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RATIONALISM, NATURALISM, AND CONSERVATISM

Daniel Kaufman
Southwest Missouri State University

§1. Liberal Rationalism and Conservative Naturalism

Many conservatives¹ have liked to distinguish their approach to politics from that of their liberal counterparts by pointing to their differences on the question, *how ought we to go about determining social and political arrangements?* For liberals, the fundamental starting point of politics is *reason*, in that it is reason that determines the best (i.e. the most just) social political structures. By 'reason' is intended some combination of deductive and inductive procedures, which are applied to general principles concerning justice and the human good (principles themselves arrived at through rational means). Political systems are thus to be constructed in the manner of scientific theories, edifices, or other deliberately created entities.²

This renders comprehensible the liberal's preference for the *social contract* tradition in political philosophy, according to which the authority³ of government rests upon an implicit *agreement* that we all have with one another to live together in a civil society and to commonly submit to governmental power. This agreement is based on an understanding of what life would be like in a hypothetical state of nature, a state in which neither civil society nor governmental authority exist: presumably such a life would be significantly *worse* than life within civil society and under government, so our mutual agreement is warranted on the grounds of rational self-interest.⁴

The conservative takes a dim view of such a theoretical approach; he believes that abstract reasoning, when applied to politics, tends to produce monstrosities rather than justice.⁵ This is due, in part, to the fact that conservatives think reason more inherently fallible than their liberal counterparts.⁶ But it also stems from a more substantial conviction about the very nature of civil society itself. Society, the conservative believes, is *not fundamentally a construct*, and is thus nothing like a theory, edifice, or corporation. Instead, civil society, like the family, is a *natural* extension of individual human life.

Family structure is natural rather than constructed in that the needs and sentiments which produce it occur *naturally* in human beings. The love and affection that men and women feel for each other, when combined with their deeper biological instincts, cause them to couple. The children that are the result of this coupling find themselves bound in various ways to their parents; these bonds are the result of both the extended period of vulnerabil-

ity that human children experience and the feelings and affections that emerge between them and their parents. The *authority* that parents exercise over children and the *duties* that each have to the other have their source in nature as well: “Father” and “mother,” “son” and “daughter,” are not constructed roles, and neither are the duties and obligations that they entail.⁷

According to the conservative, civil society is very much like the family and quite *unlike* a corporation or other voluntary association, in that its existence is a natural necessity and the relations that obtain between citizens and between citizens and their government are themselves, like familial relations, grounded in natural human needs, dispositions, and sentiments.⁸ As is the case in the family, leadership in the civil society must rest in some form of *natural aristocracy*. This need not suggest a monarchy or other form of nobility, but only a conception of *meritocracy*; one that acknowledges that some are better at governing than others and that these people will and, indeed, *ought* to govern.⁹

For conservatives, *history*, *tradition*, and *custom*, not reason, are the most reliable guides to the best social-political arrangements. This would seem to make sense if we accept the underlying claim that civil societies are not made but inherited and operate not according to rationalistic principles but rather, according to the complexities and vicissitudes of nature. For, “the tried and the true,” those social-political structures that *have flourished*, will be revealed in history and codified in tradition.¹⁰

These differences regarding human nature and the relationship of the individual to the community also entail differences between liberals and conservatives as to the ultimate *aim* of civil society. The contractual conception supposes an essentially *appetitive* human being, whose main imperatives are to satisfy and preserve itself. The primary aim of the liberal civil society is thus the *protection of rights*. In contrast, for the conservative, civil society is not something that we choose to construct in order to protect our interests, but rather is something that we need to fulfill our nature. For human beings are not only naturally social for all the reasons just discussed, but are also naturally disposed to *virtue*, and virtue is fulfilled through public acts. Thus, the primary aim of the conservative civil society is to *provide a stable and orderly environment*, in which both human life and character can flourish.¹¹ On the basis of these differences between the liberal and conservative conceptions of the individual and his relationship to the society, the conservative describes his politics as derived from Classical Antiquity and attributes liberal politics to Enlightenment thought.¹²

It will be my contention that this manner of distinguishing conservative and liberal politics is a mistake for conservatives: first, because it is based

on an overly simplistic and misleading conception of the history of ideas; second, because history, tradition, and custom cannot replace speculative reason in political philosophy; third, because to abandon speculative reasoning in politics is to undermine the core ideological content of conservatism. But making these arguments will require a better understanding of the relevant history of ideas, and it is to this that I turn next.

§2. Historical Roots

To be fair to our conservative, it is a standard tale that liberal politics has its roots in the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment; specifically, in two conceptual shifts which brought the history of ideas out of the Middle Ages and into the Modern Era. The first had to do with the understanding of nature and the second involved the role of reason in the attainment of knowledge.

The Scientific Revolution was fundamentally a *mechanical* revolution; it replaced the teleological conception of nature that had dominated Western thought from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages with one that construed the natural world as mechanical rather than purposeful. With the elimination of teleology in nature taken as a whole came the elimination of teleology in *human* nature.¹³ If, according to the classical paradigm, the human soul is always pointed towards the life of virtue, a view which renders human life as consisting in a series of choices to act in the direction of virtue or vice, modern naturalized man is essentially a machine, a creature of physical inclinations and appetites, whose behaviors are governed by the same mechanical forces that govern all physical bodies.¹⁴

It is also commonly thought that the Scientific Revolution elevated reason as a mode of knowledge above authority and tradition. Historically, Western attitudes on the efficacy of reason in the attainment of knowledge have been rooted in both the general levels of confidence in humanity that have obtained and in the prevailing conceptions of the inherent intelligibility of nature. In both Classical Antiquity and the period spanning the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Western civilization rated each of these variables at high levels. The difference between the two lay predominantly in the *construal* of the conceived intelligibility of nature: for the classical mind, it was intelligible because teleological; for the modern mind, it was intelligible because mechanical. But the common theme is that human reason is in principle capable of comprehending an inherently comprehensible world. This was an attitude that had been lost through much of the Middle Ages, in which the prevailing idea was that human reason is *incapable* of comprehending what is an inherently *mysterious* world. On such a view, the primary modes of knowledge are authority and tradition, rather than reason.

The modern confidence in the power of reason to comprehend the fundamental principles of nature is reflected in modern philosophy's preoccupation with *methodology*: since human reason has an infinite capacity for understanding and since the natural world is an inherently intelligible place, the only obstacle to a *total* human understanding is method.¹⁵ The universality here is not intended rhetorically; this becomes manifest in the Enlightenment, when reason is most spectacularly directed beyond the study of the natural world and into the realms of morals and politics. If tradition and authority are ill-suited for scientific understanding, grounded as they are in nothing but a generally low esteem of the species and a fallacious conception of nature, then is it not also the case that they are ill-suited for moral and political understanding? If clarity and totality of knowledge are to be achieved in natural science via rational investigation, then must not the same be true for moral and political science? Thus are we brought to the doorstep of liberal political theory and the social contract thought-experiments.

Although this story has been exhaustively rehearsed, it contains both distortions and points of illumination which, once revealed, undermine the overly tidy view that the roots of conservative politics lie in the classical and high medieval traditions, while liberal thought traces its origins to the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment. For although the conservative's conception of the nature and aims of civil society may find a friend in classical political thought, his antipathy towards reason will not. Nor will it necessarily find a home in the medieval tradition, especially if it is associated with Thomas Aquinas, whose work on law and politics is most often cited by conservatives appealing to that tradition.¹⁶ Similarly, the liberal's rationalism rests with some discomfort on modern thought, for it is not at all clear that the enduring legacy of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment really is the triumph of reason after all. While it is true that the early modern thinkers wrote in celebration of reason's capabilities, the two greatest *late* modern thinkers, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, wrote even more persuasively *against* reason's potential as a source of knowledge.¹⁷ Indeed, if the twentieth century is any indication, it is the naturalism that Hume pioneered in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, not rationalism, which has defined modernity, both in terms of the prevailing conceptions of human nature and the contemporary understanding of human knowledge.¹⁸

We will thus discover that the truth regarding political thought is virtually opposite that which has been the common lore. Far from the conservative political philosophy being pre-modern, it is *quintessentially* modern, for its hostility towards metaphysics and its denigration of reason

reveals its naturalism as of the Humean rather than the Aristotelian variety. It is to this connection between conservatism and modern naturalism, then, that I turn next.

§3 Hume's Naturalism and Political Conservatism

It was Hume who first grasped the full implications of the mechanical revolution in science. For while the mechanical conception of nature began with Galileo and Descartes, it was only with Locke and ultimately Hume that the understanding of *human* nature was brought into the mechanical model. Recall that while Descartes developed a mechanistic conception of body, defined in terms of the "primary" qualities of extension, substantiality, and the disposition to motion, his conception of the mind was of an *incorporeal* substance.¹⁹ The Cartesian mind is not a part of the causally determined natural world, so it is free to construct its own systems of knowledge along the lines of the axiomatic-deductive systems that Descartes so admired.

But although Descartes thus kept one foot in pre-modern thought, his primitive version of the theory of ideas opened the door to the more advanced associationism of Locke, who conceived of the flow and train of thought in much the same way that modern physics understands the movements of natural bodies. And while Locke remained agnostic on the subject of the substantiality or insubstantiality of the soul,²⁰ Hume picked up his associationism and forged a conception of human thought that was thoroughly mechanical in that it treated thought as governed *entirely* by the forces of causality. Hume recognized that the mind, if it was to be a part of nature rather than apart from it, must operate in the manner of the machine and not the *noûs* of old.

Those who have taken Hume simply as a skeptic utterly miss this thoroughgoing naturalism, which is where his real importance lies. We are thus indebted to Norman Kemp Smith, who taught us that the section on the passions in Hume's *Treatise* is the key to understanding his philosophy.²¹ For it is in the dominance of the passions in every aspect of human thought and action that the mechanical conception of man is fully realized.

Hume, in a devastating series of skeptical arguments, demonstrates that human beliefs, even in the most fundamental principles of causality, self, and material substance, ultimately stand with no rational justification whatsoever. The rationalist idea that human thought follows no rules but those of the deductive and inductive calculi is thereby effectively demolished.²² Hume replaces the rationalist picture with a thoroughly naturalistic model, a representational associationism, in which human thought and actions are ultimately the products of natural sentiments and passions, which are shaped and formed through *repetition, habit, and custom*.²³

These ideas, which are at the center of Hume's treatment of human nature, also form the core of his social-political philosophy. We've already seen that Hume thinks human beings are naturally sociable.²⁴ His opposition to social contractarianism rests essentially upon the idea that human allegiance to authority is ultimately based not in agreement, but on habit and custom.²⁵ And his low opinion of the efficacy of speculative reason, so central to his metaphysics, is also prominent in his political epistemology, and reflected in his deference to history and custom in all matters of political deliberation.²⁶ There has admittedly been some confusion on this point, and Hume is sometimes characterized as a utilitarian. This mistaken identification stems from Hume's description of justice as an artificial virtue, created for the purpose of ameliorating conflict among otherwise self-interested individuals, and his claim that human obedience to authority is based in the perception that such obedience is generally advantageous.²⁷ But Hume thinks *no* action can ever stem from a rational calculation of self-interest, and he states quite clearly that it is ultimately sentiment and not rational calculation that *motivates* and *produces* just action and obedient behavior.²⁸

The conservative philosophy that we outlined in §1 clearly represents a modern rather than an Aristotelian naturalism. While the organicism that the conservative has articulated with regard to the individual and his place in civil society may sound like the classical conception of the relationship of man to the *polis*, his antipathy to metaphysics and his conviction that history and tradition, not reason, are the fundamental guides to social and political deliberation and action are decidedly Humean, not Aristotelian. Aristotle, of course, believed that the *essence* and *telos* of man are a part of a larger metaphysical hierarchy, encompassing all of nature, and believed that they are understood through rational as well as empirical investigation. Indeed, he believed that the highest form of human life was philosophical contemplation, precisely the kind of activity that our conservative has condemned as unreliable and potentially subversive!

§3. Worries About Tradition and Custom: Prospects for a Rationalist Conservatism

It is fair at this point to ask why it is a problem that our conservative's naturalism is modern rather than classical. My answer is that there is a twofold difficulty with the conservative position as stated: first, because a rationalist approach is unavoidable in political theory, if we wish not to beg important questions; second, and more importantly, because by embracing a modern rather than a classical naturalism, much of the core *ideological* content of conservatism is undermined.

Regarding the first point, our conservative has told us that in designing social-political institutions, we must ultimately defer to history, which tells the story of our traditions and customs. But once we have considered this somewhat vague imperative, we realize that he certainly cannot mean that we must defer to *all* or *any* of our traditions and customs. Consider, for example, the following traditional Western institutions and customs: the institution of black slavery, the denial of women the franchise, and the establishment of monarchies on the basis of divine right. Clearly, no right-minded conservative would wish to base present or future social-political institutions on these traditional institutions and customs. Thus, he must believe that there is some *mode of differentiating* those traditional institutions and customs which should be followed from those which should not.²⁹ On what basis, though, could such a differentiation be made other than *speculative* reasoning concerning the good and the just? History and an understanding of tradition can tell us *what kinds* of social-political arrangements have existed prior to ours; they can tell us which of these arrangements have survived, which have died, and which have been transformed. But they cannot answer the *normative* questions as to which ought to have died and which ought to have survived, and it is the answers to *these* questions which must finally govern our current and future choices.³⁰

The conservative may want to reply that his reliance on tradition and custom in political deliberation is essentially practical or *inductive* in nature. Since history provides us with such a rich panoply of governmental and societal types, political wisdom is to be found within its pages. But pragmatic or inductive inferences regarding social-political matters still suppose some conception of 'good' or 'best'. Suppose that I refer to history, determining, after a survey of social-political systems A-K, that system G is the most likely to be successful. The question is now begged, *successful in what sense?* An answer to this question requires an articulation of social-political *values*, and history will not help us with these, since they involve 'oughts', not empirical facts. In any system of instrumental goods there must be at least one intrinsic good, relative to which the rest are the instruments. The nature of the instrumental goods may be determined empirically, on the basis observable evidence as to their efficacy in providing that which they promise, but the nature of the intrinsic good can only be determined through rational enquiry.³¹

It is rare, anyway, that conservatives of the sort we have been discussing invoke pragmatism or induction when explaining their conviction that we must defer to tradition and custom in our social-political arrangements. Most commonly, it is the *organic* quality of societies that is invoked here,

the claim being that societies and governmental systems are at risk of destruction or chaos if tinkered with or manipulated according to rationalistic schemes.³² Regardless of whether or not this is true, notice that such an answer also presupposes social-political values, namely *order* and *stability*, which cannot themselves be determined by appeal to history; history can only tell us *that* order and stability have been commonly valued, not that they *ought* be so. Thus, to embrace the historical record of traditions and customs as the fundamental guide to social and political theorizing, to the utter neglect of speculative reasoning is simply not possible. I would therefore agree with Leo Strauss that such a position “assign[s] to historical studies a much greater importance than they had ever [and *could* have ever] possessed.”³³

But there is a more devastating consequence of the conservative’s devaluing of reason than the mere fact that it leaves him with an unworkable political epistemology. The withdrawal from rational enquiry undermines what is perhaps the sole social-political aim that is common to all the various versions of conservatism: *the protection of morals and the cultivation of individual and public virtues*.

Part and parcel of our conservative’s modernism is a rejection of any notion of universals. This is revealed first in the attack on reason: for *if* he believed in the existence of universal principles of goodness and justice, he would also have to hold the view that *acquaintance* with those principles can only be through rational speculation. It is also revealed in his organicism: the conservative’s conception of civil societies as natural evolving entities (which is an integral part of his epistemological argument against the efficacy of reason in political theory)³⁴ is an implicit rejection of the idea that civil society might be an earthly imitation or approximation of an ideal order.³⁵ The conservative’s attack on metaphysics, then, must be taken as the opposite side of the coin on which his disdain for reason is stamped.

This rejection of metaphysics renders the conservative’s self-proclaimed aims for civil society and government impossible. For the idea that the fundamental purpose of government is to ensure a civil environment that protects public morals and promotes the cultivation of individual virtue would seem to require *at least* an acceptance of abstract reasoning, if not also of the existence of universals. Recall that although the natural mechanism of habituation features prominently in Aristotle’s account of human virtue (as it does for Hume), it is, for Aristotle, a part of what is only a behaviorist *pedagogy*.³⁶ Man has an *essence* that determines what is the best life for him; habit is merely the mechanism through which he is trained into that life. The determination of his essence and the identification of the character of human

flourishing require philosophical (i.e. rational) investigation,³⁷ and Aristotle’s realism about both essence and virtue are a part of a substantive metaphysics. Hume’s naturalism, in contrast, places habit and custom at the ground floor of human nature; his is a thoroughgoing, rather than a pedagogical behaviorism. A human nature beyond that describable by natural science is alien to such a view, and the notion of a “best life,” which implies a conception of intrinsic worthiness, is likewise inconceivable.³⁸

Conservatives instinctively understand the relationship of metaphysics to robust conceptions of morality and value; this is undoubtedly why so many of them derive their moral principles from their religions. And with regard to the contests that we witness in the popular culture, conservatives consistently reject the social and cultural *products* of modern naturalism, whether the theory of natural selection, the omnipresence of psychotherapy in the understanding of human thought and conduct, or the cultural relativizing of values. And yet, the *intellectual* grounds of conservatism, its anti-rationalism and opposition to metaphysics, form the very foundations of modern naturalism. In what is surely a bitter irony, then, the principles that underlie conservative philosophy provide the fuel for precisely the contemporary social and cultural transformations that conservative *people* so commonly deplore.³⁹

If the conservative is to maintain his core values, he must at least have a robust conception of speculative reasoning, so that meditation upon intrinsic values and norms is possible. At best, if he wants to connect himself to the classical and high medieval traditions, in which life in the earthly city is patterned after an eternal, universal order, he must accept not only rational speculation but also a metaphysical realism. In either case, *he must stand against modern naturalism*.

It was the Burkean reaction to the French Revolution that got everything twisted into knots. Though it is true that much of the blame for the barbarism and bloodthirstiness of the Revolution and Terror that followed it can be assigned to excessive hyperventilating about “the rights of man” and “the evils of aristocracy,” the conclusions that Burke and his conservative inheritors⁴⁰ drew from that revolution and from the theories that precipitated it were misguided. Rather than banning reason and metaphysics from political philosophy, it would have been sufficient merely to attack *those applications* of reason and metaphysics that produced the Revolution and Terror. But with this overreaction, conservatives unintentionally tied themselves to modernity and became incapable of reaching back to that past which should be their true progenitor.⁴¹

Notes

¹ Although the conservative position that I discuss in this paper is most commonly traced back to Edmund Burke, it is not limited to “historical” or European conservatism; this view has also been expressed in the work of such notable and more contemporary conservatives as Russell Kirk, Michael Oakeshott, Roger Scruton, and Richard Weaver. It is summarized helpfully in Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodward, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), Chapters 1-4 and in Jerry Z. Muller, ed., *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 1-31.

² For an outstanding conservative account of Rationalism in political thought, see Michael Oakeshott’s “Rationalism in Politics,” in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), pp. 1-36. The common identification of theories and edifices as both inherently constructed finds its clearest expression in Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method*. See René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff & Douglas Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 116-17.

³ By ‘authority’ is meant the *legitimate* exercise of power. On this idea and its relationship to the social contract tradition, see Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 28-30.

⁴ See, e.g., Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Edwin Curley, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), especially Chapters XIII & XIV and John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), C.B. Macpherson, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), especially Chapters II, III, V, & VII. It is due largely to their differences on human life in the natural condition that Hobbes and Locke have widely divergent views on what type of government is ultimately justifiable. For an importantly different view in which the moral qualities of natural- and societal-man are interestingly inverted, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*.

⁵ This is, of course, the overarching point of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, J.G.A. Pocock, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). See also, his remarks in the Preface to the Second Edition of “A Vindication of Natural Society,” in Edmund Burke, *Selected Writings and Speeches*, Peter Stanlis, ed. (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1963), pp. 52 & 53-4.

⁶ See Burke, “A Vindication of Natural Society,” p. 53. The point is also made in John Kekes, *A Case for Conservatism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 30-31.

⁷ Regarding the natural basis of our affections for those close to us, see David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd Edition, L.A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 352 (Book II, Part II, Section IV). The naturalness of such relations is, of course, hotly contested, especially by feminists and other gender theorists who argue that many of them are socially constructed.

⁸ See Hume’s “Of the Origin of Government,” in David Hume, *Essays: Moral*,

Political and Literary, Eugene F. Miller, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), p. 37. Also consider Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, pp. 31-33.

⁹ John Adams famously believed in the idea of a natural aristocracy that did not consist of nobles. See the discussion in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Eliot*, 7th Revised Edition (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1999), pp. 94-98, and also the account of the “aristocratic spirit” offered in Peter Vierick, *Conservatism Revisited*, Revised and Enlarged Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 38.

¹⁰ Kirk, in *The Conservative Mind*, p. 40, describes Burke as holding the view that “History...is the gradual revelation of a supreme design...God makes history through the agency of man.” See also, on this point, Stanlis’s discussion in Burke, *Selected Writings and Speeches*, p. 77.

¹¹ The picture of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) that emerges in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that man’s nature is fulfilled through public and political acts. There is, of course, the complication of Book X which suggests that human excellence is attained through contemplation (*theoria*) rather than through political life. With regard to this point I generally concur with Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: the Desire to Understand* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 309-320, that Aristotle regards man as a divided being, part mortal part divine, and that the life of contemplation constitutes the fulfillment of his divine nature. In the *Treatise*, Hume (p. 485 (Book III, Part II, Section II)), somewhat similarly talks of civil society “perfecting” man’s defects. On the contrast between the Ancient Greek and Enlightenment conceptions of human nature in the context of politics, see Allan Bloom, *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960-1990* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 324.

¹² The classic expression of this view is in Aristotle’s *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 37 (1253a1-10).

¹³ On this point see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 7-8.

¹⁴ For one of the best discussions of these effects of the Scientific Revolution on the view of human nature and politics, see Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 157-172.

¹⁵ This idea is expressed most compellingly in Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, p. 120.

¹⁶ Plato famously thought that reason was the only mode through which knowledge of *any* sort could be attained. This included knowledge of the Just and the Good, which is why he argued vehemently in the *Republic* that philosophers must rule in the city (pp. 712-13 (473d-e)), in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961)). For Aristotle, it is through reason that we come to comprehend the *ends* of things. It is through reason, then, that we discover that the *human* end is a life of virtue, consisting in a life of public and political accomplishment. See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 15-17 (1097b20-1098a20). And though St. Thomas held that there

were some truths that were beyond the capacity of reason to comprehend, he nonetheless also argued that much could be known through reason, even those things pertaining to God's existence and will. Equally important, he believed that the truths known by reason do not contradict faith. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book One, trans. Anton C. Pegis, F.R.S.C. (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 63-76 (Chapters 3-8).

¹⁷ Contrary to the standard historical treatment, contemporary scholars are increasingly coming to understand just how similar Hume and Kant were, especially with regard to the issue of the efficacy of reason in human understanding. The central purpose of both Hume's *Treatise* and Kant's first *Critique* is to identify reason's limits, and both philosophers identify metaphysical speculation as beyond those limits. See the discussion in H.O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), Chapter 2 and Lawrence BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 15-26.

¹⁸ I am here referring to the cognitive/behavioral theories which dominate the contemporary psychological scene and to the tradition of naturalized epistemology which has completely swept over Anglo-American philosophy in the last century. See, especially, Hilary Kornblith "What is Naturalistic Epistemology?" and W.V. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized," both in Hilary Kornblith, ed., *Naturalizing Epistemology* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988).

¹⁹ 'Primary quality' is actually a Lockean term, but Descartes already develops a rudimentary primary/secondary quality distinction in Meditation Two, Section 31 of *The Meditations on First Philosophy* and in Part 2, Chapter 4 of the *Principles of Philosophy*. For the Lockean treatment of physicality, see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Alexander Campbell Fraser, ed., Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), Book II, Chapter VIII, Section 9.

²⁰ See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p.450 (Book II, Chapter XXVII, Section 10).

²¹ See Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1949). For other accounts of Hume within the naturalistic interpretive tradition of Kemp Smith, see Barry Stroud, *Hume* (New York: Routledge, 1977) and Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism*.

²² See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, esp. pp. 155-173 (Book I, Part III, Section XIV); pp. 180-219 & 251-263 (Book I, Part IV, Sections I, II, & VI).

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-117 (Book I, Part III, Sections VIII & IX); pp. 399-407 (Book II, Part III, Section I); pp. 455-470 (Book III, Part I, Sections I & II).

²⁴ See note 11.

²⁵ Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 468-470.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 486-7. Also see "Of the Origin of Government," p. 39.

²⁷ Muller in his otherwise outstanding account of Hume's political theory sometimes sounds as if he thinks Hume is a utilitarian. See *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, pp. 31-6; 46-7.

²⁸ Hume argues that artificial virtues like justice ultimately arise out of natural human necessity (as opposed to rational decision). See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 477-484 (Book III, Part II, Section I). On the true source of our obedience to authority, see Hume, "Of the Original Contract," pp. 468-9.

²⁹ One who accepts only what is *ethical* in custom and tradition is how Vierick distinguishes the conservative from the reactionary. See *Conservatism Revisited*, p.32.

³⁰ For a powerful discussion of this line of thought, see Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 16-21.

³¹ A classic example of a derivation of the intrinsic good is found in Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd Edition, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), pp. 7-10 (First Section, 393-398).

³² See Hume, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," pp. 512-513. When Hume states that a wise magistrate may "attempt some improvements for the public good, yet will he adjust his innovations as much as possible to the ancient fabric," the question may duly be asked *in what does the public good consist, and how is it determined?* Also on this point, see Pocock's introduction to Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. xliv.

³³ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 16. [My brackets]

³⁴ On this point, recall the discussion in §1.

³⁵ Kirk, in *The Conservative Mind*, p. 20, denies that Burke is an organicist, asserting that he believes society to be a spiritual entity rather than a natural one. This would tie the conservative to the ancient and high medieval tradition that we have discussed. There is no discussion in Kirk of the idea that Burke's attack on reason and metaphysics prevents any such assimilation with these traditions.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 33-40 (1103a15-1105b15).

³⁷ Aristotle's survey of "common" and "reputable" views on the subject of the human good ultimately come to very little; it is only through reflection on the unique properties of man and a deduction of his *telos* from those unique properties that the identification of the human good with the life of virtue emerges. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-17(1097a15-1098a20).

³⁸ See, on this point, Hume's discussion in "The Sceptic," in Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 159-180.

³⁹ Consider the following from Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p.14: "By denying the significance, if not the existence, of universal norms, the eminent conservatives who founded the historical school were, in fact, continuing and even sharpening the revolutionary effort of their adversaries. That effort was inspired by a specific notion of the natural. It was directed against...the supranatural or otherworldly."

⁴⁰ There is enough disagreement over Burke's political philosophy (in part due to the fact that he offered no systematic treatises on politics and often wrote and spoke hyperbolically) that I am reluctant to attribute too strongly to him what I am calling "the conservative overreaction." But there is no question that many of those

conservatives who consider themselves the inheritors of Burke are responsible for this overreaction and for the dangerous rejection of rational speculation in political theorizing.

⁴¹ See the important discussion in Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 294-323, for an account of how Burke's attitudes about reason and metaphysics render the classical and high medieval traditions out of his reach.

Editorial Policy

Each January issue of the *Southwest Philosophy Review* contains papers presented at the previous annual meeting of the Southwestern Philosophical Society. Papers in the July issue are selected by the editor, with the advice of the members of the Advisory Board and other referees, from open submissions to the *Review*.

Comments on papers previously published in the *Review*, including papers from the annual meeting, are solicited and will be considered for publication.

Unsolicited book reviews will be considered and books for review are solicited from publishers and authors, with preference for publications by members of the Southwestern Philosophical Society.

Manuscripts for the open July issue should be submitted in triplicate and should conform to *The Chicago Manual of Style* standards with notes gathered at the end. Since papers are refereed anonymously, the author's name should appear only on a separate cover page. Manuscripts will be returned only if return postage is included. The deadline for submission for open issues is, usually, April 1, prior to publication.