thought, we would speak of the resultant notion of orderly development. Change, growth, development--all must take place, but within the framework of order.

Burke's metaphysics does not ratify a static world of changeless essences where becoming is short-changed for being. Rather, in this

finite, mutable world man's existence is most properly realized by and through his becoming. In Burke we see a primacy placed on existence, existence in the concrete, historical, and social conditions which subject man's essential human nature to the particularities and modalities of his existence as a social being. Indeed, for Burke man is being-in-the-world.

Burke in no way falls prisoner to an abstraction. It is this wariness of abstractions and of an abstract metaphysics that thrusts his politics into the concrete world of actual experience. Here, man's longing for freedom is not an ideal to be pined for. It is rather to be achieved within his own time, in response to the traditions, customs, and historical developments that have helped shape the character and nature of the citizens of a nation. Man is a social being. Man's freedom, individual rights, and duties are realized in the context of society.

Lingering confusions in Burke's thought have nevertheless led to misunderstandings of his political thought. These could have been largely obviated if Burke had not recoiled from making explicit his implicit metaphysics. Such is the wording of so many of his individual tracts and speeches as to make the content ambiguous and misleading. Burke's thought has suffered at the well-meaning hands of his interpreters for the very fact that he refused to be more than the "philosopher in action." The advent of the French Revolution and the need to advance in a more specific fashion the latent underpinings of this thought caused works as the Reflections on the Revolution in France to be more philosophical in tone and content. How else was he to counter the penchant for theorizing that fueled and spawned so much of the French political

thought that so evoked his wrath?

Perhaps we have pointed up some characteristic differences inherent in the French mind as opposed to the English. The former seems more given to ratiocination apart from any experiential basis, whereas the English mind is highly imbued with the empiricist tradition. And Burke, the Irishman, is quite English in this regard. The empiricist aspect of his thought, however, does not evolve into the sort of empiricism of a Locke or a Hume. The youthful appropriation of the classics, being Burke's early fare in Trinity College, Dublin, was never to be lost to him. His knowledge of Aristotle, Cicero, and other classical authors is apparent in his writings, and studies indicate a grounding in the "scholastic tradition of medieval Christian Aristotelianism."[53]

Nonetheless, we cannot make of Burke what he was not. He was neither a metaphysician nor a scholastic, but his political philosophy is grounded in and gives solid evidence of an Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical orientation. Yet, for whatever reason, Burke's thought is impeded from achieving that clarity and cutting edge which could have been his if he had attended, in greater detail, to the philosophical foundations of his political thought. To do less was to invite the metaphysics he assigned to the French to have full reign in revolutionary times.

One must at the same time retain a perspective on what the political philosopher may desire and what the facts of the matter are for him. Edmund Burke was, in his time and to his own mind, a politician,

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[53]Canavan, The Political Reason of Edmund Burke, pp. 202-3.

not a political philosopher. Only the disarray and chaos that surrounded him forced him to articulate a philosophy he himself had, in the main, appropriated from the living tradition of the perennial philosophy.

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