

Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Modern History,
Politics, and International Relations.

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September 2015

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Previous Literature on Kirk and the Moral Imagination.....	15
Chapter One: Russell Kirk and Christian Humanism.....	22
1.1 T. S. Eliot.....	23
1.2 Christopher Dawson.....	32
1.3 G. K. Chesterton.....	36
1.4. C. S. Lewis.....	42
Chapter Two: Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination.....	48
2.1 The Nature of Norms.....	49
2.2 Epistemology or the operation of the Moral Imagination.....	59
Chapter Three: The Moral Imagination and Tradition and History.....	66
3.1 Tradition.....	67
3.2 Contemporary Criticisms of Tradition.....	71
3.3 History.....	77
3.4 American History.....	79
3.5 Historical Consciousness.....	82
Chapter Four: The Moral Imagination and Literature and the Arts.....	84
4.1 Literature and Norms.....	84

4.2 Authors.....	91
4.3 Limitations in Kirk’s Views on This Subject.....	94
Chapter Five: Education and the Moral Imagination.....	100
5.1 The Moral Imagination and the Disciplines of Education.....	100
5.2 Debates on the Canon.....	106
5.3 Educational institutions and the Moral Imagination.....	109
5.4 Kirk on Contemporary Education.....	111
Chapter Six: Religion and the Moral Imagination.....	118
6.1 The Transcendent	118
6.2 Religion as a Source of Morality.....	120
6.3 The Nature of Religion.....	123
6.4 Religion and Society.....	125
Chapter Seven: Social Associations and the Moral Imagination.....	135
7.1 The Family.....	139
7.2 Local Community.....	142
7.3 Other Social Associations.....	144
Chapter Eight: Politics and the Moral Imagination.....	149
8.1 Law and the Moral Imagination.....	149
8.2 Government and the Moral Imagination.....	154
8.3 Leadership and the Moral Imagination.....	160
Conclusion.....	165

References.....	176
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Abstract

This thesis is a comprehensive investigation of Russell Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination. It focuses especially on the nature of the Moral Imagination as integrative and non-reductionist, or what Kirk sometimes describes as illative. It explores Kirk's development of this concept as one through which the individual can grasp his fully human nature and dignity, and which makes use of all the important areas of human social interactions and all the human faculties of knowing, providing man with immersive moral knowledge and support. The thesis is significant for its unique focus on Kirk's Christian humanist influences – especially T. S. Eliot, Christopher Dawson, G. K. Chesterton, and C. S. Lewis.

The aim is to understand Kirk's attempt to develop the concept of a normative imagination that avoids reductionism in understanding man's moral life, by presenting a unified vision that neglects no important aspects of man's life, being, and social interactions. The thesis also aims to explore the norms that Kirk believes it is the purpose of the Moral Imagination to apprehend and to structure human life. This contribution is clarified through comparing Kirk's use of the concept of the moral or normative imagination to recent use of the concept by writers such as Martha Nussbaum and David Bromwich. This thesis also contrasts Kirk's vision of the Moral Imagination with the kind of sceptical conservatism exemplified in the writings of Michael Oakeshott. The aim of this comparison is to discover whether Kirk's theory of the Moral Imagination can overcome the limitations of a conservatism that rejects the role of universal norms and purposes in politics and constructs its conservatism only on the foundation of avoiding rapid and incautious change

Introduction

Russell Amos Kirk (1918-1994) was one of the leading voices of twentieth century American conservatism, with a career as a man of letters that spanned over four and a half decades. His survey of Anglo-American conservatism, *The Conservative Mind*, published at the beginning of his career, in 1953, was important in giving an identity and pedigree to the fledgling post-war American conservative movement, and was representative of his traditional, Burkean perspective.¹ Through his thousands of essays, speeches, columns, and even ghost stories and Gothic novels, Kirk championed this brand of conservatism in numerous topics and fields, from literature to education; becoming perhaps its premier American representative in the latter half of the twentieth century.² Kirk, very much the mid-Western American in some respects, was born in Plymouth, Michigan, on the outskirts of Detroit, and resided for much of his life in his ancestral mansion of Piety Hill in Mecosta, Michigan; but he also spent a considerable amount of time travelling in North America, Europe, and North Africa. His travels, for lectures and debates and for pleasure, and his career brought him into contact with many leading literary, academic, and political figures of his age, many of whom shared something of his views or preoccupations. Amongst his friends and acquaintances were ranked T. S. Eliot (about whom Kirk wrote his book, *Eliot and His Age*), Richard Nixon, George “Scom” Scott-Moncrieff, and Malcolm Muggeridge.³

Kirk began his career as an academic and writer in the years following the Second World War, the nadir of conservative and rightwing thought in America. This was a period in which New Deal liberalism and progressivism seemed triumphant in politics, society, and academia. As the liberal literary critic Lionel Trilling wrote in 1950, “In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition”.⁴ However, this time also saw the beginnings of the post-war American conservatism movement. This movement grew out of the remnant Old Right of the interwar years and included a mix of viewpoints, from classical liberals like F. A. Hayek to anti-communists like Whitaker Chambers and traditionalists like Richard Weaver. All these figures and tendencies were more or less opposed, in their various ways, to the New Deal orthodoxy of more economic interventionism and a progressive social agenda, as the Old Right had been before them.⁵

¹ Person, James E. Jr., ‘Our Captain Kirk’, *National Review*, 16th June, 2003. 47-48.

² Buckley, William. F., ‘Russell Kirk, RIP’, *National Review*, 30th May, 1994. 19-20.

³ East, John P., ‘Russell Kirk as a Political Theorist’, *Modern Age*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter, 1984). 33. And. Person, James E. Jr. (ed.), *The Unbought Grace of Life: Essays in Honor of Russell Kirk*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Publishers, Peru, 1994. 2-3.

⁴ Bradford, M. E., ‘The Wizard of Mecosta’, *National Review*, 12th December, 1980. 1513. And Vella, John M., ‘What is Worth Conserving? An Introduction’, *Modern Age*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Autumn, 2007). 339. And. Nash, George, H., *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945*, Basic Books, inc., Publishers, New York, 1976. 58.

⁵ Nash, Op. Cit. XIII-XIV.

It was in this milieu that Kirk made his arguments for the place of a Burkean, traditional conservatism in America.

At the centre of Kirk's thought was his doctrine of the Moral Imagination and the closely related idea of the permanent things, which together, as I will argue, were a background for all the central concerns of his writings. These concepts were an expression of his fundamental spiritual, philosophical, and moral beliefs and presuppositions. But what, for Kirk, was the Moral Imagination? This thesis will answer this question at length, but to give an introductory definition of this concept, we can say it represents the faculty of moral knowledge.⁶ As we will see, Kirk is not completely clear here about the exact philosophical nature of this faculty, or the degree to which it is conscious or discursive as opposed to unconscious and instinctual, but this faculty is man's means of moral knowledge and apprehension. This naturally leads to two further questions; namely, what does Kirk's proposed faculty of the Moral Imagination come to perceive or know and how does it operate in order to know or perceive this knowledge or perception?

The answer to the first question is that Kirk believed the Moral Imagination apprehends or understands universal norms or moral truths. Although Kirk does not spell out his beliefs in a systematic fashion, we can say that his idea of moral norms has two sides to it. On the one hand, he clearly believes in a transcendent, divine, and objective or realist morality which is the ultimate basis of spiritual and moral meaning and value, and is the end of the Moral Imagination.⁷ On the other hand, this universal morality is, for Kirk, immanent, intimately reflected in human nature, man's place in the cosmos, and human society.⁸ The Moral Imagination apprehends, for Kirk, in part, these transcendent norms in these immanent reflections. Indeed, because human nature and society are so important to man, human nature and social institutions properly ordered are clearly norms for Kirk in their own right, to be apprehended and understood by the Moral Imagination.

And what is more, we may also say that the correct order of human nature is one of the central ends of the Moral Imagination, whose central concern is teaching man how to bring right order to individual and society.⁹ These universal norms, transcendent and immanent, were for Kirk understood as the traditional norms of Christian and Hellenic civilisation.¹⁰ They are often called the permanent things by him, a phrase taken from T. S. Eliot, and include traditional virtues, like piety or prudence, and enduring social associations like marriage and family (especially historically rooted

⁶ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormity in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 48-49. And. Kirk, Russell, 'The Moral Imagination', in Russell Kirk, *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Panichas, George. A (ed.), Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 2007. 211.

⁷ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 20. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991. 22-38, 43, and 109-113.

⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 39-43.

⁹ Kirk, Russell, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 207-8.

¹⁰ Aeschlimann, M. D., 'Natural Law or Nihilism?', in Person, James E. Jr. (ed.), *The Unbought Grace of Life: Essays in Honor of Russell Kirk*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Publishers, Peru, 1994. 79-81.

ones), and the interactions and affections associated with them, as well as traditional (especially Christian) spirituality.¹¹

As for the way in which the Moral Imagination works, as an introduction we may say, Kirk makes it clear that it operates through a process that integrates moral knowledge taken from all important aspects of human life and society, from tradition to social associations – the sources of the Moral Imagination.¹² The overall faculty of the Moral Imagination apprehends or understands the moral knowledge of these sources through the means of all the faculties or processes that men have for knowledge; that is, not just imagination proper, but also reason, sentiment, habit, instinct, intuition.¹³ The relationship between the sources or aspects of moral knowledge and our faculties depends upon the particular source, or aspect of life and society. Kirk referred to the Moral Imagination as illative.¹⁴ He took this term from Cardinal Newman, and meant by it that the Moral Imagination drew from and integrated the inputs of all major aspects of human life with all means of human knowing.

A central, distinctive claim of this thesis is that the theme of integration and of an illative sense is spread throughout Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination. The Moral Imagination for him aims to apprehend human nature in full and thereby to allow the individual to bring order to the soul and men to bring order to society (these two, Kirk sees as connected). The concern is with hierarchic arrangement and harmony of the whole person or what Kirk refers to as normality: the former, immanent human nature reflecting the latter, transcendent norms.¹⁵ And the diverse aspects of man and society which are to be brought into order by the Moral Imagination, in accordance with human nature and universal norms, are precisely the sources and faculties of the Moral Imagination that supply it with moral knowledge. The hallmark of Kirk's concept of the Moral Imagination, therefore, is this unifying, illative quality, whose means and ends both include integrating all aspects of man. It will be the purpose of this thesis to explore this doctrine of the Moral Imagination in depth. We will aim to describe and evaluate all the main parts of the Moral Imagination for Kirk, from his notion of norms to be apprehended by it, to the sources and faculties it makes use of, to the way in which it operates as a faculty of knowledge. We will also see how this notion was important to those areas of Kirk's writing which were of greatest interest for him, like education, history, and literature.

¹¹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 55-57.

¹² Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Peru, 1988. 47.

¹³ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, Gateway Editions, Limited, South Bend, 1978. 260. And. Young, Frederick Douglas, 'Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (Winter, 2011). 286. And. Henrie, Mark. C, 'Russell Kirk and the Conservative Heart', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Spring, 2003). 20-21. And. Kirk, Russell, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', in Kirk, Russell, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things are Written On The Sky*, Regnery Gateway, inc., Washington D.C., 1987. 68-69. And. Kirk, *Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 6. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 28.

¹⁴ East, Op. Cit. 39. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 47.

¹⁵ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 39-41.

It must be said that, although Kirk explicitly makes use of Newman's term illative sense, there is a distinction between the two figures' use of the concept. Newman's account of the illative sense is philosophical. He is most interested in the question of religious faith and how it can be justified to assent to a proposition that we cannot prove completely through discursive reason. The illative sense is the incremental prods of experience, drawn from "principles, doctrines, facts, memories, experiences, testimonies", whose probabilities add up a whole bigger than themselves and which sum allows for certainty of belief and faith.¹⁶ Kirk makes use of the same illative notion of drawing from the numerous sources of man's life and society. In this sense he is continuing Newman's search for a means supplementing discursive reason. But Kirk does not attempt the same sort of philosophical explanation of his illative sense or Moral Imagination as Newman. This gets to the heart of Kirk's approach to the Moral Imagination – he is content to rely on common sense and a general outline to support his claims. This is both because he was not a philosopher but a man of letters and social commentator and also reflects his belief that reason, or philosophical argument, cannot replace the multiple sources of the Moral Imagination. Writing of Newman himself, Kirk could state that "reason does not impel our impressions and our actions; it follows them."¹⁷ Kirk's presentation of the Moral Imagination here reflects, implicitly at least, his understanding of that faculty itself and its anti-reductionism.

Indeed, the common sense nature of Kirk's treatment of the Moral Imagination is reflected in his confidence in the truth of his vision of norms and his belief that all right thinking men, nourished by healthy traditions, literature, and education will apprehend the permanent things. Kirk, in fact, was content to dismiss those who did not accept universal norms as unworthy of discussion.¹⁸ Newman, by contrast, in *Grammar of Assent*, the work in which he argues for the illative sense, is deeply concerned with the threats to faith from the rationalism and empiricism of his age, and though his aim is to justify certainty in belief in the Catholic faith, he treats the issue as more philosophically open to question and debate.¹⁹ The common sense and non-rationalist nature of the Moral Imagination are essential to Kirk's treatment of it: his goal is nothing less than reaffirming what he takes to be the permanent things, the perennial truths, of the human race.

Two of the most important influences on the moral thought and role of imagination in Kirk's work are Edmund Burke and Irving Babbitt.²⁰ Burke, an Anglo-Irish statesman, whose written repudiation

¹⁶ Harrold, C. F., *John Henry Newman: An Expository and Critical Study of His Mind, Thought and Art*, New York, 1945. 157. And. Newman, John Henry, *Grammar of Assent*, Image Books, Garden City, 1955. 270-299. And. Nichols, Aidan, John Henry Newman and the Illative Sense: A Reconsideration, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (August, 1985). 362-368.

¹⁷ Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. 249.

¹⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 47.

¹⁹ Nichols, Op. Cit. 257-262.

²⁰ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 62-65. And. Regney, Henry, 'Russell Kirk and the Making of the Conservative Mind', *Modern Age*, Vol.21, No.4 (Autumn, 1977). 341 and 343.

of the French revolution in his work *Reflections on the Revolution in France* made him one of the founding figures in modern Western conservative thought,²¹ was perhaps the most important of all Kirk's intellectual influences and the basis for much of his conservative thought. Throughout his career as a writer on politics and culture, Kirk would explicitly draw from Burke again and again. Burke featured prominently in Kirk's seminal history of Anglo-American conservative thought, *The Conservative Mind*, and he even wrote an intellectual biography of Burke.²² The influence of Burke over Kirk's thought was so pronounced that the latter was often considered a Burkean conservative.

In terms of Burke's influence over Kirk's conception of the Moral Imagination, we can see it in the very phrase itself. This phrase was from a famous passage in Burke's *Reflection* in which he describes the role of the Moral Imagination as a cloak over our purely animal nature which gives this nature dignity and allows us to see the highest qualities of human nature – those which “the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies”. Kirk quotes this passage of Burke's and states that the phrase originated with Burke. This particular passage of Burke's is located in perhaps the most famous few pages of the whole of the *Reflections*, those beginning with his description of once seeing Marie Antoinette at Versailles.²³ Kirk sums up what he feels is Burke's meaning in using this term thus:

By this “moral imagination,” Burke signifies that power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and momentary events “especially,” as the dictionary has it, “the higher form of this power exercised in poetry and art.” The moral imagination aspires to the apprehending of right order in the soul and right order in the commonwealth.²⁴

More than the name, then, Kirk also took from Burke – in part at least - the idea that private reason, rationalism, is inadequate alone to support the moral education of the individual, and must be supplemented by the Moral Imagination. And he drew from Burke some of his belief that sentiment and imagination are some of the faculties which must supplement discursive reason and help to form the Moral Imagination.²⁵ Burke himself, within those famous passages on the Moral Imagination from the *Reflections* writes:

²¹ Muller, Jerry Z., *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997. 25.

²² See Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. And. Kirk, Russell, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered*, Arlington House, New Rochelle, 1967.

²³ Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, O'Brien, Conor Cruise (ed.), Penguin Books, London, 2004. 169-174.

²⁴ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 207.

²⁵ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 34-39. And. Whitney, Gleaves, 'The Swords of Imagination: Russell Kirk's Battle with Modernity', *Modern Age*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001). 312. And. McDonald, W. Wesley, 'Reason, Natural Law, and Moral Imagination in the Thought of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter, 1983). 18

On the principles of this mechanic philosophy [that of the French Revolutionaries], our institutions can never be embodied, if I may use the expression, in persons, so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment. But that sort of reason which banishes the affections is incapable of filling their place. These public affections, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law.²⁶

Moreover, Burke seems to have been one of Kirk's influences in his view that man is necessarily embedded within a web of tradition, continuity, and social institutions and therefore must bow to the moral instruction of these, rather than rely solely on his individual reason and experience.²⁷ Burke defended tradition and prescriptive institutions against those who would precipitously change them according to their own rationalistic schemes, as well as the importance of social continuity to give meaning, purpose, and stability to the lives of men. He famously defended society as a contract between the dead, living, and yet unborn, as well as the visible and invisible, precisely because he felt society required great time and patience to achieve its ends and must look to its temporal predecessors and spiritual origins for continuity and purpose.²⁸ In these views Kirk concurred.²⁹ This is important for the Moral Imagination because it underscores the limits of man's private reason and experience to lead him to moral knowledge and is a powerful hint at man's nature as a socially and historically embedded being who must draw a lot of his moral knowledge from his life within society.

Babbitt was also one of the premier influences on Kirk's thought, including his conception of the Moral Imagination. Babbitt was an American writer, academic, and literary critic who was one of the central members of New or American Humanism.³⁰ Kirk, who first attended university just as the influence of Babbitt and the New Humanists was waning, early came under that influence. Although it was from Burke's work that the phrase Moral Imagination originally came, it was Babbitt's use of that phrase that seems to have most impressed upon Kirk the importance of this concept. Indeed, there is a good reason to think that it was Babbitt's analysis of Burke's moral imagination in the former's *Democracy and Leadership* that alerted Kirk to the importance of this concept in Burke's

²⁶ Burke, Op. Cit. 172.

²⁷ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 33-34.

²⁸ Stanlis, Peter J., 'Edmund Burke, The Perennial Political Philosopher', *Modern Age*, No. 26, Vol. 3/4, (1982:Summer/Fall). 326-327. And. Burke, Op. Cit. 169-174, 183-184 and 194-197.

²⁹ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 98-101 and 104-106.

³⁰ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 43.

thought. It was from Babbitt that Kirk explicitly inherited much of the foundations for his view of the importance of the imagination to individual conduct.³¹

Although Burke's imaginative approach to politics was clearly an early influence on Kirk's own perspective, it was Babbitt's overt vision of the imagination as a central factor in the lives and actions of man that seems to have been an ever stronger early influence over Kirk's conception of the Moral Imagination. Babbitt and the New Humanists stressed the division in man between his higher capacities and potential for reflective thought and action and his lower material desires and immediately felt passions.³² They also stressed the important role of imagination – subject to the influence of the imaginative exemplar of literature, society and tradition, education, and social leadership - in determining the mind set and actions of human beings, for the better or worse.³³

Kirk took from Babbitt, as he makes clear, this abiding belief in the division between the higher and lower aspects of man, and the necessity of moral effort and struggle so that the higher aspects dominate and bring order to the lower.³⁴ He also took from Babbitt's strong sense of the imaginative nature of man support for his belief in the importance of the imagination to regulate this moral struggle.³⁵ And he often alluded to Babbitt's notion of the idyllic imagination, which appealed to undisciplined and effortless sentimental expression as the basis of individual and social moral order.³⁶ As Kirk puts it, "With Irving Babbitt, we may call the mode of imagination represented by Rousseau 'the idyllic imagination'—that is, the imagination which rejects old dogmas and old manners and rejoices in the notion of emancipation from duty and convention....The idyllic imagination ordinarily terminates in disillusion and boredom."³⁷ Although he focused as often on what he called the diabolic imagination – that which was inspired by the perverse and obscene – Kirk echoes Babbitt's view that the imagination may be seduced by idyllic dreams in which effort and moral struggle were absent.

So, from Babbitt, as well as Burke, Kirk inherited the idea that discursive reason alone was not enough to lead men to moral thought and action. He took from Babbitt too that our moral awareness must be based in our highest human nature and that sentiment, as well as reason, can mislead when not informed by this higher self – any reductionist means of moral knowledge, rationalist or sentimentalist, is likely to lead to an incomplete moral awareness.

However, Burke's and Babbitt's influence over Kirk's concept of the Moral Imagination must not be overstated. Burke alluded to the limits of pure reason as a means of knowledge and hinted at the

³¹ Ibid. 57 and 62-65.

³² Babbitt, Irving, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Meridian Books, New York, 1959. 68. And. Ryn, Claes, 'Babbitt and the Problem of Reality', *Modern Age*, Vol. 28, No. 2/3 (Spring/Summer, 1984.). 156 and 161-162. 162-163.

³³ Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Op. Cit. 137.

³⁴ Ibid. 44.

³⁵ Russello, Gerald J., *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2007. 55-56.

³⁶ Russello, *The Postmodern Imagination*, Op. Cit. 55-57.

³⁷ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 208.

importance of sentiment and imagination as supplements to discursive reason. But he did not develop the Moral Imagination as an illative, integrative faculty of moral awareness which combines numerous processes, like reason, imagination, and sentiment, and sources, like tradition and religion, as Kirk did. Burke's writings on the Moral Imagination remain hints and impressions which later writers, including Kirk, would develop. And neither is Kirk's concept of the Moral Imagination simply that of Babbitt and the New Humanists. Kirk stressed the role of pure imagination within the Moral Imagination less than Babbitt. For Babbitt, it was especially imagination which held the balance between our higher and lower selves and imagination which was most central to moral knowledge and the Moral Imagination. Babbitt does not so strongly develop its balanced illative and integrative nature, drawing from all faculties. The influence of Burke and Babbitt on Kirk and his thought, including the Moral Imagination, has been given been explored at length by other writers, as will touch on again later in this introduction.

This thesis will therefore not repeat such an investigation beyond the essentials just mentioned, but will include a unique examination of the influences of twentieth century Christian Humanism, especially as represented by T. S. Eliot, Christopher Dawson, G. K. Chesterton, and C. S. Lewis, which has not been so strongly highlighted in the past. As we will aim to show, Kirk shared the commitment of these figures to an anti-reductionist understanding of man and morality founded upon a traditional Christian view of norms. Like his Christian humanist influences, such as C. S. Lewis, and others, Kirk implicitly and, to a degree, explicitly was strongly opposed to tendencies in modern thought and life which he felt neglected important aspects of man and society or reduced man to only a part of his inherent qualities and capacities. His view of rationalism and scientism, which he sees as ignoring such important areas of human life as religion, sentiment, and imagination, is a clear example of his antipathy to reductionism. He even refers to C. S. Lewis's criticisms of reductionism with obvious agreement.³⁸ The Moral Imagination is significant precisely because it is Kirk's attempt to give an integral and anti-reductionist explanation of human social, political, and moral knowledge, ordered around traditional, Christian humanist values, and in opposition to what he felt were modern reductionist tendencies.

The concept of and phrase Moral Imagination is one which has enjoyed a certain vogue in recent decades, being used in the work of quite a few different writers and academic. We find, for example, the theologian Alister McGrath explaining C. S. Lewis's power as an apologist partly through Lewis's awareness of the power of imagery to convey spiritual truths. He argues that C. S. Lewis saw reason and imagination as collaborative and both as important means to understand truth; in fact, that

³⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'Civilisation without Religion?' in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 11.

Lewis offered Christianity's superior ability to intuitively and imaginatively understand and fit together our whole experience of the world and ourselves as proof of its truth.³⁹

Neoconservative writer and historian Gertrude Himmelfarb has also made use of the term. She uses it in a somewhat general fashion to refer to the moral register or nexus of moral assumptions and beliefs of a culture. For example, she has written about the Moral Imagination of the Victorians, in which the problem of poverty loomed larger than in the past. This use of the Moral Imagination does imply that morality is connected to a whole edifice of images and beliefs, but Himmelfarb does not explore the Moral Imagination as a faculty in its own right.⁴⁰ And the conservative writer John Kekes has used the term Moral Imagination to refer to man's ability to understand the limits and possibilities of his life, given the particular circumstances he finds himself in. He can then grasp the consequences of actions, so that he might order his moral life according to his responsibilities and desires. Kekes develops the Moral Imagination as an important means for moral knowledge, focusing especially on this ability to imagine outcomes.⁴¹ And there have been other noteworthy recent usages of the term.⁴²

What all these usages of the term have in common is the implication that imagination has a role in human moral knowledge and action and, often, that more than narrow reason is important for the full human life. Therefore, many contemporary usages of the term Moral Imagination have these notable similarities to Kirk's usage of the term. But another way in which Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination is significant, it will be argued, is that Kirk attempts to give a fuller exposition of the role of imagination and greater understanding of the Moral Imagination as man's moral faculty than other recent and contemporary figures who have made use of the concept. It will be argued that the illative, integrative nature of Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination is a unique contribution to understanding how the emphasis on the imaginative and the insufficiency of rationalism hinted at in recent usages of the term can be turned into a fuller account of man's moral awareness. In order to undertake an assessment of this contribution, we will particularly contrast Kirk's idea of the Moral Imagination to those held by Martha Nussbaum and David Bromwich, two of the most prominent writers who have made notable use of the concept of normative imagination in recent decades.

³⁹ McGrath, Alister, 'Try Seeing It This Way: Imagination and Reason in the Apologetics of C. S. Lewis', *Religion and Ethics*, ABC Online, 15th May, 2013. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/05/15/3760192.htm>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁴⁰ See Himmelfarb, Gertrude, *Poverty and Compassion: the Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, Knopf, New York, 1991.

⁴¹ See Kekes, John, 'The Enlargement of Life: Moral Imagination at Work', *The Montreal Review*, June 2011. <http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/The-Enlargement-of-Life.php>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁴² See for example, Bates, Jennifer Ann, *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2010. And. Donskis, Leonidas, *The End of Ideology & Utopia? : Moral Imagination and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century*, Lang, New York, 2000. And. Tilmouth, Christopher, *Passion's Triumph over Reason: a History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

Bromwich, Sterling professor of literature of Yale University, known for his writings on Edmund Burke, uses the phrase Moral Imagination (which he acknowledges was first used by Burke) to refer to our imaginative capacity to have empathy with others, and especially to imagine their experiences and feelings rather than simply feel rehearsed responses.⁴³ Bromwich argues that at its highest the Moral Imagination should be the result of an act of will, a conscious effort to imaginatively grasp the moral dignity of others. This causes him to see its greatest exercise in apprehending the feelings of those people least like us and giving justice to strangers, rather than in reminding us of our duty to those like us.⁴⁴ Bromwich, in fact, sets convention and what he sees as the propensity of society to excuse and veil injustice against the Moral Imagination's alertness to such iniquity. He also sees the Moral Imagination, properly used, as an instrument of self-knowledge, one that can search out how far from the ideal one's actions are and therefore prevent moral complacency and self-deception, fed by social convention.⁴⁵

Nussbaum, an influential philosopher and writer on ancient philosophy, ethics, and liberal education, has also made noteworthy use of imagination as a moral faculty in a similar way to Bromwich. She too sees an important and potent moral instrument in imagination's ability to understand how others feel. Although she believes there is more to morality than simply being able to imagine how others are feeling (she notes the sadist might do this as well), she does describe the development of man's moral awareness as partly a process of increasing his understanding of the humanity of others.⁴⁶ Like Bromwich (though a little less uncompromisingly), she believes, therefore, that understanding the humanity of the other, the dispossessed and marginalised like women and ethnic minorities, is one of the great ends of the ethical imagination.⁴⁷ Nussbaum sees in literature and education important sources and encouragement for Moral Imagination. She discusses how literature can humanise the other and can provide powerful moral images and how education should be undertaken to introduce students to imaginative literature and to the history and situations of diverse groups and cultures, from world cultures to minority groups like women and African-Americans, which all form important chapters and topics in her *Cultivating Humanity*.⁴⁸

Kirk shares with Nussbaum and Bromwich the belief in the importance of the imagination proper in influencing man's moral understanding and action. Where Kirk's usage differs from these other prominent usages of the term is his belief that the Moral Imagination is based on more than imagination proper and the fact he emphasises the role of imaginative empathy far less than they do.

⁴³ Bromwich, David, *Moral Imagination: Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014. 7-11.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 12-17 and 21-26.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 26-27.

⁴⁶ Nussbaum, Martha, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997. 85-89. And. Nussbaum, Martha, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010. 95-96.

⁴⁷ Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, Op. Cit. 27-46.

⁴⁸ Nussbaum, Martha, *Cultivating Humanity*, Op. Cit.

Kirk instead frames the Moral Imagination, as we have seen, as an integrative and illative understanding that draws traditional, Christian humanist based moral norms from all man's faculties and all important aspects of man's social life. We will argue this is what makes his writings on the subject a significant contribution to the idea of the Moral Imagination, showing how it can help lead to a powerful, non-reductionist understanding of human moral existence.

There are certain important areas we will explore to better understand this contrast with Bromwich and Nussbaum. One area is whether Kirk's approach to the Moral Imagination is preferable to either Nussbaum's or Bromwich's in its attempts to integrate man's social associations, like family, and local community, into his moral life and balance the settled, customary, and familiar moral imperatives with those connected to strangers and the unfamiliar, thereby guarding against parochialism and over attachment whilst recognising the real moral and cultural role of these everyday social institutions. This is opposed Bromwich's marginalisation of them. A second area will require us to see how Kirk's Moral Imagination makes fuller account of all the faculties of man's moral knowledge, not just imagination, which is central to Nussbaum and Bromwich's account, but also sentiment, reason, habit, and so on. Another area of investigation will be to investigate how Kirk founds his moral vision upon a wider foundation of moral norms than the empathy for the other at the centre of Nussbaum's and Bromwich's writing about moral imagination, which makes Kirk's doctrine a more complete picture of man's moral life. Finally, we aim to show how Kirk's idea of moral understanding and norms leads to a better understanding of the moral substance of education than Nussbaum's. So, above all, we will see how Kirk attempts to take the impetuses shared by these other usages of the concept and turn them into a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of morality that marginalises or neglects no important part of man's moral life. Also through contrasting Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination to that of Nussbaum and Bromwich, we may be able to better understand Kirk's and to see valid criticisms of Kirk's doctrine that this brings to light.

In this thesis we will also aim to show that Kirk's Moral Imagination is significant because of the contribution it can make to conservative thought. Conservatism can itself be seen, in part, as a rejection of modernist reductionist tendencies, to one degree or another. Indeed, all varieties of conservatism have at least objected to what they see as a modern overemphasis on man's rationality and his ability to rationally understand and change society. Instead, conservatives have argued that man's reason is too limited to so understand society; that there is more to man's understanding of himself and others than discursive reason alone; and that man exists within a particular, historically rooted matrix of traditions, beliefs, and social associations that partly define him and his knowledge. They have used these assumptions to argue that man is not in a position to drastically overturn his political and social institutions using reason and that, rather, he should seek cautious and gradual

change, with the utmost continuity.⁴⁹ But there has long been a debate whether a conservative can and should appeal to a more extensive and universal account of human nature, institutions, and morality – such as is part of Kirk’s concepts of the Moral Imagination and permanent things - than is implied simply by his need for cautious change and established institutions.

To somewhat simplify a complex spectrum of belief, there are, on the one hand, those conservatives who are most concerned to simply defend the status quo from radical change and who shy away from more substantive claims in defence of particular institutions or beliefs. This conservatism might be called sceptical conservatism, because its foundation is scepticism of human reason, especially as concerns society and politics, and attempts at drastic or abrupt social change. This sceptical conservatism has often been attacked for lacking a positive content. This, for example, was one of F. A. Hayek’s critiques of conservatism in his essay *Why I am not a Conservative*, written partly in response to Kirk’s conservative writings and added as a postscript to his 1960 *The Constitution of Liberty*. Hayek wrote that “it [conservatism] may succeed by its resistance to current tendencies in slowing down undesirable developments, but, since it does not indicate another direction, it cannot indicate another direction, it cannot prevent their continuance.”⁵⁰ By this he means that conservatism, lacking a positive set of beliefs itself, as he thinks it does, can only slow change and not offer a new direction that can fully prevent unwanted changes. He goes on to suggest its trimming and moderating nature, if it lacks core beliefs of its own, will mean conservatism tends to drift in the direction in which social forces, especially of the left, drag it and will end up defending what it previously objected to as dangerous innovation.⁵¹

Samuel Huntington, in his 1957 article, *Conservatism as Ideology*, defines conservatism in a similar way. He claims that conservatism is essentially situational, or, in other words, that it is the defence of established institutions from threats to their legitimacy when these become significant. He claims conservatism lacks a substantive core beyond this, coming into being in particular circumstances, which determine its form and content, and then being set aside in favour of a more substantive, non-conservative ideology when the institutions it is defending are either overcome or successfully resist threats to their survival.⁵² Although in his essay Huntington is not criticising conservatism for being situational - he is defining it (and essentially endorsing one major, influential interpretation of conservatism)- it is apparent that this sort of conservatism is likewise vulnerable to the accusations of lacking a positive core and being subject to drift, as he denies for conservatism ideational content beyond the need to preserve institutions from rapid change and paints conservative movements as ephemeral and isolated responses to particular circumstances. Murray

⁴⁹ Muller, Op. Cit. 9-22.

⁵⁰ Hayek, F. A., *The Constitution of Liberty*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006. 344.

⁵¹ Ibid. 344-345.

⁵² Huntington, Samuel P., ‘Conservatism as an Ideology’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June, 1957). 457-470.

Rothbard, the libertarian economist, indeed wrote a contemporary commentary on this article in which he claimed that this situational conservatism will be at great disadvantage precisely because it lacks an ideational content or core to contrast to radical ideologies, and “men...must have some set of ideational principles with which to view social institutions.”⁵³ As Rothbard suggests, it is not clear from the sort of conservatism Huntington describes, why the conservative wishes to even defend established institutions or why the conservative would not defend all established institutions, even totalitarian or cannibalistic ones.

These criticisms of a conservatism devoted simply to opposing rapid and radical change have been repeated many times by later writers. For example, in a 2010 article for the American conservative, Notre Dame Professor Patrick J. Deneen lamented that as “conservatism defines itself relative to the current position of its more liberal opponent, it has come to occupy space that has been abandoned by a leftward-moving opposition.”⁵⁴ And Thomistic philosopher Edward Feser has made the argument that conservatism based only on aversion to rapid change, which he refers to as anti-realist conservatism, is at a disadvantage to a realist conservatism, which “affirms the existence of an objective order” of natures and principles reflected in long-standing moral and cultural traditions, specifically because the anti-realist conservative has less of a positive core of belief with which to resist ideological drift. This kind of conservative cannot appeal to any objective standards or perennial principles in changing times and must, therefore, be swept along by changing political and social ideas, adopting opinions and measures he was once opposed to.⁵⁵

Some conservatives, such as Michael Oakehott, are happy with this sort of situational or anti-realist conservatism, either because they think that more substantive principles cannot be supported or because they consider them an anti-conservative commitment to abstract ideals and philosophising. For instance, in his anthology on conservative thought, Jerry Z. Muller, specifically referencing and praising Huntington, argues for historical utilitarianism, or the defence of long-standing institutions as the core of conservative thought, and contrasts conservatism to orthodoxy, or the defence of a specific set of institutions across time and place. Although Muller does argue that conservatives tend to share commitments to certain positions, like the importance of the family and the positive social role of religion, his main analytical emphasis is on historical utilitarianism.⁵⁶

However, we will argue that these problems with sceptical conservatism are real and that Kirk’s doctrine of the Moral Imagination is significant, in part, as a means of presenting a conservatism not

⁵³ Rothbard, Murray N., ‘Huntington on Conservatism: A Comment’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3, (September, 1957). 784-787.

⁵⁴ Deneen, Patrick. J., ‘Counterfeiting Conservatism’, *Imaginative Conservative*, 19th October 2013: <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2013/10/counterfeiting-conservatism.html>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁵⁵ Feser, Edward, ‘The Metaphysics of Conservatism’, *TCS Daily*, 12th January 2006: http://www.ideasinactiontv.com/tcs_daily/2006/01/the-metaphysics-of-conservatism.html, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁵⁶ Muller, Op. Cit. 3-9 and 18-19.

beset by these problems. We will show that Kirk presents a positive vision of what is perennial for man, despite the different trappings -or institutions, customs, and beliefs - that might give expression to these norms in any particular society, to inspire and contrast to opposing belief systems. This core would include respect for strong intermediate social associations like families and local communities; support for traditional and what Babbitt referred to as restrictive virtue, or virtue that involves self-control, prudence, and temperance; respect for faith and traditional religion; acknowledgement of the importance of tradition, continuity, and prescription; a stress on liberal education and education's moral role in balancing social and utilitarian concerns; and a concern for the aesthetic and artistic and their spiritual and moral role. Much of these basic principles are reflected in Kirk's various canons of conservative thought.⁵⁷

These principles would not just give a positive core to conservative belief, but also reflect, according to Kirk, the enduring values and deepest desires of mankind, linking men to transcendent meaning and purpose and making this purpose felt in everyday life. As Kirk declares, "it is the moral imagination which informs us concerning the dignity of human nature, which informs us we are more than naked apes."⁵⁸ Indeed, a criticism of situational conservatism is that not only can it not provide a positive contrast to radicalism and liberalism, but that it cannot speak to the deepest longings of mankind.

In order to make this case we will contrast Kirk's conservative vision to sceptical conservatism. This kind of conservatism goes back at least to David Hume, and includes Arnold Gehlen and even Hayek (who, despite disclaiming the label conservative, combines sceptical conservative arguments against rapid change and a commitment to individualism and negative freedom which leaves him in an analogous position to the sceptical conservative), but it will be above all Michael Oakeshott who will be used as a representative of sceptical conservatism. Oakeshott, a twentieth century British philosopher, made a famous attack on political rationalism in his *Rationalism in Politics*, echoing a common conservative theme. Oakeshott embraced a sceptical Idealist philosophy that differentiated between experience as a whole, studied by philosophy, and modes of experience, like history and the practical (including morality and values), that approached the world from one partial perspective or context, such as the past for history or quantity for science. Modes of experience for Oakeshott were almost entirely distinct, and their methods and fields of study should not, therefore, be confused. He held there was a fundamental limitation in proceeding from knowledge of modes of experience to experience as a whole, due to the incommensurate relationship between the partial, method and content bound experience of the modes and the all-embracing nature of experience as a whole. These positions meant he did not believe history as history could be made practical use of, as this

⁵⁷ See for example, Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 17-25.

⁵⁸ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 208.

would be blurring distinct modes of experience, nor that values, which he associated with the practical mode of experience, pertained to experience as a whole.⁵⁹

On the basis of this philosophy, Oakeshott defended a liberal, sceptical conservatism that was opposed to claims of authoritative, objective norms, as these are identified with reality as a whole, or to social associations and organisations defined by substantive purpose, as this implies knowledge of such norms.⁶⁰ This is in contradistinction to Kirk, whose conservatism contained the authoritative norms of the permanent things at its core and which, to a degree, saw the state and social associations deriving their purpose and being from these norms. We will explore the contrast between Kirk's conservatism and the sceptical conservatism of those like Oakeshott when it comes to the kind of norms and moral principles they feel are of lasting importance to man. In doing so, we shall see if Kirk's belief in a more substantive and absolute morality supplies a deficiency in sceptical conservatism that means the former better answers to the enduring needs and desires of man and society.

Similarly, we will explore whether Kirk's insistence on the importance of transcendence and religion supplies a deficiency in sceptical conservatism, which though it often sees a social utility in religion, is less likely to see traditional religion as essential to man's nature and moral life. And, finally, we will examine whether the reluctance of Oakeshott and other sceptical conservatives to connect social associations and politics to universal moral purposes and principles, such as the norms human nature and permanent things apprehended by Kirk's Moral Imagination, is less able than this doctrine of the Moral Imagination to supply a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of man's social and political requirements. The overall theme will be whether Kirk's integrative and illative vision speaks to aspects of man and society neglected by a more sceptical or situational conservatism. These evaluations will allow us to see the contribution that Kirk's writings make to debates on the nature of conservative thought and how these debates better allow us to understand Kirk's thought, as well further add to our understanding of the significance of Kirk's doctrine for a more general understanding of man's social and moral existence.

⁵⁹ Sullivan, Andrew, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2007. 30-31. And. Tregenza, Ian, 'Skepticism and Tradition: The Religious Imagination of Michael Oakeshott', in Abel, Corey (ed.), *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2010. 6.

⁶⁰ Isaacs, Stuart, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, Routledge, London, 2006. 87-89 and 104-107. And. Oakeshott, Michael, 'Rationalism in Politics', in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen and Co. Ltd, London, 1962. 1-13. And. Sullivan, Op. Cit. 149, and 163-166. On Oakeshott's Idealist philosophy and epistemology see Sullivan, Op. Cit. 15-49.

Previous Literature on Kirk and the Moral Imagination

Some articles and books have touched on Kirk's conception of the Moral Imagination previously. None of these works, however, explored the issue of the illative and integrative nature of the Moral Imagination, given order through Kirk's traditional, Christian idea of norms and human nature, to the same depth and extent as this study. This study will also stand out from other Kirk literature in shedding light on the significance of the Moral Imagination for understanding Kirk's thought and writings. We will see how the beliefs and categories connected to the Moral Imagination, like the permanent things and anti-reductionism, were part of Kirk's mind set and framework for approaching all the topics which most frequently engaged his interest, such as history, education, literature, and religion (many of which are the very sources of the Moral Imagination), and are therefore fundamental to understanding his political and social thought.

James E. Person's biography of Russell Kirk, *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind* is one of the few book length studies of Kirk's thought and writings.⁶¹ This work is largely thematic; beginning with an outline of Kirk's life and thought, Person, then, gives a detailed examination of a number of important areas of Kirk's thought or writings, such as his views on education and his creative fiction. This work has been described as laudatory, and it is certainly the case that Person has much admiration and respect for Kirk; however, it does provide a detailed analysis of all the major areas of Kirk's thought and the major sources of commentary and criticism of them. This biography, dealing with all Kirk's thought and writing in depth, includes both considerable commentary on the Moral Imagination and chapters about Kirk's views of many of its sources, tradition and history, education, law, literature, and Kirk's social views. However, although he begins by discussing the importance of the permanent things and the Moral Imagination to Kirk, Person's study does not, as this thesis does, focus on the integrative nature of the Moral Imagination, both as a unifying moral sense making use of all important aspects of man's life and faculties and as at the centre of Kirk's vision of the world. This latter point means he does not show so clearly the way the moral apprehension of the permanent things – the norms of human nature and man's place in creation – is a fundamental element in Kirk's writings on his most frequent topics, from literature to past conservative figures, as my study will make clear.

Another important work that touched upon the Moral Imagination is Wesley McDonald's *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*. McDonald was Kirk's research assistant and had spent time at his ancestral home of Piety Hill. His work is an exploration of Kirk's thought. McDonald focuses especially on Kirk's use of the New Humanist's (especially Babbitt's) ethical dualism and emphasises the role

⁶¹ Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999.

imagination plays in men's conduct.⁶² He also explores the place of tradition, community, education, and social and political leadership in Kirk's thought. McDonald shows how Kirk defended traditional norms and the permanent things, but he focuses more on the influence of Babbitt and the New Humanists on Kirk's moral thought than this study, with its unique examination of Kirk's Christian humanist influences. As he writes, "To explain and critically assess the ethical position upon which Kirk's defense of order and authority depends, I will rely heavily on the contributions of Irving Babbitt....[and] Paul Elmer More".⁶³ As a consequence he reads Kirk's moral thought largely through the New Humanist framework, focusing mostly on the purely imaginative aspects of the Moral Imagination and its role in influencing the balance of man's ethical dualism, between his higher and lower natures, rather than the integrative and illative understanding this present study will use. My thesis is also, unlike his, a systematic study of the Moral Imagination and its relationship with many important aspects of Kirk's thought. Finally, as can be seen by the list of areas of Kirk's thought that McDonald devotes significant space to, this thesis includes chapters on several areas, like religion and literature, that he does not give the same space and depth of investigation to.

Another book length treatment of Kirk's ideas and writings is Gerald J. Russello's *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*. Russello's work is an overview of Kirk's conservative thought and, as is implied in the title, focuses considerably on the role of the imagination. Although he does explore the immersive nature of tradition, history, and social associations, unlike this present study, his work focuses largely on the imagination proper, as well as the similarities between Kirk's use of the imagination and post-modern thought, with emphasis on the narrative, imaginative creation of identity and knowledge.⁶⁴ This gives his study quite a different frame of reference to this thesis, which does not compare Kirk to any post-modern thinkers and spends most time on his Christian humanist influences. His book, consequently, invests more time in exploring Kirk's views on the imaginative, narrative structuring and mediating of reality in man's apprehension of it – "the social construction of much of our lives", in his words - common to post-modern thought, rather than the manner in which the moral consciousness can combine the inputs of man's numerous means of knowledge and enduring social and cultural experiences to apprehend the transcendent good and assimilate the individual to it.⁶⁵ And, furthermore, Russello explores in depth only history, politics and leadership, and law of the sources of the Moral Imagination, which means he cannot show as clearly how important Kirk's vision of the permanent things, known through the Moral Imagination, was to his entire thought.

⁶² McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit.

⁶³ Ibid. 43.

⁶⁴ Russello, Op. Cit.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 25.

John M. Pafford's book *Russell Kirk*, from the series *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers*, is a recent contribution to the scholarship on Kirk.⁶⁶ It covers his life, influences, and beliefs, as well as the reception of his writings and their continuing relevance. It contains an interesting and useful survey of those who have written about Kirk's views over the decades, from the release of the *The Conservative Mind* to after his death. The chapter of Pafford's work on Kirk's beliefs contains a brief, though pertinent and insightful, section on some of his major influences – in this case Burke, John Adams, Orestes Brownson, T. S. Eliot, and Dawson – and aspects of his thought. However, though insightful, this chapter is more of an overview than a detailed and thorough examination of Kirk's thought, and this is certainly true for Pafford's treatment of the Moral Imagination, which is not examined in its own section, and which is not used as the framework to understand Kirk's overall thought as it is in this thesis. Pafford recognises the role of natural law and traditional Christian norms at the centre of Kirk's thought but does not examine in depth the importance of the non-reductionist, integrative understanding of human nature, deriving from these sources, in Kirk's writing.

As well as these book lengths treatments of Kirk's thought that touch on the Moral Imagination, there have been articles and book chapters that significantly explore the topic. One such article is Fred Douglas Young's article on *Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination*, which observes the way in which Kirk makes use of two terms he closely interconnected, the Moral Imagination and the Permanent Things, to navigate the relationship of the One and the Many in his thought and to give coherence and consistency to life and thought in a world of flux and change.⁶⁷ Whilst this work does show the way that the Moral Imagination helps to see the universal through the concrete of the permanent things, it, being an article does not go into the matter to the same extent and depth as this study, nor does this article explore the different major sources of the Moral Imagination singularly and in as much detail, or in respect to their relations to faculties like habit and imagination.

Andre Gushurst-Moore, in his book *The Common Mind*, explores numerous figures in a Christian humanist tradition, stretching from Thomas More onwards, he sees as important representatives of belief in a common, traditional humanity and common sense. One chapter in Gushurst-Moore's work is devoted to Russell Kirk. He, interestingly, sees Kirk as applying his Christian humanist tradition's concern of common sense understanding of the essential and whole human nature to politics.⁶⁸ Like this thesis, he sees Kirk's political and social views, expressed importantly in the Moral Imagination, as being based on a vision of a non-reductive, integrative human nature, or what he refers to as the Common Mind.⁶⁹ However, much of the chapter is devoted to the imaginative and cultural qualities

⁶⁶ Pafford, John. M, *Russell Kirk*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2013.

⁶⁷ Young, Op. Cit. 278-287.

⁶⁸ Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelic Press, Tacoma, 2013. 217-218

⁶⁹ Ibid. 220-223.

of Kirk's fiction, and such literary criticism is not part of this present thesis, and not his cultural and political writings. Nevertheless, Gushurt-Moore's work is an intriguing study of Kirk's place within a Christian humanist tradition which affirms the importance of traditional morality and religion and "a principle of integration, and integrity, in the nature of the human person, and in the nature of human society" - the common mind or Moral Imagination.

Gleaves Whitney, in *The Swords of the Imagination: Russell Kirk's Battle with Modernity*, aims to show that Kirk wielded no less than five interrelated kinds of imagination: the historical, political, moral, poetic, and prophetic imagination. Through these Kirk, Whitney shows, aimed to make use of the past, make sense of the present, and make the right decisions for the future.⁷⁰ However, not only, again, is Whitney's work an article and therefore does not have the depth and extent of this study, but his study examines in more depth Kirk's use of the imagination proper, as opposed to the other faculties of the Moral Imagination, as an instrument for making sense of and ordering the world and human nature to their fullest extent.

John P. East's *Russell Kirk as a Political Theorist* likewise echoes the importance of the Moral Imagination in Kirk's thought and sketches the outlines of this faculty, drawing attention to its origins in Burke's writings and its similarities to Cardinal Newman's Illative Sense.⁷¹ In doing so he shows the illative nature of the Moral Imagination for Kirk, or the way in which it makes use of many sources and faculties to perceive universal moral truths in the flux of time and space. However, aside from being far briefer than this study, he does not give the Moral Imagination the level of systematic study we will and cannot, in the format chosen, give the same kind of illustration of just important Kirk's vision of norms – the permanent things – is to many of the topics dearest to Kirk, from education to history, as this thesis.

One of the most lengthy and sustained articles on Kirk's views on the imagination is David Atwell Zoll's article *The Social Thought of Russell Kirk*.⁷² Zoll pursues a study of Kirk's social thought in which he grants central place for Kirk's aesthetic and literary work and the *Enemies of the Permanent Things* in particular. Zoll surmises that the aesthetic and the imaginative are at the heart of Kirk's social thought. He discusses Kirk's limitations, his lack of "philosophical precision" and "frequent hostility to science and empiricism" which kept him from utilising their insights. He also discusses Kirk's views on morality and norms, which play such an important part in his thought, and challenges interpretations that would assimilate Kirk's moral views to those of Thomistic natural law.⁷³ Zoll does make it clear how important Kirk's aesthetic sense was to his thought, even on morals and politics and the place of enduring normative standards in art and politics for Kirk, showing how Kirk's

⁷⁰ Whitney, Op. Cit. 311-320.

⁷¹ East, Op. Cit. 33-44.

⁷² Zoll, Donald Atwell, 'The Social Thought of Russell Kirk', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 2 (Autumn, 1972). 112-136.

⁷³ Ibid. 128 and. 131.

thought was a reaction against the overly rationalist and ugly. However, he focuses on the Moral Imagination more as a means of aesthetic perception and a process of pure imagination than an illative normative sense. He does not, as we will do, show the integrative nature of the Moral Imagination and explore it in systematic depth.

Michael P. Federici has written a long and useful article on Kirk's view of prescription, or long held beliefs and customs, entitled *The Politics of Prescription: Russell Kirk's Fifth Canon of Conservative Thought*. In this work Federici shows how, for Kirk, prescription was a vital means through which man could gain knowledge, including moral and social knowledge essential to living good, human lives. Through the Moral Imagination prescriptive institutions, wisdom, and tradition could make present what the individual, or even a whole generation, could not discover himself. This article is, therefore, an excellent source for a very important aspect of the Moral Imagination in Kirk's thought.⁷⁴ The focus, though, of this long article is on prescription and tradition and their place in Kirk's thought, including the Moral Imagination. This article, therefore, lacks the complete overview and systematic presentation of the Moral Imagination in this present study.

Ted V. McAllister's essay *The Particular and the Universal: Russell Kirk's Second Canon of Conservative Thought* is an in depth examination of the second of Russell Kirk's six canons of conservative thought. McAllister focuses on how important diversity of locality, associations, and region were to Kirk. He explains how Kirk believed in a universal order that was, largely, discoverable, imaginatively and illatively, through the particular – or the diverse and varied cultures and associations in which individuals live their lives. This study is useful as a source for how the Moral Imagination is related to specific elements of society and culture, such as social associations.⁷⁵ This article does have a heavy focus on the integration of the particular and universal in Kirk's thought, emphasising the way Kirk affirmed universal norms without marginalising the concrete, historical and particular. Indeed it shows how he made use of them as vital aids for glimpsing the universal and transcendent. However, though a long article, it is still an article and lacks the depth and context of this thesis, and, as well, its concern is largely social and cultural associations and therefore does not cover all the aspects of the Moral Imagination in the same systematic fashion.

There are also many articles and essays which mention or elucidate Kirk's life and thought, including some that take special interest in the role of imagination or sentiment in Kirk's thought, or deal with sources of the Moral Imagination, like Kirk's views on history.⁷⁶ However, those listed

⁷⁴ Federici, Michael P., 'The Politics of Prescription: Russell Kirk's Fifth Canon of Conservative Thought,' *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 159-178.

⁷⁵ McAllister, Ted V., 'The Particular and the Universal: Russell Kirk's Second Canon of Conservative Thought', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 179-199.

⁷⁶ Important examples include: Birzer, Bradley J., 'More than "Irritable Mental Gestures": Russell Kirk's Challenge to Liberalism, 1950-1960', *Humanitas*, Volume XXI, No. 1 and 2 (2008). 64-86. And. Frum, David, 'The Legacy of Russell Kirk', *New Criterion*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December, 1994.). 10. And. Hittinger, Russell, 'The Unwritten Constitution and the Conservative's Dilemma', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994).

above are the primary works that touch on the Moral Imagination in a sustained way. Neither they nor the remaining articles and works on Kirk's life and writings cover the Moral Imagination in the same extent and depth, placing Kirk's thought on it in context and showing its non-reductive (i.e., non-reduction of moral knowledge to discursive reason, sentiment, or even imagination) and unifying function for Kirk. This makes this present study original in understanding Kirk's thought and the unique perspective and insights of that thought.

The structure of the thesis will be to first explore the influence of the twentieth century Christian humanist tradition, in the persons of T. S. Eliot, Christopher Dawson, G. K. Chesterton, and C. S. Lewis, whose influence on Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination, and its non-reductionist, Christian humanist background has not been extensively examined before. We will then undertake a conceptual analysis of the Moral Imagination as a whole for Kirk, examining how Kirk saw its nature, its operations, and the norms and moral vision he believed it was to apprehend or understand. Then we will explore the major sources of the Moral Imagination in turn – tradition and history; literature and arts; education; religion; social associations; and politics – in order to get a fuller understanding of the concept and its relationship to such significant areas of Kirk's thought. Having undertaken this analysis we will be able to get a firmer understanding of the significance of this concept in the areas mentioned above, as well as to the contribution of aspects of Kirk's moral and social thought to specific debates and issues that are brought up during the analysis.

58-62. And. Malvasi, Mark G., 'Kirk among the Historians: Myth and Meaning in the Writing of American History', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 132-158. And. McClay, Wilfred M., 'The Mystic Chords of Memory: Reclaiming American History', *The Heritage Foundation: The Heritage Lectures*, No. 550, 13th December, 1995. And. Quinn, Dermot, 'Religion and the Conservative Mind', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 200-229. And. Stanlis, Peter J., 'Prophet of American Higher Education', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 6-80. And. Henrie, 'Russell Kirk and the Conservative Heart', *Op. Cit.* 14-23.

Chapter One

Russell Kirk and Christian Humanism

An important, though not exhaustively examined, influence and context for Russell Kirk's thought is that of the twentieth century Christian Humanism we have already mentioned. By twentieth century Christian Humanism we are referring to a number of figures in the early and middle twentieth century who reacted to the rise and dominance of modernity and liberalism by looking to a pre-modern inheritance. These figures drew from traditional Christian thought and combined with it a respect for the philosophy and letters of classical antiquity and the continuing importance of imaginative literature and humane letters to the spiritual, moral, and cultural understanding of man's nature and his place in the cosmos. These Christian humanists reacted to what they saw as the narrowness and one-sided (to use C. S. Lewis's term, reductionist) quality of much modern thought. They tended to think that the modern emphasis on discursive reason and scientific knowledge both excluded important areas of knowledge and reality, and led to the fragmentary and unpredictable treatment of these marginalized areas (such as sentiment or imagination).¹ In preference to this modern outlook, the twentieth century Christian humanists advocated a return to a pre-modern perspective that aimed to integrate and make room for all the varied aspects of human nature, knowledge, and life, ordering them hierarchically – in various slightly differing ways- around the metaphysical and moral truths of traditional Christianity and the classical philosophical tradition of Plato and Aristotle and (to a lesser degree) the Stoics.²

This Christian humanist revival was no organized movement. Though often influencing each other, those we have grouped under this label were unique and distinct thinkers with their own particular backgrounds and viewpoints. There are a good many figures of the early and middle twentieth century who are in some way representative of this Christian humanist tradition, from Charles Williams to Jacques Maritain.³ The four thinkers of this loose tendency whose thought seems to have some of the most parallels to Kirk's, and to have exerted some of the strongest influence upon him, are T. S. Eliot, Christopher Dawson, G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. It is the influence of these thinkers which we will

¹ See Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelico Press, Tacoma, 2013. 1-19.

² Ibid.

³ Birzer, Bradley J., 'Making Modernity Human: Can Christian humanism redeem an age of ideology?', *The Imaginative Conservative*, 8th November 2012. <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2012/11/making-modernity-human-can-christian.html>, accessed 6th August 2015.

especially use to note the context of Kirk's writings as part of the Christian humanist revival of the twentieth century.

1.1 T. S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot is perhaps the foremost influence on the thought and writings of Kirk from the loose movement of twentieth century Christian humanism. Kirk and Eliot were friends during the last decade or so of Eliot's life, meeting during Kirk's travels in Britain in the 1950s. Kirk published an intellectual biography of Eliot, *Eliot and His Age*, in which he explicitly cites Eliot as one of the foremost representatives of the Moral Imagination in his time and contextualizes Eliot's work with particular regard to his role as such a representative.⁴

Eliot, of the four most important Christian humanist influences on Kirk we have identified, was the most concerned with the place of the individual within a continuity and tradition of knowledge. This was a theme which preoccupied Kirk as well. Eliot emphasized the importance of living within a tradition in order to have access to the knowledge necessary for participation in a particular field.⁵ This was most especially true in the case of literature. In his famous 1919 essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, he makes the case that works of literature do not exist on their own. Rather, such works exist within a tradition of literature which gives them shape and meaning, and which allows them to be interpreted and judged. They take their place within this tradition, which is not dead or simply in the past, as the arrival of new, genuinely good works reshapes this tradition by their introduction – slightly altering its make-up and proportions. In this way the author becomes part of a continuity, integrating the past and present, that gives him the knowledge and norms he could never have gained on his own, and which connects the past to the present in a real way in which the past is a living presence in the present.⁶ As Eliot writes, "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead."⁷

As noted, this account of the importance of tradition was, for Eliot, especially true of literature, but it was also eminently able to be made into an account of tradition itself, and therefore applied to political and social and other cultural arenas. Eliot himself, in his political and social writings, expressed a

⁴ Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Peru, 1988. 7.

⁵ Eliot, T. S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in Eliot, T. S., *Selected Prose*, John Haywood (ed.), Peregrine Books, Middlesex, 1963. 23-25.

⁶ Lucy, Sean, *T. S. Eliot And The Idea Of Tradition*, Cohen and West, London, 1967. 5-6. And Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Op. Cit. 23-25.

⁷ Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Op. Cit. 23.

Burkean conservative perspective. Tradition was partly needed to integrate the individual into society. The example of literary tradition illustrates this: tradition was needed so the author may better know what the contemporary audience and critics expect. And the past generations in the author's case are represented by the meaning and style of past writers. He writes, for example in his 1933 lectures at the University of Virginia published as *After Strange Gods*, about tradition in general, including under its sway everything from religious rites to conventional manners.⁸

Kirk, as we will discuss in greater depth later on, held a remarkably similar view of tradition in this regard to Eliot. He held that tradition was necessary for the individual to have access to knowledge in many areas of life, including the normative.⁹ It was against a background of rooted experience handed down across the generations that Kirk believed individuals could absorb the knowledge required to properly order their lives, which their own private experience and petty reason could never replace. More than this, Kirk, like Eliot, believed that tradition meant more than the influence of a past that was dead and entirely cut off from the present. Rather, tradition for Kirk was to be part of an eternal society, where the past continued to live in the present – as Kirk says, the present being only the surface of the past – and which immersed those sensitive to it in the guidance and society of the dead.¹⁰ Tradition, in other words, helped to integrate man and society, including society's moral knowledge, over time. Just as much as Eliot, Kirk then felt the present was in a conversation with the past, gaining much from its moral, artistic, and other wisdom, whilst giving new form and greater understanding to this wisdom (especially when the present was sensitive to the benefits and demands of tradition).

Kirk held similar views to Eliot on the specific topic of literary tradition. Kirk felt that literature, or Western literature, formed a tradition of normative insight and artistic achievement that was a necessary context and support for both the aspiring artist and the imagination of society.¹¹ He explicitly shows that he agrees with the core of Eliot's perspective, as set out in such places as *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. This agreement includes with Eliot's vision of literature as an immersive tradition in society, which links the individual both to an ever present tradition of past imaginative works – of which the present (at least if it is sensitive to the demands which such an inheritance requires if it is to apprehended properly) is in constant conversation with, redefining them as they define the present - and to the normative truths behind them. Here Kirk shows the appreciable influence of Eliot's integrative view of literary tradition, which links past and present works, as well as the medium of these works, in time with a hierarchy of timeless truths and values. As Kirk writes as a summary of part of

⁸ Lucy, *Op. Cit.* 5-6.

⁹ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormity in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 29. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. 36-38.

¹⁰ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, *Op. Cit.* 36-41. And. McClay, Wilfred. M., 'The Mystic Chords of Memory: Reclaiming American History', *The Heritage Foundation, The Heritage Lectures*, No. 550, 13th December, 1995. 4-5.

¹¹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, *Op. Cit.* 27-28 and 56.

Tradition and the Individual Talent, “Because the poet lives in a tradition, he may become a prophet: the great mysterious incorporation of the human race speaks through him, so that he says more than he comprehends.”¹²

The influence of Eliot on Kirk’s thinking on tradition, or at least Kirk’s recognition of his affinity to Eliot on this position, is made explicit by Kirk many times in his writings. In his book on Eliot, *Eliot and His Age*, Kirk discusses Eliot’s views on this subject, clearly expressing his own appreciation of and agreement with much of Eliot’s perspective on this issue. For example, Kirk discusses approvingly Eliot’s belief in the necessity of social and cultural continuity to give purpose and direction and wisdom to both literature and the commonwealth. Kirk writes as a summary of this core point in Eliot’s views on tradition, “life can only have meaning if we know what has been said and done before our hour; only if we subordinate ourselves to civilisation’s continuity and essence; only....if we accept certain ancient sources of authority that describe the intersection of time and the timeless”.¹³

Kirk also shows respect and admiration for Eliot’s concern to intersect the time and the timeless, by which he was referring to the shared belief of Eliot and himself that universal moral truths can be expressed through the accumulated experience that creates traditions and customs and prescriptive institutions.¹⁴ Eliot’s poetry was suffused with allusions to time and its passing, as well as the limitations of time, or history, on its own to bring wisdom. Craig Raine writes, as an illustration, that the subject of *The Four Quartets*, perhaps Eliot’s most mature work, “is time and the mystical experience”.¹⁵ Eliot seems to anticipate Kirk’s concept of the Moral Imagination, or that part of it concerned with tradition and history at least, by suggesting that it is the timeless that must be seen through time, through history and tradition, for time to be of use and worth to man, just as Kirk thought concrete, time-bound aspects of human nature reflected timeless, transcendent norms and were a means to know grasp them. For example, in *The Dry Salvages*, the third of the *Four Quartets*, Eliot writes “but this thing is sure, That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here.”¹⁶ This line, and those that follow, suggest that time itself can give us little, because its flux and change carries us away before we can get what is worthwhile out of it. But we can, Eliot in the same poem advises, learn from time if we can see the timeless through it:

The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—

¹² Ibid. 56.

¹³ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 61-62.

¹⁴ Ibid. 60-62.

¹⁵ Raine, Craig, T. S. *Eliot*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006. 96.

¹⁶ Eliot, T. S., ‘The Dry Salvages’, in Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays*, Faber and Faber, London, 2004. 187. Also *Little Gidding* contains similar sentiments: Eliot, T.S., ‘Little Gidding’, in Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays*, Faber and Faber, London, 2004. 195-197.

No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.¹⁷

These were sentiments echoed by Kirk on many occasions, including his reminiscence of the stay of Malcolm Muggeridge and his wife with Kirk's family at Piety Hill.¹⁸ Kirk even went so far as to have Eliot's quote, "the communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living", carved on his headstone.¹⁹ This quote signified for Kirk the power of tradition to teach wisdom to society and shows how profoundly Eliot's belief that through time one could glimpse the timeless, the transcendent through the immanent – which was what gave time meaning and worth – resonated with Kirk. In some sense, Kirk's belief in the permanent things was but a generalisation of these sentiments, glimpsing transcendent norms through important experiences of worldly life. It may be one more reason why Kirk was so keen to link tradition to contract of eternal society, or continuity between both past, present, and future; and the visible and invisible (or spiritual) worlds.²⁰

It is certainly the case that Kirk drew his appreciation of tradition and prescriptive wisdom from numerous sources, most obviously Edmund Burke. Such an appreciation, after all, is one of the hallmarks of traditional conservatism, of which Kirk was an eminent representative. However, as we have just seen, there is a clear affinity between Kirk's views and Eliot's and signs of direct appreciation and influence of the latter on the former. It is especially in the stress on the living continuity of tradition, the view that the past is not really dead but bound up with the present and the present with it, in which the influence of Eliot on Kirk seems strongest. Eliot reinforced Kirk's apprehension of the immersive quality of tradition and prescription and the psychological and spiritual need for continuity. He also reminded Kirk that the timeless may intersect with time; that the eternal verities expressed in human

¹⁷ Ibid. 189-190.

¹⁸ Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 137-138.
And Young, Frederick Douglas, 'Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (Winter, 2011). 86.

¹⁹ Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999. 26.

²⁰ Kirk, Russell, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Regnery Gateway, Washington D.C., 1989. 240.

social and cultural institutions and conventions and relations may shine through forcefully at times. Eliot's thought and influence is therefore connected to some of Kirk's deepest and most profound thinking on tradition, and that which marks out Kirk's traditionalism as integrating past and present, time and timeless.

Eliot and Kirk also shared many similar sentiments and views on the subject of education. In his prose writing, such as in his many articles for his periodical, *The Criterion*, and in other publications, as well as in his books and lectures on cultural issues, such as *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, Eliot often touches upon issues of education, its current condition, and ruminations on reform.²¹ This discussion of the state of contemporary education, and the principles behind all education, especially seems to have interested Eliot in his later years, from the Second World War onwards, but was a concern for him throughout his life of writing.

Eliot, firstly, critiqued views that would locate the ends of education in such concerns as social utility, citizenship, sociability, and similar goals. Eliot instead upheld the classical view of education's goal as wisdom. Eliot, like Kirk later, emphasised, to begin with, "That, before entering upon any discussion of Education, the purpose of Education must be stated."²² Here we see that for him the ends of education must not be lost sight of. He stressed the importance of the religious and spiritual knowledge that had been at the centre of this classical and liberal education. Eliot maintained that "If we define education, we are led to ask 'What is Man?'; and if we define the purpose of education, we are committed to the question 'What is Man for?'"²³ This shows that he believed education was connected to the highest purposes and nature of man. He discussed the several aims of education, those which are social and those individual, and their relationships, and he was at pains to subordinate these aims to a vision of the nature and ends of man that was traditionally spiritual and hierarchic.²⁴ He writes,

[W]hat I plead for is what Matthew Arnold spoke of as "the knowledge of the best that has been thought and said in the world"(and, I might add the best that has been done in the world and that has been created in the arts in the world); that this knowledge of history, in the widest sense, should not be reserved to a small body of experts...but that it should be the common possession of those who have passed through the higher grades of non-specialised education.²⁵

²¹ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 354-369.

²² Eliot, T. S., *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, in Eliot, T. S., *Christianity and Culture*, Harcourt, inc., San Diego, 1976. 171.

²³ Eliot, T.S., 'The Aims of Education', in Eliot, T. S., *To Criticise the Critic: And Other Writings*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1991. 75.

²⁴ Ibid. 117-120.

²⁵ Ibid. 120.

Here we see Eliot mark out for education a function remarkably similar to the Moral Imagination for Kirk. That is, he sees the final end of education, for those suited to higher levels of high school education, to present the best of human wisdom and knowledge in a number of disciplines. This brings together important areas of human knowledge under a common, integrated purpose.

With this end of education in mind, Eliot was a critic of many trends in contemporary learning, as well as the neglect of the true ends of education. Some of the trends which he criticised were the massive increase in university and college enrollment, especially after the second world war; the reduction of educational standards following the influx of students and the desire to democratise education; and the marginalisation or removal of the subjects of liberal education.²⁶ He also took the time to critique some of those whom he felt had given a dubious account of the ends and purpose of education. For example, he critiqued the idea that education makes people happy, saying “That the educated person is happier than the uneducated is by no means self-evident” and went on to give several reasons why.²⁷ And, as William M. Chace notes, he was critical towards the idea of education as a panacea for all social ills.²⁸ Eliot also criticised at length the use of education as a social policy to create equality of opportunity. He writes:

Any educational system aiming at a complete adjustment between education and society [meaning entirely tying outcomes in education to a narrow standard of aptitude] will tend both to restrict education to what will lead to success in the world, and to restrict success in the world to those persons who have been good pupils of the system. The prospect of a society ruled and directed only by those who have passed certain examinations or satisfied tests devised by psychologists is not reassuring.²⁹

This shows Eliot opposing the use of education simply to foster equality of opportunity. And, as shown by his aversion to the restrictions on education he thinks will follow and the dominance of those like psychologists over education, it also shows his fear that such schemes would narrow and compromise the broad scope and purpose he saw in education.

As we will see in our discussion of Kirk’s views on education, he championed a similar perspective to Eliot’s. Kirk likewise stressed the gaining of normative wisdom, clear thinking, and immersion in the

²⁶ Eliot, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, Op. Cit. 171-186.

²⁷ Ibid. 176.

²⁸ Chace, William M., *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1973. 200-201.

²⁹ Eliot, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, Op. Cit. 177-178.

cultural and literary tradition of Western society as the ends of education.³⁰ Education was, for Kirk as we just noted for Eliot, a means of condensed instruction in many sources of the Moral Imagination (literature, history, and so on). He also critiqued many of the same recent trends in education that Eliot did.³¹ There is evidence from Kirk's own works of his explicit admiration for Eliot's educational views. We might note, for example, that Kirk's work on the contemporary state of American higher education, *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, was originally Eliot's idea, though it took more than twenty years before Kirk finished the book. This shows direct evidence of Eliot's influence on Kirk's writing on education.

And in *Eliot and His Age*, Kirk discusses Eliot's views on education with evident agreement and respect, drawing out from it many views and themes which animated his own thought on the subject.³² Kirk dwelt, here, on the opposition of educational theorist Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins to Eliot's writings and speeches on education, and he shows disdain for what he calls the "doctrinaire democratism" which he felt lay behind it. This shows Kirk's agreement with Eliot's own unwillingness to let ideological social policy dictate the aims of education.³³ And Kirk approved Eliot's declaration that to find the purpose of education we must ask what is man and what is he for, and he went on to agree with the notion that education without religious understanding is not education at all "because it cannot touch upon ultimate questions".³⁴ Here we see Kirk showing that he sees agreement between his own beliefs about the moral ends of education, which are first and foremost to make use of the several disciplines to show us the nature and norms of man, and Eliot's insistence on linking the aims of education to those of man.

The influence of Eliot on Kirk's educational views was certainly not the only influence. Other influences range from his own experience of what he referred to as Behemoth State, or Michigan State College (later University), to writers on the subject like Cardinal Newman, Canon Bell, and, especially, Irving Babbitt and the New Humanists.³⁵ In many ways Eliot's influence seems to have just reinforced what Kirk already believed and felt about education and the contemporary education system in America - although this kind of influence is not of negligible importance. However, it can be suggested that in underscoring the necessity of wisdom, including religious knowledge, as a primary purpose of education, Eliot helped expand Kirk's own thought on this subject. We have Kirk's own commentary on Eliot's

³⁰ Stanlis, Peter J., 'Prophet of American Higher Education', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 77.

³¹ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning: An Episodic History of American University and College since 1953*, Gateway Editions, South Bend, 1978. XII-XIV.

³² Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 353-369.

³³ Ibid. 357.

³⁴ Ibid. 360-363.

³⁵ Stanlis, 'Prophet of American Higher Education', Op. Cit. 76-77.

thought in this respect.³⁶ Although such a belief was in the tendency of Kirk's thought anyway, it may be that Eliot helped to confirm and deepen Kirk's views on the subject.

The importance of religion, and the ways in which it was important, to man and society, was a topic about which Eliot and Kirk shared many viewpoints. Eliot had always felt a need for spiritual support in life, as his earlier poems like *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Wasteland* show.³⁷ After considering a conversion to Buddhism, he converted to the Anglican Church, as an Anglo-Catholic, in 1927.³⁸ Eliot, even before his conversion but especially after it, had a great interest in Christian and particularly Anglican thought, literature, and art. He wrote about such early Anglican High Church divines as Lancelot Andrewes and Bishop Bramhall; and he also contributed to contemporary discussions on Anglicanism and Christian faith in Britain, even writing his *Murder in the Cathedral* for a religious festival. Eliot's later poetry and drama, like the just mentioned play, became increasingly taken with themes of spiritual problems and renewal. His *Four Quartets*, as an illustration, represent an exploration of Christian mysticism and the relationship of spiritual realities to time.³⁹ But it is perhaps in his *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, written just before and just after the Second World War respectively, that Eliot devotes the most time and effort to the explicit consideration of the role of religion in the order of man and the commonwealth.⁴⁰

Eliot defended the need for religion to be at the centre of a healthy culture and society, giving meaning and value, integrating and giving proportion to, the various aspects of society and culture.⁴¹ As Eliot writes in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, "We may go further and ask whether what we call the culture, and what we call the religion, of a people are not different aspects of the same thing: the culture being, essentially, the incarnation (so to speak) of the religion of a people." This is an illustration of his belief in the strong connections of religion and culture, in which the latter is to an important degree dependent (although Eliot does stress there is not a complete unity or dependence) on the former.⁴² He also defends religion against those who would subordinate it to temporary political or social concerns. Religion, or the Church, has its own role to play at the centre of society and the polity and it must do this with integrity and sincerity, and not with only sociological purposes in mind.⁴³ Eliot, also, gives his view of the way in which Christian values should govern a Christian society and critiques

³⁶ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 362-363.

³⁷ Ibid. 138-143.

³⁸ Ibid. 70 and 144.

³⁹ Raine, Op. Cit. 96-98.

⁴⁰ Eliot, T. S., *The Idea of a Christian Society* in Eliot, T. S., *Christianity and Culture*, Harcourt, inc., San Diego, 1976. And. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, Op. Cit. 100-106 and 141-157.

⁴¹ East, Op. Cit. 41. And. Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 276-277 and 299. And Lucy, Op. Cit. 24.

⁴² Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Op. Cit. 101-104.

⁴³ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 280.

Coleridge's idea of the clerisy, giving his own interpretation of the place of spiritual and moral leadership in society.⁴⁴

In these works, and in his writings upon religion in general, Eliot echoes many of the central concerns of twentieth century Christian humanists; namely, the need for the integration of human life and society around the hierarchical values of traditional Christianity. He finds the source of many of the shortcomings and problems of modernity to lie in the neglect of this need for integration. An illustration of which is the neglect of the need to found politics upon more essential foundations than the political itself – upon, indeed, morality and religion. He identified many of these problems, showing their causes, and offering prudential paths to reform – based upon his basic Christian humanist principles – for contemporary society.

Kirk shared many of Eliot's thoughts of the relationship of religion to the individual and to society. He echoes Eliot's claim that religion is at the centre of any healthy society and culture, as well as the assertion that it is required to give man something higher in life to aim at than sensual pleasure.⁴⁵ Eliot is, indeed, as John P. East has pointed out, for Kirk perhaps the premier champion and poetic exemplar of the Moral Imagination in the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Kirk on occasion even shows he directly appreciates Eliot's views on this subject.⁴⁷ Likewise, Kirk shared Eliot's positions on both the importance of religious wisdom to educators and leaders and the need to respect religion's integrity, indeed transcendence, and not try to reduce religion to serving immediate social and political needs.⁴⁸ Again, Kirk voices his agreement with Eliot on these points.⁴⁹

What Kirk appears to have absorbed most from Eliot on this subject is a deeper realisation of the need for both individual and polity to find its most basic foundation and pattern of order in religion. This was certainly the drift of Kirk's thought anyway, and he was influenced by others in this direction, including by the other Christian humanists whom we are about to examine. But Eliot, we can ascertain both by the affinity of their thought and by explicit remarks of appreciation from Kirk, was an important influence nonetheless in Kirk's theocentric and catholic Christian view of man and society.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 278-279.

⁴⁵ Asher, Kenneth, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995. 89-93. And. Kirk, Russell, 'York and Social Boredom', in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 195-201.

⁴⁶ East, Op. Cit. 40. And Young, Op. Cit. 86.

⁴⁷ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 61-62.

⁴⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'Civilisation without Religion?' in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 10. And. Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 295. And. McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 193.

⁴⁹ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 276-280.

1.2 Christopher Dawson

Christopher Dawson is also one of the twentieth century humanists who had the most overt influence on the life and thought of Kirk. Dawson, historian and writer, spent most of his writing career outside the academy, one of a then old-fashioned and passing breed of independent men of letters. He was a convert to Roman Catholicism, from High Church Anglicanism, in his twenties; and his religious faith would have a seminal influence upon the rest of his life, including his literature.⁵⁰ The most prominent and consistent themes of Dawson's work were religious in nature: the relationship of culture to religion, the role of providence in history, and the pilgrim like nature of man in history and the world.⁵¹ In common with the Christian humanism which animated his thought, Dawson aimed to reconcile the competing, and in our age considerably disordered, elements of the life of man under the integrating influence of a traditional and imaginative catholic Christianity. It is especially in the fields of culture and history that Dawson sought to play a role in this integration, or reintegration.

Dawson, in such works as *Progress and Religion* and *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, argued forcefully and in detail for the central place of religion in culture and society. In works such as these, Dawson explored, amongst other topics, the role religion has historically played in culture, its formative influence, and its limits.⁵² He also touched upon, largely through history, the role that religion must play in culture, or healthy culture – or, in other words, the degree to which a healthy culture and society will tend to be a religious one. Although he was a devout Roman Catholic, Dawson shied away in his writings, for the most part, from overt Catholicism and, instead, focused on the general importance of religion to culture.⁵³ Dawson wrote about religion in numerous cultures, from primitive tribes, defending the place of religion here from those who saw the lives of these as too precarious and savage for real religious belief; to the centrality of Christianity to European culture.⁵⁴ For Dawson culture is essential to understanding man. Culture is immersive and has a huge impact both on how the individual and society see the nature of the world and their purpose within it. For example, he writes “cultural unity is both wider and deeper than that of the state....it is itself the fundamental social reality on which all the other social phenomena are dependent”.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Hitchcock, James, 'Christopher Dawson', *American Scholar*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Winter, 1993). 112. And. Hittinger, Russell, 'The Great Historian of Culture', *The University Bookman*, Volume 33, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993).

⁵¹ Kirk, Russell, 'The High Achievement of Christopher Dawson', *The University Bookman*, Volume 47, No. 1 (Winter, 2010).

⁵² Dawson, Christopher, *Dynamics of World History*, ISI Books, Wilmington, 2002. 136. And. Dawson, Christopher, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1931. 70-91.

⁵³ Hitchcock, Op. Cit. 112.

⁵⁴ Stuart, Joseph T., 'Christopher Dawson and the Idea of Progress', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Autumn, 2011). 82-84.

⁵⁵ Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*, Op. Cit. 20.

And for Dawson religion is a very important aspect of culture, tending to be at the centre of most healthy cultures. He states, “There is [in a culture] a common conception of reality, a view of life, which in even the most primitive societies expresses itself through magical practice and religious beliefs, and which in the higher cultures appears in fuller conscious form in religion, science, and philosophy.”⁵⁶ Here he expresses his view that culture presents a worldview, which tends to culminate in religious beliefs. This theme of the centrality of religion and culture is related to Dawson’s view, in common with the loose group of Christian humanists we have identified, that the loss of religious, especially traditional Christian, faith led to disorder and decline in contemporary society. By losing sight of the importance of the transcendent to order earthly life and culture, and the deep links the individual has to his immersive culture, our contemporary society is unable to healthily integrate the disparate elements of life, collective and individual.⁵⁷

Kirk agreed with Dawson on the importance of religion to culture. He explicitly cites Dawson in this regard and notes his agreement. In an essay on the legacy of Dawson entitled *The High Achievement of Christopher Dawson*, Kirk writes, “What was Dawson’s principal achievement? It was to show us that all civilizations arise out of religious belief: culture comes from the cult”. And in his autobiography, *The Sword of Imagination*, he writes that, influenced by Dawson amongst others, he “had come to conclude that a civilization cannot long survive the dying of a belief in a transcendent order that brought the culture into being.”⁵⁸ At the centre of Kirk’s thought and his concept of the Moral Imagination, as we shall examine below, was religion and the transcendent, whence the norms organising the diverse parts of human life ultimately derived for him. James Person, in his critical biography of Kirk, indeed notes that Kirk and Dawson shared a strong emphasis on the role of religion as the seedbed of culture.⁵⁹ Kirk was convinced that religious tradition was one of the most important sources of normative knowledge. He was also convinced that belief in norms and realities that transcended the mundane was a vital way for establishing purpose and value in the life of an individual and a society, and warding off potentially ruinous social boredom.⁶⁰

Kirk also clearly recognised in Dawson someone who, like himself, believed in a close relationship between the universal, in religion, and the concrete, in culture, with the former giving meaning and value to the latter and the latter leading to the former. Kirk writes, “The crucial factor is that in Dawson’s work the immediate and the particular are not neglected in the interest of the abstract and general. Doubtless this characteristic is ultimately attributable to Dawson’s Christianity—to his belief

⁵⁶ Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, Op. Cit. 75. And Hitchcock, Op. Cit. 112.

⁵⁷ Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, Op. Cit. 217-233.

⁵⁸ Kirk, Russell, *The Sword of the Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995. 474. And. Kirk, ‘The High Achievement of Christopher Dawson’, Op. Cit.

⁵⁹ Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 58.

⁶⁰ Kirk, ‘York and Social Boredom’, Op. Cit. 195-201.

that a single historical event, the Incarnation, is of absolute and unique importance.” This shows Kirk clearly thought Dawson was encouraged in this belief by his Christianity, which reflects on Kirk’s own views on Christianity.⁶¹ Although Dawson was not Kirk’s only influence in the religious nature of his thought, he certainly seems to have had an influence in reminding Kirk of the significance of religion to culture and to moral awareness, and in Kirk’s appreciation of the integrating, hierarchical order that religion can help to give to the concerns of man and society.

Dawson was a strong inheritor of the Augustinian perspective on history and man’s place in the world.⁶² He repudiated theories of history that attempted to squeeze proliferating particular facts and events into grand and exhaustive historical narratives. But Dawson did believe that providence worked in history, although we could not hope to have anything but a small appreciation of its workings. He believed that, by being attuned to a historical consciousness, man might perceive glimpses of the working of the divine plan, the logos, in history and perceive, also, truths about human nature.⁶³ He wrote of what he held as the unique nature of the Christian view of history, and “how Christianity transfers the meaning of history from the outer world of historic events to the inner world of spiritual change, and as a real world-transforming power”, expressing his belief in Christianity’s vision of the spiritual nature of history, given meaning by the Christian message.⁶⁴ In particular Dawson expressed through history his Augustinian view of man’s life in the world – that man is a pilgrim, meant for eternity, whose first priority should be spiritual; that man is fallen and must rise above his sinful nature through grace; and that man should use his free will for virtue.⁶⁵

Kirk too was an Augustinian, or of an Augustinian temperament and outlook, and concurred with Dawson both in his views on providence and history and in his view of man, fallen but free, a pilgrim to the city of God.⁶⁶ As Dermot Quinn has written, Kirk was perhaps an Augustinian even before he was a Burkean.⁶⁷ And Kirk was fond of referring to human, corporeal existence as a place of pilgrimage or vale of tears, given meaning and consolation through the eternal beyond it.⁶⁸ We cannot trace the exact degree of influence that Dawson had on Kirk’s thought on these subjects, relative to other thinkers and his own ruminations. What we can safely suggest, through the affinity of their work and Kirk’s own

⁶¹ Kirk, ‘The High Achievement of Christopher Dawson’, Op. Cit.

⁶² ‘Review of “Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson” by Birzer’, Bradley J., *University Bookman*, Volume 46, No. 3 (Autumn, 2008). 61-62.

⁶³ Klamut, Charles Fr., “‘Vital Tension’ as the Creative Spiritual Energy of History”, *The Imaginative Conservative*, 31st March 2013. <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2013/03/vital-tension-as-the-creative-spiritual-energy-of-history.html>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁶⁴ Dawson, *Dynamics of World Culture*, Op. Cit. 251.

⁶⁵ ‘Review of “Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson” by Birzer, Bradley J.’, Op. Cit. 62. Dawson, *Dynamics of World Culture*, Op. Cit. 251-253. And Hittinger, ‘The Great Historian of Culture’, Op. Cit.

⁶⁶ Quinn, Dermot, ‘Religion and the Conservative Mind’, *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol 35 (2006). 211 and 218.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 218.

⁶⁸ Kirk, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Op, Cit. 21.

words, is that Dawson had an important impact in deepening and reinforcing the Augustinian view of history and human nature that Kirk held, helping to found Kirk's views on history and of human existence upon the foundations of traditional Christian faith. For Kirk, like Dawson, Christianity became the integrating factor for the nature, purpose, and value of human life, and for the apprehension of man in history, although each never lost their concern for not extinguishing the particular and mundane within this transcendent worldview.

Finally, we also might note an interesting similarity between Kirk and Dawson on the subject of education, although Kirk does not explicitly refer to it. Whilst accepting Thomistic philosophy, Dawson was sceptical about the benefits of placing Thomistic philosophy and metaphysics at the centre of the curriculum, as was generally the case at many Catholic educational institutions in the early and mid-twentieth century.⁶⁹ Dawson, with his strong focus on the importance of history and the vital role of culture to the individual and society, instead, favoured an approach that was more firmly based in Catholic history and culture. As Glenn W. Olsen puts it, "In the most obvious way, the dominating presence of philosophy blocked the study of the things Dawson wanted studied under the heading of Christian Culture."⁷⁰ In particular Dawson believed that the centrality of Christianity to Western culture risked being overlooked by this lack of concern for culture, especially Christian culture, in Catholic education.

This, in some ways echoes Kirk's viewpoint. Although, like Dawson, he was not an enemy to the Thomistic thought of Aquinas and Neo-Scholasticism, Kirk's pedagogical views stressed history and literature far more than they did speculative philosophy and metaphysics, such as Scholasticism. We risk repeating ourselves, as we will study Kirk's views on education in depth, but he always emphasised the illative combination of imaginative and humanistic disciplines, focusing on the concrete and historical and literary, far more than he did abstract or discursive reason, to impart norms. Here he is in close agreement with Dawson in the centrality of culture in leading many people to normative education and integrating the other aspects of their education. And it was the integrative, illative process of traditional education, which Dawson praised strongly in his work *The Crisis of Western Education*, that made use of culture and imagination in particular to allow the student to see spiritual and normative truths through history and literature, which these two thinkers most have in common on this subject.⁷¹ Only perhaps an even greater accent on the literary and imaginative on Kirk's parts set apart the basic views of these figures.

⁶⁹ Olsen, Glenn W., 'Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Catholic Education: The Proposal that Catholic Culture and History, not Philosophy, Should Order the Catholic Curriculum', *A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, Vol. 13 Issue 3 (Summer, 2010). 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 16-18.

⁷¹ Gaston, James, 'Christopher Dawson and the Importance of the Intelligibility of the Integrative Cultural Process to the Liberal Arts', in Coman, Brian, *Connor Court Quarterly: The Christian View of History and the Revival of the Liberal Arts*, Connor Court Publishing, Ballan, 2012. 137-139.

1.3 G. K. Chesterton

The final two twentieth century Christian humanist figures which particularly seemed to have influenced Kirk's thought, Chesterton and C. S. Lewis, are harder to trace in terms of their explicit influence. Kirk gives less time to describing his appreciation and agreement with the thought of these two figures. Kirk did write an essay on Chesterton's writing, entitled *The Journalism of G. K. Chesterton*; however, he spent much of the essay discussing Chesterton's journalism and comparing it to current serious journalism.⁷²

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was a British journalist, writer, and Christian apologist. Chesterton was known for his humorous writing, his use of paradox, and his strident defence of traditional Christianity (especially in its catholic forms) and traditional morality. His work of apologetics entitled *Orthodoxy*, one of his most enduring works, was written as an expression of his view that the Apostle's Creed was still the best philosophy of life.⁷³ Chesterton was a prolific writer, writing works in numerous genres including newspaper articles, essays, detective stories, novels, apologetics, biographies, and poems. Chesterton's writing was often imaginative, making use of symbolism, humour, paradox, and other literary devices to try and make his audience think and shake them from their conventional viewpoints.

Chesterton and Kirk shared a belief in the power and value of imaginative literature to shape the understanding and sentiments of readers. This shaping included the shaping of moral and spiritual questions. Chesterton championed the power of myths and fairy tales to convey important knowledge about human nature and life. Chesterton makes the point that myths, legends, and fairy tales give access to a truth that is distinct from, but often just as important as, that gained by reason or natural science. We see this, for example, in his essay *Red Angels*, in which he writes that "The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon."⁷⁴ Here Chesterton alludes to the power of fairy tales and fantasy to show us how to overcome evil, to show a vision of human courage and moral struggle. He also writes, in *The Everlasting Man*, on the power of mythology and literature to make known important aspects of reality, and the widespread human propensity to make use of them in just this way. He writes, "Every true artist does feel, consciously or unconsciously, that he is touching transcendental truths; that his images are shadows of things seen through the veil. In other words, the natural mystic does know that there is something there; something behind the clouds or within the trees; but he believes that the pursuit of

⁷² Kirk, Russell, 'The Journalism of G. K. Chesterton', *The Chesterton Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (May, 1992).

⁷³ Pearce, Joseph, *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief*, HarperCollins Religious, London, 1999. 50. And. Klaus, Carl H., and Stuckey-French, Ned (eds.), *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to our Time*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2012. 57.

⁷⁴ Chesterton, G. K., 'The Red Angel', in Chesterton, G. K., *Tremendous Trifles*, The Echo Library, London, 2006. 49.

beauty is the way to find it; that imagination is a sort of incantation that can call it up.”⁷⁵ This shows his clear belief in the power of imaginative literature and folklore to show truths about the world which may be veiled by the most literal and rationalist perspective.

He was a firm believer in integrating the different faculties of man – his reason, imagination, sentiments – and the power of each of these to show fundamental truths. He wrote against excessive rationalism, arguing that reason alone was powerless to lead to even rational truth and that it was overly rationalistic perspectives that were a greater danger to sound viewpoints than imaginative ones. As he writes, “Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom.”⁷⁶ He seems to be primarily alluding to his belief that it is over reliance on reason that leads most often to delusion and obsession, to the inability to approach reality properly. And he saw in the wonder of imagination and fantasy a prompt to seeing the spiritual and transcendent, even in the everyday. He constantly wrote against those whom rationalism and pragmatism had stopped from feeling amazement at the world, and he clearly saw in the imagination a means to reawaken this sentiment.⁷⁷ He even argued against the reduction of morality to a matter of discursive reason alone, by suggesting that the sometimes strange conditions imposed on fairy tale characters reminds us of something beyond the purely rational in morality and in the world itself.⁷⁸

Chesterton’s writing style and choice of genres reflects this belief in the importance of imaginative literature and symbol and myth. He made use of not just paradox and a style of prose that was highly imaginative and thought provoking, but also used novels and detective stories, partly at least, to transmit his political, cultural, moral, and spiritual positions in an imaginative way.⁷⁹ He often referred to the importance of paradox himself, giving his view that the imaginative and often startling nature of paradox was frequently a greater medium for the bearing of truth than the platitude or the simple statement. Karl Schmude even suggests that his ability to see the paradox of many truths reflects his profound imaginative vision.⁸⁰ Chesterton disparages, for example, both Bolshevism and Islam for their allegedly simplistic creeds, their belief that simple truths are the higher truths and that complexity in fundamentals is to be avoided. He, on the other hand, saw in the complexity and paradoxical nature of

⁷⁵ Chesterton, G. K., *The Everlasting Man*, Blackmask Online, 2002. 43.

⁷⁶ Chesterton, G. K., *Orthodoxy*, in Chesterton, G. K., *Heretics and Orthodoxy*, Merchant Books, Seaside. 2009. 151.

⁷⁷ Gill, Richard, ‘Stranger Than Fiction: Hannah Arendt and G. K. Chesterton’, *Renascence*, Vol. 62 Issue 4 (Summer, 2010). 280 and 285.

⁷⁸ Chesterton, G.K., ‘Fairy Tales’, in Chesterton. G. K., *All Things Considered*, John Lane Company, New York, 1916. 256-258.

⁷⁹ Caldecott, Stratford, Was G. K. Chesterton a Theologian?, 13th May 2014. <http://traditionalcatholicbookclub.com/2014/05/13/was-g-k-chesterton-a-theologian/>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁸⁰ Schmude, Karl, ‘The Artist and the Architect: G. K. Chesterton and Christopher Dawson’, in Coman, Brian, *Connor Court Quarterly: The Christian View of History and the Revival of the Liberal Arts*, Connor Court Publishing, Ballan, 2012. 155-156.

Christian creeds a depth that better reflected the most profound realities.⁸¹ This can be used as a sign of his own belief in paradox as a potent and imaginative vehicle for higher truths.

Kirk takes a very similar position to Chesterton on the importance of imaginative literature, as well as myths and symbols. He believed strongly in the Moral Imagination, one of main sources of which was imaginative literature, and praised Chesterton's use of the Moral Imagination to rouse readers.⁸² He was convinced, in a similar way, that it was not just through discursive reason alone that men could be influenced in politics and culture, morality and religion, but through the imagination and sentiments and all man's faculties.⁸³ As he wrote as early as *The Conservative Mind*, in the context of early twentieth century English politics, "the Liberals were routed by the reappearance of a quality in human nature which Tories always had known to be more or less constant: the ineffectuality of reason as a guide for most men."⁸⁴ Kirk used an evocative, baroque prose style as part of his advocacy of imaginative literature, as Zoll has pointed out.⁸⁵ He also defended imagination and literature and myth on many occasions as vehicles for moral and spiritual truths, and even wrote ghost stories and Gothic and baroque novels himself with strong moral and spiritual meaning.⁸⁶ For him as well as Chesterton, the imaginative veiling of truth possible in imaginative literature and fantasy was a powerful means to normative understanding: "they [myths, fables, and allegories] are means for penetrating to the truth by appealing to the moral imagination."⁸⁷

Like Chesterton, Kirk believed that the modern world had disintegrated man's natural faculties, alternating between a sterile and abstract reason and sentimentalism. By making use of imagination and sentiment as well as reason, and reintegrating these around timeless truth, then man was able to better understand his nature and place in the universe – this is the purpose and role of the Moral Imagination.⁸⁸ And like Chesterton, Kirk had a high respect for the role that myth and symbol and literature can play in all levels of society, appealing to those who would not have the time, ability, or inclination to engage in abstract ethics, philosophy, and theology.⁸⁹ In this sense imaginative literature and myth were capable of a social integration, a binding together of different classes and parts of society, around the truths it contained.

⁸¹ Chesterton, G. K., *The New Jerusalem*, George H. Doran Company, New York, 1921. 262-263.

⁸² Zoll, Donald Atwell, 'The Social Thought of Russell Kirk', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 2 (Autumn, 1972). 121. And. Kirk, 'The Journalism of G. K. Chesterton', Op. Cit. 22

⁸³ McDonald, W. Wesley, 'Reason, Natural Law, and Moral Imagination in the Thought of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter, 1983). 22. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 39.

⁸⁴ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 329.

⁸⁵ Zoll, Op. Cit. 112.

⁸⁶ Gushurst-Moore, Op. Cit. 223-230.

⁸⁷ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 111.

⁸⁸ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 47.

⁸⁹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 111-112. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 160-161.

Chesterton and Kirk also held similar views on the individual and social role of dogma, or, in Kirk's words, "a settled opinion: a principle, maxim, or tenet firmly established...a theory or principle received on authority – as opposed to one based on personal (or general short run) experience or demonstration."⁹⁰ Chesterton, like the twentieth century Christian humanists in general, was opposed to what he thought of as the narrow rationalism and empiricism that had become a significant hallmark of modernity, because it left out both important sources of spiritual and moral knowledge external to man and important means of knowledge other than discursive reason. This rationalism and empiricism was highly suspicious of any truths or principles that were not open to immediate discursive or scientific demonstration (the exact balance or make-up of legitimate demonstration, discursive and scientific, would depend on the particular individual or movement), including time-honoured truths and spiritual or moral principles.

A humorous swipe at this sort of narrow rationalism can be seen in the beginning of his autobiography.⁹¹ Chesterton held, in contrast, that belief in timeless dogmas – what might be called common sense - and long held traditions were genuine and often necessary paths knowledge.⁹² Chesterton was particularly keen to defend traditional Christian doctrines against criticisms from rationalists and empiricists, and in doing so he defended the importance of dogma in general and of faith or the acceptance of doctrines and first principles (including the foundations of reason) upon faith. In his famous early work entitled *Heretics* he goes so far as to state:

Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas. As he piles doctrine on doctrine and conclusion on conclusion in the formation of some tremendous scheme of philosophy and religion, he is, in the only legitimate sense of which the expression is capable, becoming more and more human. When he drops one doctrine after another in a refined scepticism, when he declines to tie himself to a system, when he says that he has outgrown definitions, when he says that he disbelieves in finality, when, in his own imagination, he sits as God, holding no form of creed but contemplating all, then he is by that very process sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of the vagrant animals and the unconsciousness of the grass. Trees have no dogmas. Turnips are singularly broad-minded.⁹³

⁹⁰ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 249.

⁹¹ Chesterton, G. K., *Autobiography*, Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., London, 1937. 9.

⁹² Gushurt-Moore, Op. Cit. 172-181.

⁹³ Chesterton, G. K., *Heretics*, in Chesterton, G. K., *Heretics and Orthodoxy*, Merchant Books, Seaside. 2009. 132.

Chesterton defended dogma as the natural position of mankind, necessary, as a supplement to individual reason and experience which were naturally limited, to pass on knowledge and to form the basis of action and higher thought.⁹⁴ In these convictions he is very closely paralleled by Kirk. Kirk was convinced that dogmas, or, as we have seen him refer to them as, settled opinions, were required for men to gain knowledge of all kinds. The individual cannot hope, by his own reason and private experience, to replace the knowledge gained through the long experience and insight of the species. He writes, “it is not foolish to accept on authority, or dogmatic statement, certain theological and moral and political dogmas. Life is short, personal experience is limited, and learning through demonstration may be both difficult and dangerous.”⁹⁵ Tradition and prescription, in this sense, are also a form of dogma, or very closely related. And, importantly for Kirk, the individual cannot act and live in the manner proper to a virtuous and good human being if he has no settled dogmas and convictions to fall back on, and is instead forever searching for the foundations of a good life.⁹⁶ Here Kirk and Chesterton both share a position that is critical of modern endeavours to split the individual from inherited wisdom and principles and reduce his knowledge to individual wisdom and experience set up in contrast to and domination over the traditional truths of humanity taken from diverse sources; and to split, as a consequence and cause of this, modernity from the inherited past of human society.

Finally, Chesterton and Kirk share similar views on the reality of norms or moral law. This view, for both figures, was connected to their defence of dogma. Chesterton, throughout his writing career, voiced his belief in the existence of the moral law as well as his belief in traditional morality and virtues as expressions of this moral law. For example, we find him in his essay *Tom Jones and Morality* stating that “the older feeling was that if the heart of man was ever so evil, there was something that remained good - goodness remained good. An actual avenging virtue existed outside the human race; to that men rose, or from that men fell away.”⁹⁷ And Chesterton clearly shows his agreement with this view of the good. Even in his Father Brown stories he takes the time to affirm objective natural law against relativism.⁹⁸

For Chesterton, as for the twentieth century Christian humanists in general, there were objective norms of human nature (closely related to genuine common sense) that, although they might be violated often, were the standards of all human action and thought. And the expression of these

⁹⁴ See for example the chapter ‘The Suicide of Thought’, in Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*, Op. Cit. 162-175. And. Ker, Ian, *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, and Waugh*, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, 2004. 96.

⁹⁵ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 249-254.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Chesterton, G. K., ‘Tom Jones and Morality’, in Chesterton, G. K., *All Things Considered*, John Lane Company, New York, 1916. 259-266.

⁹⁸ Chesterton, G. K., *The Blue Cross*, in Chesterton, G. K., *The Complete Father Brown Stories*, Wordsworth Classics, Ware, 2006. 28-29.

objective norms in the time-honoured creeds and moral codes and mores of traditional religions and societies gave to these latter a certain, important kind of legitimacy and right of respect.⁹⁹ This was especially true, for Chesterton, of the West and of Christendom. He even goes so far as to suggest that morality and law grew out of religious concerns: “Morality did not begin by one man saying to another, ‘I will not hit you if you do not hit me’; there is no trace of such a transaction. There is a trace of both men having said, ‘We must not hit each other in the holy place.’ They gained their morality by guarding their religion.”¹⁰⁰

Kirk too held that there were norms of human nature that existed beyond the personal desires or wishes of individuals or societies. He held that the norms of human nature were part of the basic moral law, and that only through following these norms could order in the soul and order in the commonwealth be achieved.¹⁰¹ The norms, which are understood by the Moral Imagination, have their expression in the moral traditions of particular moral traditions of different societies and cultures, for Kirk.¹⁰² Here, again, Chesterton’s and Kirk’s belief in enduring, objective norms and moral law is a representation of the view of twentieth century Christian humanism as a whole (we will have more to say on this topic when we examine C. S. Lewis’s influence on Kirk) and reflects an attempt to reintegrate individual and social life around traditional and hierarchical values – the norms and moral law, which ultimately are rooted in the religious and transcendent. Instead of, what seemed to these Christian humanists, the confused and disordered values and moral perspectives of modernity, Chesterton and Kirk sought in traditional moral law the integration of life around enduring standards.

In all these areas of similarity we have examined between the thought of Chesterton and that of Kirk, though the many shared perspectives and principles are highly suggestive, and at least implies a shared intellectual milieu of Christian humanism, there is little direct evidence of Chesterton’s immediate influence over Kirk. However, although Kirk expresses appreciation of Chesterton’s thought in the aspects we have discussed in the same detail and depth he does for that of Eliot and Dawson only infrequently, Kirk does quote Chesterton on numerous occasions, showing his esteem for him and his awareness of his thought. Sometimes these allusions and quotes briefly cover the areas of especial similarity that we have examined. For example, Kirk was fond of alluding to Chesterton’s aphorism that all life is in parable and we only understand it in allegory, which directly shows his appreciation and agreement with Chesterton’s thought on the role of symbol and myth.¹⁰³ But there are also many times where Kirk alludes to or quotes Chesterton on topics not directly related to those we have discussed.

⁹⁹ Gushurst-Moore, Op. Cit. 180-184.

¹⁰⁰ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Op. Cit. 194.

¹⁰¹ Kirk, Russell, ‘The Case for and against Natural Law’, in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 197-206.

¹⁰² Ibid. 205.

¹⁰³ Kirk, Russell, ‘Civilisation without Religion?’, Op. Cit. 7-8.

One such instance is his invoking of Chesterton's satirical attack on claims of limitless liberty in his collection of stories *The Poet and the Lunatic* in order to critique contemporary libertarian claims about liberty.¹⁰⁴

Although it is true that Kirk alludes only once in *The Conservative Mind* to Chesterton, and then only to refer to him as an auxiliary to the conservative cause, we can see from the foregoing that Chesterton exerted noteworthy influence on Kirk.¹⁰⁵ That Kirk and he at least often inhabited a similar intellectual milieu, and that the similarities in their thought and the marks of great familiarity and appreciation of Kirk for Chesterton's work, are greatly suggestive of an important influence of Chesterton's Christian humanism over Kirk.

1.4 C. S. Lewis

When it comes Lewis there is direct evidence of his influence over Kirk in specific areas, although this evidence is still substantially less than for the influence of Eliot. C. S. Lewis was a Northern Irish writer, professor, Christian apologist, and lay theologian. He was one of the most important Christian apologists and writers of the twentieth century. He was a critic of modern scientism and materialism, as well as an expert on medieval and renaissance literature and a writer of imaginative fiction himself, such as his famous Narnia children's books.¹⁰⁶

Kirk cites Lewis's critiques of scientific reductionism and materialism as support for his own views on these subjects. For example Kirk attacks materialist reductionism of human beings for being based not upon current science but upon scientism and cites Lewis as originator or populariser of the term reductionism and as critic of scientific and materialist reductionism.¹⁰⁷ Lewis, over his writing career, made powerful criticisms of materialism for what he felt was its reduction or neglect of important parts of reality and of human nature. In his work *Miracles* he made a famous argument against materialist and naturalist explanations of reason and mind, known as the argument from reason.¹⁰⁸ We cannot enter into such philosophical discussions here, but Victor Reppert has recently defended Lewis's argument

¹⁰⁴ Kirk, Russell, 'Libertarians: Chirping Sectaries', in Kirk, Russell *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 276-277.

¹⁰⁵ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 359. And Quinn, Op. Cit. 211.

¹⁰⁶ Honda, Mineko, *The Imaginative World of C. S. Lewis: A Way to Participate in Reality*, University Press of America, Lanham, 2000. V. And. Gushurst-Moore, Op. Cit. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Kirk, 'Civilisation without Religion?', Op. Cit. 10-11.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis, C. S., *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, Collier Books, New York, 1978. 12-24.

from reason at length and in depth.¹⁰⁹ And in numerous other works he made arguments about the incompatibility of materialism and any meaningful morality.

In the second chapter of *The Abolition of Man*, for example, Lewis explores naturalistic replacements for traditional morality, what he calls the *Tao*, and suggests they cannot ground a consistent and meaningful morality. As he writes, "The truth finally becomes apparent that neither in any operation with factual propositions nor in any appeal to instinct can the Innovator find the basis for a system of values."¹¹⁰ As Loomis and Rodriguez summarise Lewis's position on this score, "to be outside the *Tao* is to be...outside the framework of an assumed cause-and-effect uniformity of Nature – a set of framework commitments that...allow transcendent Reason or theoretical and practical reason a foot in the door."¹¹¹ The reference here is to the effects naturalism has on reason as a whole (transcendent and theoretical reason) as well as our understanding of meaningful morality (practical reason).

Kirk, likewise, often criticised materialism and scientific reductionism. Although he shied away from the philosophical arguments that Lewis sometimes engaged in, Kirk believed that a materialist view of man robbed him of his higher significance and higher faculties, condemning him to be but a naked ape whose primary concerns are not moral, aesthetic, or spiritual but material and utilitarian.¹¹² Kirk states:

It appears that the principal cause of the loss of the idea of the holy is the attitude called "scientism" - that is, the popular notion that the revelations of natural science, over the past century and a half or two centuries, somehow have proved that men and women are naked apes merely, that the ends of existence are production and consumption merely; that happiness is the gratification of sensual impulses; and that concepts of the resurrection of the flesh and the life everlasting are mere exploded superstitions.¹¹³

This quote is representative of a position common to both Lewis and Kirk: that reducing man to only his physical and material aspect removed much of prime importance in human existence. Kirk would even bring up Lewis as an admirable critic of such reductionism.¹¹⁴ They believed that only by understanding his higher moral and spiritual nature, which they understand primarily in traditional Christian and classical terms, could man approach all of life and all of himself in the correct way. The last

¹⁰⁹ See. Reppert, Victor, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, 2003.

¹¹⁰ Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis, C. S., *Selected Books*, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2002. 413.

¹¹¹ Loomis, Steven R., and Rodriguez, Jacob, *C. S. Lewis: A Philosophy of Education*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009. 61.

¹¹² Kirk, 'Civilisation without Religion?', Op. Cit. 11-12.

¹¹³ Ibid. 11.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

of his *The Abolition of Man*, and his science fiction trilogy, represent, in different genres, Lewis's opinions on this score.¹¹⁵

One of the areas in which Kirk most cites Lewis's work is in the area of universal norms. It is particularly Lewis's work *The Abolition of Man*, in which Lewis describes the malign consequences he feels are likely to emerge from modern attempts to explain morality as subjective and to view human nature and norms as within our power to reshape scientifically, that Kirk alludes to in this regard.¹¹⁶ Lewis affirms, in this work, his belief in an objective morality, which he calls the *Tao*, that has been understood by all traditional civilisations and sages of the world in its basic framework, if not all its details. It is a morality, or hierarchy of values, that teaches us how to objectively feel and react to the world, integrating our judgment to the hierarchical norms of reality.¹¹⁷ In other works too Lewis makes reference to universal norms or natural law, which he sees embodied, to varying degrees, in most traditional cultures. There is his essay *The Poison of Subjectivism*, written before *The Abolition of Man* but covering much of the same territory; and *Mere Christianity*, in which he uses the alleged existence of universal moral norms in human societies – and the moral intuitions of most individuals across cultures – as a premise for the likelihood of God's existence as the origin of this moral knowledge; and numerous publications, even touching upon them in his fiction.¹¹⁸

Lewis above all believed there was a rational, God-given good or common sense that man might constantly draw from, individually and collectively, if he did not give in to his fallen nature. As Michael D. Aeschliman puts it:

Part of the reason for Lewis's popularity is his assumption that almost all good men who have ever thought honestly share universal convictions which may differ in detail but not in substance.¹¹⁹

Kirk draws upon Lewis's position in this regard to support his own belief in universal norms that tend to be expressed by the rooted experience and tradition of traditional societies and which are expressed in many of the great, traditional religious and philosophical movements. Kirk, like Lewis, is keen to

¹¹⁵ Adey, Lionel, *C. S. Lewis: Writer, Dreamer, and Mentor*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1998. 102-104. And. Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, Op. Cit. 419-429.

¹¹⁶ Gilley, Sheridan, 'The Abolition of God: Relativism and the Center of the Faith', in Mills, David, *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1998. 160-165. And. Meilaender, Gilbert, *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1998. 183. And Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 35.

¹¹⁷ Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, Op. Cit. 404-418.

¹¹⁸ Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity*, Fount Paperbacks, London, 1977. 15-38. And. Lewis, C. S., 'The Poison of Subjectivism', in Kirk, Russell (ed.), *The Portable Conservative Reader*, Penguin Books, London, 1982. 509-521. And. Meilaender, Op. Cit. 182-183.

¹¹⁹ Aeschliman, Michael D., *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1998. 3.

attack those who would belittle human knowledge of enduring and objective norms and those who would set up their own private speculations against the wisdom of the ages. Kirk even goes so far as to name *The Abolition of Man* as one of the best introductions to a sound path of education and wisdom; and he refers to it and to the view of norms expressed in it, including the appendix in which Lewis sketches the outlines of universal morality, on numerous occasions.¹²⁰ Kirk also included Lewis's essay *The Poison of Subjectivism* – which is a prototype for *The Abolition of Man* – in the volume *The Portable Conservative Reader* he edited for Penguin Books, showing his high regard for Lewis's work in this field.¹²¹

Both Lewis and Kirk believed there is an enduring, hierarchical system of values that anchored all human life and action, individual and social, to a definitive standard, providing order and harmony in life. They were enemies of those they felt in modernity who had tried to undermine this belief and subordinate true values and virtues to various unbalanced and erroneous ideologies. These ideologues, they thought, had created a confusion of values and consequently a disorder and disharmony in the life of the individual and community alike. What Aeschliman says of Lewis can equally be said of Kirk: "He felt that the amorality, agnosticism, and atheism of much of twentieth century culture...amounted to an aberration within the historical tradition of common sense, and that its adherents were, in the terms of Augustine whom he quotes, 'divorced by some madness from the *communis sensus* of man.'" ¹²²

One area of confusion that deserves a special mention was that of sentiment. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis defends the place of the sentiments, which are not purely reactive passions and yet not purely rational, as a middle power in man that should be cultivated to support virtue. He attacks those who would remove sentiment from literature and our understanding of it as confusing appropriate sentiment with sentimentalism and leaving literature and its readers undefended against a narrow utilitarianism. That is, he suggests that without sentiment, in many respects, it is hard to support and maintain right reason and a rational appreciation of the good.¹²³ He writes, "Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism."¹²⁴ This was a theme which much interested Kirk as well. He was keen to defend appropriate and natural sentiments against those who would replace them with narrow utilitarian reason. He writes, for example, referencing Gabriel Marcel, of the importance of a sentiment of diffused gratitude, of sympathy for the hopes and achievements of our ancestors, towards traditional society, which can help bind society together.¹²⁵ And Kirk quotes the

¹²⁰ See for example Kirk, Russell, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', in Kirk, Russell, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things are Written On The Sky*, Regnery Gateway, inc., Washington D.C., 1987. 76-77. And. Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. XXII. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 35.

¹²¹ Lewis, C. S., 'The Poison of Subjectivism', Op. Cit. 509-521.

¹²² Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man*, Op. Cit. 3.

¹²³ Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, Op. Cit. 407-408. And. Meilaender, Op. Cit. 204-205.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Op. Cit. 407.

¹²⁵ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 28.

very passage from Lewis that we just have.¹²⁶ Like Lewis, Kirk was convinced that a narrow, discursive reason alone was insufficient to appreciate and defend virtue and prudence without the support of noble sentiment and imagination.¹²⁷ Here we see both Lewis and Kirk defend the integration of all of man's natural faculties, especially his emotions and affections, against what they believed to be the disjointed concentration on discursive reason of many moderns.

Finally, Kirk and Lewis both shared a great appreciation of the power of myth and creative literature to convey important truths, principles, and values. Lewis is perhaps most famous today for his *Chronicles of Narnia* children's books. In these works Lewis created a highly imaginative mythological framework, partly to veil Christian theology and morality.¹²⁸ He also made use of creative fiction to better convey truths in many of his works, from his retelling of a Greek myth in *Till We Have Faces* to the satirical *The Screwtape Letters*.¹²⁹ Mineko Honda makes the claim that Lewis's stories were for him a positive way to participate in reality and that he believed that myth can reveal the metaphysical reality and meaning of the world, often more fundamentally than science.¹³⁰ And Lewis himself, in an essay entitled *Myth Became Fact*, defends the mythical in Christianity by seeing in a myth a partial solution to bridging the gap between the concrete and sensual and the abstract and intellectual. He writes there that "In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise only be understood as an abstraction." This clearly shows that Lewis, like Kirk, saw in myth and imaginative literature a way to veil and symbolise truths that could not always be as easily apprehended by discursive reason.¹³¹ He, therefore, believed in the complimentary combination of faculties of knowledge - imagination and sentiment with reason.

Kirk praised Lewis as a writer of creative fiction and fantasy of great worth – both the Narnia books and in his sci-fi trilogy, *The Space Trilogy*.¹³² It is certainly the case that Lewis was part of the conservative and Christian humanist use of creative fiction that provided a background and impetus for Kirk's own embrace of imaginative literature as an important source of the Moral Imagination – in his scholarly works and in his own tales and novels. They shared a belief that it is important to appeal to the whole man, his imagination as well as his reason, to arouse right reason and virtue, and that imagination

¹²⁶ Kirk, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', Op. Cit. 76-77.

¹²⁷ Young, Op. Cit. 86. And. Henrie, Mark. C, 'Russell Kirk and the Conservative Heart', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Spring, 2003). 20-21. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991. 6. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 28.

¹²⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 114.

¹²⁹ Adey, Op. Cit. 141-147 and 156-164.

¹³⁰ Honda, Op. Cit. 69 and 71. Also, for extended treatment of Lewis and the use of fantasy and myth to veil truth see Gray, William, *Fantasy, Myth, and the Measure of Truth: Tales of Pullman, Lewis, Tolkien, MacDonald, and Hoffman*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009. 104-152.

¹³¹ Como, James, *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C. S. Lewis*, Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, 1998. 122-128. And. Lewis, C. S., 'Myth Become Fact', in Lewis, C. S., *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity, and the Church*, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2002. 140-141.

¹³² Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 114.

was one of the primary human faculties, one with profound ethical and spiritual potential. On this score Kirk quotes Lewis not only as a writer of modern fantasy which “rouses our wonder and shows us the norms for man and society through conjuring up fanciful episodes in which our virtues and vices glimmer as in a looking glass”, but makes explicit and extended reference to Lewis’s differentiation between different forms of fantasy and the uses of each.¹³³

Therefore, we can see that Kirk shares important moral principles in common with this twentieth century Christian humanist tradition. He is, like them, committed to understanding man’s moral existence in its wholeness, including the role of imagination, sentiment, and reason, as well as art, literature, and society. They shared the strongest aversion to the reduction or elimination of what they felt were essential aspects of man and his moral life, especially the reduction of man to the material and his moral life to a matter of utility or self-interest. And Kirk shared with the Christian humanists the belief in traditional Christian norms and their central role in bringing order to the life of man and society. And it was not just a matter of shared convictions. Kirk was deeply immersed in the writings and thought of Christian humanism, especially of the four figures we have singled out. We have therefore seen there is reason to believe that Kirk’s illative Moral Imagination springs from the influence and prompts of the twentieth century Christian humanism as well as from that of Burke and Babbitt, though the former influence has not been given the same prominence in commentary on his thought.

¹³³ Ibid.

Chapter Two

Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination

We have already given an overview of the central concepts of Russell Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination in the introduction. Now we will examine these concepts in greater detail. The Moral Imagination, as noted, is, for Kirk, man's moral faculty. It is that which allows man to have moral knowledge and so to act morally. As he puts it, "By this 'Moral Imagination' Burke signifies that power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and momentary events".¹ Kirk is not clear about the exact nature and content of this faculty, however. He refers to normative consciousness, ethical perception, and knowledge of norms, but he does not make clear the degree, to which the knowledge of the Moral Imagination is conscious knowledge or instinctual awareness, nor in what sense it is knowledge and in what sense it is perception or intuition.² Indeed, Kirk gives no philosophical account of the Moral Imagination and its mode of understanding. He, rather, leaves discussion of the nature of the Moral Imagination to the common sense level: it is just that faculty whereby men know what is moral and how to act morally. As was said in the introduction this common sense approach is related to the very nature of Kirk's view of the Moral Imagination. The Moral Imagination is not in need of systematic philosophical development, as Cardinal Newman develops his illative sense, because it is natural to man's moral life and connected intimately to the permanent things, the values and institutions that develop in all healthy, traditional societies. To focus too heavily on the Moral Imagination as a philosophy is to lessen the prescriptive authority and depth of its many sources and to fall victim to the very rationalism the Moral Imagination stands against.

Though certainly this common sense level of analysis can suffice for conveying much of his meaning, relying on it entirely obviously robs him of a more developed and philosophical understanding of the faculty, which may better explain it and make Kirk's argument more powerful and more easily defended against a variety of objections. What Kirk does make clear is that the Moral Imagination is central to man's moral life and place and purpose in the world. The Moral Imagination perceives or

¹ Kirk, Russell, 'The Moral Imagination', in Russell Kirk, *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Panichas, George. A (ed.), Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 2007. 207.

² Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 7. And. Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormity in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 48-49. And. Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 211.

understands norms from outside the individual and transforms the individual's character and behaviour with this knowledge or perception.³

2.1 The Nature of Norms

This leads us to the question of the norms or morality that the Moral Imagination, according to Kirk, is to understand or perceive – or, in other words, its end. As we said in the introduction, Kirk believed the Moral Imagination apprehends or understands universal norms or moral truths. And despite his lack of philosophical or systematic analysis of the topic, we can say Kirk believed that the ultimate roots of norms or morality were transcendent, objective, or divine. That is, he felt the norms perceived by the Moral Imagination had their final foundation in a universal, objective reality.⁴ This is what led him to talk about spiritual purpose and man's place in the cosmos revealed by the Moral Imagination.

On this score, Gleaves Whitney emphasises how Kirk believed the Moral Imagination is what gives dignity and uniqueness to humanity, when he connects it to the belief in an immortal soul faced with the choice of fundamental importance between good and evil: it is vitally connected to the spiritual journey of man.⁵ An example of Kirk making clear the divine and transcendent roots of norms can be seen in his examination of the Old Testament and Judaism and their influence on early American culture and history. Kirk emphasises the importance of the Hebraic Covenant with God, in which God decreed laws by which the Jews should live. He even says that from this covenant with Moses has “grown modern ethics and modern social institutions”.⁶ Also when it comes to the Aristotle and Plato, their views on the importance of divine moral laws and metaphysics is highly significant to Kirk's positive view of them.⁷ These examples also show how strongly Kirk linked norms to religion, as we will examine later along with his views on transcendence and religion.

His belief about universal, objective, and transcendent norms appears to show the influence of the twentieth century Christian humanist tradition, who stressed that enduring norms are both real and important. In this context Kirk himself, with considerable admiration, refers to C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*, stating “the universality of such moral laws is summed up succinctly by Lewis, in his *The*

³ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 48-49. And. Kirk, ‘The Moral Imagination’, Op. Cit. 211.

⁴ Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991. 22-38, 43, and 109-113. And. Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 20.

⁵ Whitney, Gleaves, ‘The Swords of Imagination: Russell Kirk's Battle with Modernity’, *Modern Age*, Vol 43., No. 4 (Autumn, 2001). 316.

⁶ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 11-12.

⁷ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 77, 81, and 88.

Abolition of Man".⁸ Chesterton, for example, as we mentioned when noting the influence of this humanism on Kirk, expressed his own agreement with the reality of an enduring moral law, which he calls an avenging virtue (implying its importance for human society and individuals).⁹ And in his *Heretics* he says also that "Of course, there is a permanent substance of morality", implying again his belief in a universal foundation to morality.¹⁰ Likewise, the fellow twentieth century Christian humanist writer Dorothy Sayers says that "There is a universal moral law, as distinct from a moral code, which consists of certain statements of fact about the nature of man; and by behaving in conformity with which, man enjoys his true freedom. This is what the Christian Church calls "the natural law".¹¹

As noted, these norms, for Kirk, although rooted in the transcendent had their reflection in immanent reality, specifically that of human nature and society. Human nature, and the social associations and roles that grew out of it, is therefore an image of these transcendent norms which was peculiarly powerful for individuals, to the point where Kirk often referred to norms in general as the norms of human nature.¹² For instance he writes, "The aim of great books is ethical: to teach what it means to be a man".¹³ This shows that these norms – the right order of human nature and society – do not just reflect transcendent norms, but are norms in their own right (whose ultimate sanction, however, is in transcendent norms), making correct understanding and order of human nature, and through it society, a major end of the Moral Imagination. It is these norms of human nature and society which are for Kirk the permanent things.¹⁴ That is, it is these which are of enduring value and link man to a higher, ultimately divine purpose; they are, as John P. East notes, what makes life worth living.¹⁵

The importance of this objective and transcendent sanction for norms, as well as their reflection in an enduring human nature and social relations, for Kirk is at odds with much sceptical conservatism. This brand of conservatism has tended to argue against appeals to universal norms or a permanent human nature. We might mention Michael Oakeshott, for example, who had a complex position on morality based in his Idealist philosophy, which we have brought up briefly in the introduction. Although it would be going too far to say he eschewed transcendent morality entirely, he did more or less reject authoritative, substantive accounts of universal norms, based in a divine or transcendent realm or in

⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 35.

⁹ Chesterton, G. K., 'Tom Jones and Morality' in Chesterton, G. K., *All Things Considered*.

¹⁰ Chesterton, G. K., *Heretics*, in Chesterton, G. K., *Heretics and Orthodoxy*, Merchant Books, Seaside, 2009. 109.

¹¹ Sayer, Dorothy L., *The Mind of the Maker*, Mowbray, 1994. 7.

¹² Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 39-43.

¹³ Ibid. 41.

¹⁴ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 209

¹⁵ East, John P., Russell Kirk as a Political Theorist, *Modern Age*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter, 1984). 35-36. And Henrie, Mark. C, 'Russell Kirk and the Conservative Heart', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Spring, 2003). 21.

permanent human nature, especially as regards as conservative thought.¹⁶ Oakeshott, indeed, goes beyond many sceptical conservatives, who, though they reject placing the reality of any particular set of such norms at the centre of conservative thought, do recognise the social importance of belief in some variety of transcendent norms (especially in the guise of religion), when he says:

What makes a conservative disposition in politics intelligible is nothing to do with natural law or a providential order, nothing to do with morals or religion; it is the observation of our current manner of living combined with the belief...that governing is a specific and limited activity, namely the provision and custody of general rules of conduct, which are understood, not as plans for imposing substantive activities, but as instruments enabling people to pursue the activities of their own choice with the minimum frustration.¹⁷

What Oakeshott shares with sceptical conservatives in general is two positions: firstly, the denial or doubt of the universal norms of the sort Kirk affirms; secondly, that the commitment to a specific vision of norms across time and place is contrary to the conservative commitment to respect changing circumstances and avoid rationalistic, rigid social blueprints.

When it comes to the first position or objection, Kirk can say little in return. As we will see, he does not give a philosophical argument for his vision of norms, appealing instead to the authority of the great Christian and Hellenic thinkers. He does make an implicit appeal to the universality of his vision of norms, as we mentioned above. That is, he, like Lewis in his *The Abolition of Man* (which Kirk admired and recommend), implies that the ubiquity of a belief in norms, natural law, which has many general points in common, is some argument for its validity. This is certainly not a full argument for his version of norms, but Kirk also implies, as a sort of consequence, that these norms are connected to man's abiding beliefs and needs. This is why he refers to them as permanent things.¹⁸ He does not defend this claim with a detailed account of the similarities of the moral beliefs of many traditional cultures, but Kirk's exploration of the reflection of norms in important areas of life, like tradition and social associations, explores how his vision of human nature is reflected in important aspects of life and society. For instance, as we shall see in the chapter on tradition, he tries to show how the importance of continuity and looking to something greater than one's private self and judgment is a significant reason

¹⁶ Isaacs, Stuart, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, Routledge, London, 2006. 69-89. And. McIntyre, Kenneth B., 'One Hand Clapping: The Reception of Oakeshott's Work by American Conservatives', in Abel, Corey (ed.), *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2010. 259.

¹⁷ Oakeshott, Michael, 'On Being Conservative', in Kirk, Russell (ed.), *The Portable Conservative Reader*, Penguin Books, London, 1982. 585-586.

¹⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 20-21.

for venerating tradition and traditional society. We will have more to say about this topic on the chapter on religion and the Moral Imagination, but for now we will say that, although Kirk can raise suggestive insights, his lack of a proper philosophical account of his vision of norms prevents him giving a full counterargument to the sceptical conservative on the existence of transcendent norms and a permanent human nature.

When it comes to the claim that belief in universal norms is contrary to the conservative hostility to rigid abstractions and emphasis on changing circumstances, Oakeshott implies this when he discounts such norms as important to conservatism and advocates the ruler be an “impartial umpire” setting basic rules of conduct for social life rather than trying to make society conform to the permanent things.¹⁹ Other sceptical conservatives argue similarly.²⁰ In response Kirk can appeal to the fact that the Moral Imagination perceives norms through the concrete and particular in human society. This lessens this sceptical conservative objection considerably as it means there is a limit to the reliance the Moral Imagination, according to Kirk, places on abstract moral rules and their unaltered adaption to individual circumstances. Rather, Kirk acknowledges that the enduring norms of human nature can be validly expressed in myriad ways according to time and place.²¹

Besides, Kirk can respond to the sceptical conservative that it is these transcendent norms and permanent things which give conservatism its necessary positive content. By understanding these norms and making sure a particular society adheres to them, conversant to the peculiar situation of that society, Kirk can argue that the conservative can present a positive vision to contrast that of liberals and radicals, and so not be bound simply to defend the status quo no matter what it is or embrace what he once denounced once it has become established. This will mean that the conservative can offer a positive platform against his opponents; moreover, it also means that if Kirk is correct that the permanent things represent the deeper needs and requirements of individuals and society, this will likely make a conservatism founded upon them more convincing and persuasive, if it can communicate this fact effectively.

Kirk's conception of norms is also at odds with Martha Nussbaum's and David Bromwich's. The most salient contrast for understanding and evaluating the distinct norms which underwrite Kirk's Moral Imagination is the strong focus on empathy and understanding the equal humanity and dignity of all men that is at the heart of Nussbaum's and Bromwich's accounts of normative imagination. This was not the whole focus of their ethical thought. Nussbaum is a renowned scholar of ancient philosophy and ethics, and has written extensively on the subjects. But when it comes to their use of norms in

¹⁹ Oakeshott, 'On Being Conservative', Op. Cit. 589.

²⁰ See for example Muller, Jerry Z.(ed.), *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997. 4-9.

²¹ McAllister, Ted V., 'The Particular and the Universal: Kirk's Second Canon of Conservative Thought', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 182-185.

connection to imagination, both stress understanding the equal humanity of others.²² For example, in her *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum mentions self-restraint and perseverance briefly, but spends her time largely emphasising understanding the equal personhood of all, especially in foreign cultures and marginalised groups, as the central moral imperative supported by, amongst other things, the narrative imagination.²³ Here is a representative quote – “narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest – with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusal of visibility”.²⁴

This is a very different perspective on norms to Kirk’s. Although his belief that human nature reflects norms does imply an important role for understanding the humanity of others, Kirk does not give much attention to this problem. This may be a limitation in Kirk’s approach. It is surely the case that understanding and acting on the equal dignity of others is an important part of morality, and Nussbaum makes a persuasive case, based on psychological research, for emphasising this as an aspect of moral education.²⁵ However, on the other hand, there is surely more to morality than understanding and according equal dignity to others. Kirk’s position, as we have seen and shall see, is that virtues, such as self-restraint and prudence, and respect for traditional society with its perennial institutions and social interactions, as well reverence for the transcendent, are just as important. Both Nussbaum and Bromwich seem to marginalise these others aspects of morality when discussing normative imagination. Indeed, Bromwich goes so far as to suggest the moral duties and instruction of familiar social interactions often impedes proper moral development, as we will discuss later.²⁶ So, Kirk’s account of norms would seem to account for a wider range of everyday human moral and social interactions and relationships, without neglecting or maligning them, which may give him, depending upon the ultimate truth of this account, a more constructive and comprehensive understanding of such interactions and relationships. And it can even be argued that understanding of others is unlikely to occur if one does not understand oneself and act in a restrained and upright fashion. Nevertheless, Kirk himself could have more explicitly discussed empathy and understanding the humanity of others.

As for the specific content of the norms or morality Kirk advocated, we may say that Kirk envisaged them in a traditional, Christian way. He has in mind a moral tradition that combines numerous Western sources that in some sense conform to a common perspective.²⁷ As he says:

²² See Bromwich, David, *Moral Imagination: Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014. 7-11. And. Nussbaum, Martha, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997. 50-112. And. Nussbaum, Martha, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010. 27-120.

²³ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, Op. Cit. 85-112.

²⁴ Ibid. 88.

²⁵ Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, Op. Cit. 27-46.

²⁶ Bromwich, Op. Cit. 12-17 and 21-26.

²⁷ East, Op. Cit. 37-38.

The prophets of Israel, the words of Christ and His disciples, the writings of the fathers of the Church, the treatises of the Schoolmen, the discourses of the great divines of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation – these are the springs of American metaphysics and American morality, as they are of European metaphysics and morality.²⁸

These sources are traditional and form the main, most popular, and enduring currents of pre-modern, Western moral thought. They are theistic, in that at the very least they attest to a divinity in the universe and are anti-naturalistic. These sources are interested in the search for virtue, rather than pleasure seeking or utility maximising. They are restrictive, in the sense Irving Babbitt used the term as mentioned above - they conceive the moral path as one of effort and, importantly, self-control, rather than the outpouring of sentiment, altruism, or good will alone. And these sources of norms are realist, overwhelmingly at least (and those that are not explicitly so have a powerful belief in the basis of morality in the objective will of God and/or have a moral sense and expression little differing, despite any theoretical divergences, from their realist forebears), in the philosophical sense. Kirk even takes the great representatives of these traditions, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, Aquinas, etc., as a unified source of, largely unanswerable, refutation for sceptics, atheists, and relativists, which serves to illustrate the high degree of unity he sees in the schools of traditional morality we have mentioned.²⁹

Kirk gives some indication of his awareness of the virtue driven and restrictive nature of these moral systems, and this is one reason for his admiration of them. His exposition, in *The Roots of American Order*, of the ancient Hebrew relationship with God is suffused with the centrality of their remembrance of and obedience to, as well as forgetfulness and disobedience of, God and his commandments and prohibitions.³⁰ Likewise, Kirk notes the way in which both Aristotle and Plato, along with the Roman Stoics (who are the Stoics Kirk always has in the forefront of his mind), would have man restrain his appetites and live according to right measure.³¹ We need barely stop to note that for Kirk restraint and virtue were central to Christian morality, from Christ through to the Schoolmen and Reformation divines.

In many ways this conception of virtue put Kirk at odds with the contemporary ethos. Although there were many different strands of ethical thought in the twentieth century and a myriad of thinkers,

²⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit, 31.

²⁹ Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. 28-29. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit, 20.

³⁰ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 25-28.

³¹ Ibid. 83-84, 89-90, and 117-119.

writers, and voices on the subject, the dominant trends in the West were away from the austere, self-restraining traditional virtues that Kirk believed in. We might quote, for example, recent research on American books of the last century that found a significant decline in the use of moral terms (like virtue and decency) and what the authors referred to as virtue terms in these books (like honesty or love). The moral perspectives that were dominant in the West tended to reflect what the American Humanists, a strong influence on Kirk as noted, referred to as humanitarianism or the new morality. This new morality stressed moral sympathy and sentiment in various combinations with a utilitarian outlook stressing harmonisation of rational self-interest and achievement of material well-being.

The aforementioned study, as an illustration, whilst it notes the decline in the use of terms like virtue and temperance, records an increase in terms like tolerance and compassion;³² a change one would associate with a decrease in emphasis on restrictive virtue and increase in the role of sympathy in moral thinking. Such perspectives saw a great lessening of the place in morality of the restraint of appetites, from use of intoxicants to the sexual.³³ They also saw the cementing of moral sympathy, for the marginalised and minorities, at the centre of virtue and the overwhelming moral focus on the plight of the poor in much dominant ethical thought. Kirk, therefore, was quite discordant with the main trends of his day, and ours, when it came to his insistence on temperance and active virtue, although, as we noted above, he was resolute in carrying on many earlier Western perspectives in this regard.³⁴

We may very briefly mention here that Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has echoed Kirk's theme of the importance of human nature and good character or virtue in his influential *After Virtue*, one of the most important works of moral philosophy of the late twentieth century, showing a broader contemporary concern with the issue. To note just those parts of his ideas which are most pertinent here, MacIntyre argued that the Aristotelian conception of an ideal human nature and teleological development of man's ends – including his character and virtues – towards this nature (a conception taken over by the Schoolmen and which forms the basis of their natural law philosophy) provided an antidote to what he perceived as the chaotic state of modern moral discourse, by giving a rational standard to understand man's flourishing and hence moral behaviour.³⁵ This standard enjoined virtue or good character precisely because it emphasised not just moral sentiment or rules but also the development of character as means to develop one's nature.³⁶ Kirk, of course, also saw understanding

³² Ibid. 475-477.

³³ Courtwright, David T., 'Is "Right Turn" the Wrong Frame for American History after the 1960s?', *Historically Speaking*, Volume 12, Number 3 (June, 2011). 6-7.

³⁴ Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, in Lewis, C. S., *Selected Books*, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2002. 436-437.

³⁵ D'Andrea, Thomas D., *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006. 235-247 and 255-257. And. MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London, 1985. 147-149.

³⁶ Lutz, Christopher Stephen, *Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue*, Continuum, London, 2012. 112-129.

and pursuing ideal human nature as the goal of the Moral Imagination. But he did not connect this, in any detail, to an Aristotelian philosophical attempt to understand the natural teleology or ends of man's various aspects and function – such as his sexual or intellectual functions - within society, and their connection to man's central or highest nature, despite his equating the Moral Imagination with natural law.

If Kirk had made use of this Aristotelian approach to understanding man's nature and *telos*, he may have strengthened his argument by putting forward a closer and more systematic argument of what that nature is and how various virtues and actions contribute to it; for example, in what sense temperance follows as necessary to pursue man's highest nature and what temperance means in terms of his regulating his various desires and bodily functions and their natures and ends. This would have not only given extra understanding of man's norms, but would have made Kirk's vision of human nature and norms more philosophically rigorous.

On the other hand, Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination may itself supplement such an Aristotelian, discursive understanding by showing the many means through which man can and must come to understand human nature and its virtues besides discursive reason and precept, therefore presenting a more comprehensive and balanced view of man's moral awareness. Indeed, part of the Moral Imagination's necessity for Kirk was to supplement reason in this way. So we can see that Kirk's concern with virtue was shared by some of his contemporaries and that that his views can contribute to this discourse on the subject, as well as may gain something from it.

Unfortunately, Kirk's reluctance to enter into a philosophical discussion about the norms he is advocating, which has been commented on by both David Zoll and Wesley McDonald, also makes it hard to see explicitly how he combines these schools of morality and the exact outcome of this combination.³⁷ We can certainly see that Kirk grants a central place to orthodox Christianity in shaping his combination of these traditions. He even goes as far as to argue that both Old Testament Judaism and Hellenism were missing aspects that were made up for in Christianity.³⁸ But, aside from the factors we have mentioned (traditionalism, virtue directedness, realism, and an important place for restraint and self-control) Kirk tends to rely on an assumed compatibility between these schools of moral thought.

Arguments can be made against the compatibility of these moral strands of thought. It will be claimed that they differ quite considerably in both the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of their morality, and in the details of this morality itself. For example, the Schoolmen were generally

³⁷ McDonald, W. Wesley, 'Reason, Natural Law, and Moral Imagination in the Thought of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter, 1983). 129. And. McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 16.

³⁸ Wolfe, Alan, 'Contempt', *New Republic*, 2nd July 2007. 53.

Aristotelian in their philosophical beliefs, whereas the Church Fathers were usually more Platonic. But it may be asked whether or not these differences are as fatal to the construction of any unified moral understanding as this objection makes out. It would seem these strands of moral thought do share a lot in common; that is, they share precisely those attributes we have just mentioned. And Kirk is most interested in the moral struggle of ordinary individuals, leaving the elevated path of Saints, coenobites, or mystics aside and concentrating on virtue in its broad, general, and, in a way, practical sense. Indeed, he sometimes referred to the importance of action and the active life in terms of achieving virtue.³⁹ When looked at from this angle it would seem even more of a broad, combined moral position can be discovered in the traditional, Western moral philosophies Kirk cites.

And, furthermore, his lack of philosophical defence for his conception of norms – quoting David Hume and Dr. Johnson he claims the futility of much discussion of such first principles and is content to appeal to the authority of Plato, Aristotle, and the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church against sceptics – means that he gives only a very indirect response to the rejection of all or part of his traditional, Christian humanist vision of norms.⁴⁰ This indirect response in some sense echoes the position of twentieth century Christian humanists writers like C. S. Lewis, and earlier figures like Dr. Johnson, that the acceptance of a moral position like his is natural and common sense to mankind, and rejection of it is ultimately not only deeply disturbing in its consequences but near impossible for humans.⁴¹ Kirk's reticence about a philosophical explanation of his vision of norms, though, robs him of a fuller understanding and defence of the nature of transcendent norms and of the human nature which reflects them: he gives no proper philosophical account of this nature and the order in it the Moral Imagination is connected to.

One defence for this reticence might be that Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination does imply that we best discover, to a high degree, the norms of man, and therefore the order of his soul or his nature, not through abstract or discursive speculation but imaginatively through history, prescriptive institutions, traditions, religious traditions, and literature and arts.⁴² However, Kirk does not dismiss a role for reason in the Moral Imagination, and makes use of it to some degree to explain and defend his moral and political ideas, so we might ask if he could have tried to explain the Moral Imagination more systematically.

It also may be broached whether the lack of detailed exposition preserves more universality to his moral vision – allowing the bringing together of the numerous moral traditions we have mentioned – which a more specific treatment would have to reduce. This universality is important to Kirk, as it is clear

³⁹ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 213.

⁴⁰ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 19-20. And. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 28-29.

⁴¹ See for example, Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, Op. Cit.. 409-418.

⁴² Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 34-39. And. McDonald, Reason, Natural Law, and Moral Imagination, Op. Cit. 18. And. Whitney, Op. Cit. 312.

he conceives the great men and institutions of Christian and Western civilisation, whatever their differences, as forming, more or less, one moral tradition (albeit with national, creedal, and other sub-traditions) from which Western civilisation can draw imaginative sustenance. Kirk, for instance, often includes a wide variety of such traditional Western moral figures in his lists of moral authorities or men of letters. It is not rare for him to combine such figures as Hesiod, Sophocles, Plato, Cicero, Virgil, Dante Shakespeare, Pope, and T. S. Eliot as representing a workably unified moral perspective,⁴³ which forcefully implies that Kirk sees more in the similarities and broad, shared assumptions of these figures than the more highly refined, individual, and differentiated aspects of their thought.

Zoll points out that Kirk has an implicitly Aristotelian or Thomistic perspective, especially in terms of teleology, and here, again, we might wonder whether a more explicit Aristotelianism or Thomism might be able to both improve the philosophical sophistication of his normative thought and still preserve something of its universalist ethos.⁴⁴ This is because they might serve as something of a *via media*, due to the similarities they shares with so many of these other moral traditions, despite clear differences. That is, Aristotelianism or Thomism shares the teleological, end or the good driven bent of Stoicism, Platonism, and much traditional thought, without requiring the commitment to the separate realm of ideas of Platonism, without the pantheistic materialism and fatalism of Stoicism, and with a more philosophical and universal appeal than purely theological Christian beliefs. But it still must be said that by avoiding any such project, Kirk can maintain an ecumenical approach more easily.

We may briefly mention certain specific virtues that represent some of the permanent things for Kirk to get a better picture of Kirk's moral vision. One such is humility, which, as he notes, Edmund Burke rated high amongst the virtues.⁴⁵ Humility, for Kirk, is clearly one of the central virtues, the recognition of the limits of individual knowledge and capability, and the personal capacity to defer to God, one's elders, one's forebears, and other sources of guidance.⁴⁶ Humility, in a sense, is an aspect of the whole concept of the Moral Imagination itself, which makes deferring to the traditions, customs, and wisdom of prescriptive institutions and important normative authorities vital for Moral guidance.

Piety, or the fear of God, is also a central norm for Kirk. He wrote in forceful terms of what he called the rarity of the God-fearing man, and made it clear that he felt that a perception of normative reality, through the Moral Imagination, has an important grounding in fear of God.⁴⁷ In *The Roots of American Order*, Kirk describes the contribution of ancient Judaism to American and Western order most

⁴³ Kirk, 'The Mora Imagination', Op. Cit. 209.

⁴⁴ Zoll, Op. Cit. 115 and 132.

⁴⁵ Kirk *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 371.

⁴⁶ Guroian, Vigen, 'The Conservative Mind Forty Years Later', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 24. And. Panichas, George, 'Russell Kirk as Man of Letters', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 12.

⁴⁷ Kirk, Russell, 'The Rarity of The God-Fearing Man', in Kirk, Russell, *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Panichas, George. A (ed.), Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 2007. 115-123.

importantly as obedience to and humility before God.⁴⁸ Piety, therefore, is obviously linked to the virtue of humility, and it is also connected to the deference and reverence for prescriptive institutions and other legitimate sources of authority. He describes Cicero's and Virgil's view of piety, indeed, as meaning more than church going and including reverence for family, community, and country.⁴⁹

Kirk also, in his discussion of the thought of Babbitt and the work of Virgil, for example, makes labour or work an important norm.⁵⁰ This is not just physical work or work for material gain he has in mind though. He is most especially talking about moral action, the effort to improve oneself and work to bring oneself ever closer to the ideal given by moral vision. Kirk also lists amongst central aspects of norms, or morality, such virtues as justice, fortitude, charity, and freedom. We can see that Kirk clearly has the traditional virtues in mind. Like his intellectual mentor Burke, it is clear that Kirk is a conventional moralist, and proud to be so.⁵¹ He desires to make no new discoveries in the field of morality or norms, and would fully follow Burke who said as much. Though no doubt a closer study could be made of these specific comments of Kirk on norms and morals, what it is most useful for our purpose now is to note the traditional nature of the virtues that Kirk nominates, the aspect of self-control in many of them, and their deep connection with hierarchical and harmonious order, in public and private life.

2.2 Epistemology or the operation of the Moral Imagination

Now we must turn to the question of the epistemology of the Moral Imagination in order to try to understand how Kirk envisions it operating as a means of moral knowledge, making known to man the norms we have just discussed. This will be essential to get a fuller understanding and evaluation of the Moral Imagination and its operation for Kirk. Again we must say that Kirk gives no systematic philosophical account of its operation, but the first thing that is clear from what he does write on the subject is that the Moral Imagination is illative and integrative. That is, it gathers moral knowledge from numerous sources of individual and social life and makes use of numerous faculties of knowledge. The term illative is one Kirk uses to refer to the combination of normative knowledge derived from these multiple sources and faculties or processes, borrowing the term from Cardinal Newman:⁵²

⁴⁸ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 11-45.

⁴⁹ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 103-104 And. 115-116.

⁵⁰ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 116-117. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 372-373.

⁵¹ Kirk, Russell, 'Virtue: Can It Be Taught?', *Modern Age*, No. 26, Vol. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn, 1982). 347. And. Stanlis, Peter J., 'Prophet of American Higher Education', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 77. And. East, Op. Cit. 37-38 and 41.

⁵² Russello, Gerald. J., 'Time and the Timeless: The Historical Imagination of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer, 1999). 216. And. East, Op. Cit. 39. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 47.

What we call 'the Moral Imagination' has connections with Newman's 'illative sense'. Its evidences may be fragmentary and irregular, but they are numerous; and entering the mind over a long period of time they bring conviction. The Moral Imagination, embracing tradition, looks to theology and history and humane letters, especially, for evidences of human nature and the permanent things.⁵³

We will examine the major sources of the moral knowledge for Kirk individually later on, and at the same time will be able to examine many of their relations to the faculties of knowledge. What we will note now is that the sources of the Moral Imagination cover most important aspects of everyday individual and social and cultural life, from tradition and history, to religion, to literature and arts, to education, to social associations, and to law, governance, and political leadership. The moral faculties or processes that Kirk alludes to include all major means of human knowledge, such as imagination, discursive reason, sentiment, habit, instinct, and intuition.⁵⁴ The relationship of these sources and faculties varies according to their peculiar qualities and circumstances. For instance, a social association like the family provides knowledge of norms, for Kirk, through exemplary family members (imagination), moral precept (reason), immersive instruction from a young age (habit), and affectionate ties between family members (sentiment).

The illative nature of Kirk's notion of the Moral Imagination stands out from many other contemporary usages of the term, as we noted in the introduction. These other usages tend to stress only the imagination proper. This is the case for Bromwich and Nussbaum.⁵⁵ Similarly, John Kekes, the conservative writer, has made use of the term Moral Imagination. He uses it to describe our ability to understand our limits and the consequences of our possibilities. He connects it to responsibility especially, or how we affect others.⁵⁶ Most of the writers using the term make use also of other faculties as well as imagination in their moral thought. This is implied in Keke's argument, as some amount of reason must be used to understand our limits and possibilities and their consequences. Nussbaum, also, advocates the use of reason (especially the Socratic method), for example, as important to understanding the full dignity and humanity of others – the same moral end she emphasises for the

⁵³ Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 47.

⁵⁴ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, Gateway Editions, Limited, South Bend, 1978. 260. And. Young, Frederick Douglas, 'Russell Kirk and the Moral Imagination', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (Winter, 2011). 286. And. East, Op. Cit. 39. And. Henrie, 'Russell Kirk and the Conservative Heart', Op. Cit. 20-21. And. Kirk, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', Op. Cit. 56. And. Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 47. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 28. And. Kirk, *Roots of the American Order*, Op. Cit. 6.

⁵⁵ Bromwich, Op. Cit. 3-39. And Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, Op. Cit. 85-112.

⁵⁶ Kekes, John, 'The Enlargement of Life: Moral Imagination at Work', *The Montreal Review*, June 2011. <http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/The-Enlargement-of-Life.php>, accessed 6th August 2015.

imagination as well.⁵⁷ The significance of Kirk's approach though is he, unlike these other writers, develops the Moral Imagination as an integrative mode of awareness or knowledge that combines these other faculties into an explicit whole. Combined with the sources his Moral Imagination makes use of, this makes his conception of the Moral Imagination distinctly comprehensive, integrating all important aspects of man and his social life in a unifying vision of human moral existence, rather than beholden to any one or small few aspects and faculties of man, or to a fragmentary account of how man makes moral use of the different faculties.⁵⁸

Kirk was most anxious to emphasise the limits of reason in providing moral and social knowledge, and the necessity to supplement rational knowledge by other forms of knowledge.⁵⁹ Kirk tended to consider the contemporary atmosphere, dominated by liberalism and radicalism, as too given to rationalistic approaches to, or theories of, morality. Sometimes he went as far as to refer to the rise of Logicalism, a term taken from Robert Graves's *Seven Days in Crete* and by which Kirk meant a rigidly rationalistic and planned approach to society and state.⁶⁰ He associated this kind of rationalism with much modern thought, most obviously with Utilitarians like Bentham, but also with John Dewey and many others whom he felt relied excessively on reason as their guide to men and morality.⁶¹ He often referred to this sort of rationalism as ideology, a decidedly negative term for Kirk. He rejected rationalism and ideology as accounts of human moral and social knowledge because he felt that discursive reason was too feeble and too narrow a basis for such knowledge.⁶² As implied in the doctrine of the Moral Imagination itself, and as we shall see in the chapter on tradition, Kirk believed moral knowledge must come from many sources, and that the individual requires the knowledge gained from many individuals over a long period of time, if he had a hope of accurately and without serious distortion understanding man. What was particularly galling for him about modern rationalism and ideology were their proclivity to feed what he felt was hubris, or the belief that one's discursive reason provided one with all that was needed to remake society from whole cloth.

As Kirk puts it:

The twentieth-century ideologue, after the manner of Robespierre, thinks that his secular dogmas are sustained by the Goddess Reason; he prides himself inordinately upon being "scientific" and "rational"One may add that ever since the modern scholar began to call himself an "intellectual", he has tended to fall addict to the

⁵⁷ Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, Op. Cit. 47-77.

⁵⁸ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 46-47.

⁵⁹ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 254. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit, 29 and 33- 34.

⁶⁰ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 115.

⁶¹ See for example, Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 159-161. And. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 99-108.

⁶² Niemeyer, Gerhart, 'Russell Kirk and Ideology', *The Intercollegiate Review*, Vo. 30, No. 1 (Fall, 1994). 35-38.

opiate of ideology; for the word “intellectual” itself, used as a noun of persons, implies a overweening confidence in Reason with a capital R, to the exclusion of faith, custom, consensus, humility, and sacred mystery....the ideologues are Burckhardt’s “terrible simplifiers”.⁶³

This was a concern shared by both the Christian humanists and contemporary conservatives, including Michael Oakeshott in his essay *Rationalism in Politics*.⁶⁴ The Christian humanists defended reason but they did not believe that reason alone was sufficient for spiritual and moral knowledge. We find, for example, Chesterton often deprecating rationalism, such as in his *Orthodoxy* where he ties the use of reason itself to an act of faith in its reliability or in his comments about the foolishness of trying to reduce the cosmos to our rational understanding of it.⁶⁵

Another, though somewhat secondary, conception of moral knowledge that Kirk was weary of was sentimentalism, or the reduction of moral knowledge and judgment to moral sentiment. Despite the influence of Babbitt, for whom romanticism and sentimentalism were the chief evils of modernity, Kirk was less concerned about sentimentalism than rationalism and utilitarianism.⁶⁶ It was the rigidity of rationalist ideology and the alleged sterility of utilitarianism that most worried him. Like C. S. Lewis, Kirk even seems to have thought a revival of proper moral sentiments a good, hence he made sentiment a vital support for the Moral Imagination and he even praised Hume and Adam Smith for their work on the importance of moral sentiments.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Kirk did concur with Babbitt about the dangers of the idyllic imagination fed only by gushing sentiments, and he seemed to lament aspects of what he felt was modernity’s ever increasing reliance on feeling instead of right reason – he particularly attacked television’s supposed encouragement to such sentimentalism.⁶⁸ Above all, Kirk seems to have, at least implicitly, repudiated views of man’s moral being that were partial and one-sided, and which freed him from the need to subordinate himself to a traditional, transcendent hierarchy of norms.

The two other major studies of Kirk’s thought have noted its illative and integrative nature. Gerald Russello, in his *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*, notes how the imagination can unify

⁶³ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 157.

⁶⁴ See for example, Kirk, *Eliot and his Age*, Op. Cit. 60-61. And. Oakeshott, Michael, ‘Rationalism in Politics’, in Oakeshott, Michael, *Rationalism in Politics: and Other Essays*, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1967. And. Weaver, Richard, *Visions of Order: The Cultural Crisis of Our Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 2006. 40-54.

⁶⁵ Chesterton, G. K., *Orthodoxy*, in Chesterton, G. K., *Heretics and Orthodoxy*, Merchant Books, Seaside. 2009. 151-152 and 162-168.

⁶⁶ McDonald, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 53.

⁶⁷ Kirk, Russell, ‘The Age of Sentiments’, in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 131. And. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Op. Cit. 403.

⁶⁸ Kirk, ‘The Age of Sentiments’, Op. Cit. 132-140.

sentiments, loyalties, and ideas.⁶⁹ However, he emphasises Kirk's similarities to certain tendencies in post-modern thought, most especially the use of self-creation and the narrative use of imagination to shape one's relationship towards the world.⁷⁰ His focus becomes, therefore, the subjective, personal, and creative aspect of the Moral Imagination, in which the individual uses imagination to craft important aspects of his life, like his relationship to tradition or the state, into a narrative which reflects and reveals universal norms. This is certainly an important part of Kirk's idea of the Moral Imagination. We will see in the chapter on tradition and history how he saw creative narrative as important for crafting normative traditions and history. The other side of Kirk's Moral Imagination, the expression of given, objective norms through the integration of all important aspects of life and society, is less prominent and more implicit in Russello's account. Both the subjective, creative and objective, given sides are important to Kirk, but, ultimately, it is the latter that must have pride of place. Kirk again and again affirms man's relationship to objective, immutable norms; for example, in his ghost stories, like *Lex Talionis* where a murderer is killed by one of his dead victims, or when he declares, "The sanction for obedience to norms must come from a source higher than private speculation: men do not submit long to their own creations".⁷¹ It, therefore, is this framework of the objective norms made present through unifying sources and faculties which we will treat as primary.

Wesley McDonald, in his *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, also notes the illative nature of the Moral Imagination, describing how it makes use of history, letters, myth, and religion.⁷² However, he does not emphasis an integrative, Christian humanist framework as the central means to understand Kirk's doctrine either. Rather, he argues that Kirk's perspective is essentially that of Babbitt and the New Humanists, though Kirk makes innovative use of it. McDonald sees the Moral Imagination primarily in terms of imagination proper, which guides the will, through good exemplars and imaginative vision, generally more efficaciously than reason, to a higher self or standard of behaviour.⁷³ Certainly, Kirk was deeply influenced by this perspective of the New Humanists, but it is not the entirety of his doctrine of the Moral Imagination, which stresses the integration of the normative insights of numerous sources of everyday life and faculties of human knowledge as seen throughout this thesis, and is somewhat restricting as a framework for understanding this doctrine, therefore.

An illustration of the limits of this framework are McDonald's comments on Kirk and Aristotelian or Thomistic natural law, which he sees as ultimately alien to Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination, because of the former's rationalism and alleged lack of concern for the dynamic circumstances of man's

⁶⁹ Russello, Gerald. J., *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2007. 54.

⁷⁰ For example, *Ibid.* 41-64.

⁷¹ Kirk, Russell, *Lex Talionis*, in Kirk, Russell, *Ancestral Shadows: An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*, William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2004. 85-105. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 17.

⁷² McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 58.

⁷³ See for example, *Ibid.* 42-70.

moral life, even though Kirk claimed allegiance to the natural law tradition. McDonald sees Kirk's Moral Imagination as downplaying discursive or abstract reason in man's moral life in favour of imagination and intuition. For him, Kirk can only admit discursive reason in seeking means to ends and not in understanding moral norms themselves.⁷⁴ However, if we see Kirk's Moral Imagination as illative, making use of reason alongside imagination, intuition, and the other faculties of knowledge, we can readily see how it can make use of reason to aid in understanding general and abstract moral principles, whilst more centrally relying on other faculties and sources – such as imagination, habit, and sentiment – to apply these principles in the dynamic circumstances of life. This would allow Kirk to unify the universal and particular, abstract and concrete – a major purpose of the Moral Imagination – and seems to better account for Kirk's allusion to norms deduced directly from human nature and the categorical statements of human virtue and dignity he is prepared to make, like praise for the virtue of the U.S. Founders or disapproval of Kinsey's study of human sexuality.⁷⁵ Therefore, Kirk can be seen as a natural law figure, as he saw himself, though his perspective is distinctive amongst such thinkers for its harmonisation of reason with the other faculties and appreciation of the dynamic moral circumstances of human life.

Kirk does allude to, though again he does not explore the issue concertedly, a special place for normative knowledge that is discovered through inspired individuals, or those Kirk sometimes refers to as seers, who can bring the truths apprehended by the Moral Imagination to their society in a particularly powerful and persuasive way.⁷⁶ Seers stretch from inspired prophets like Moses and Buddha to wise men and great artists. It is clear that seers possess, for Kirk, intuition which allows them a special, direct grasp of norms somewhat free from the numerous sources and prompts normally required by the Moral Imagination. However, Kirk does not break the link between seers and the Moral Imagination completely. This is clear, firstly, in that the intuition of seers generally does not consist, for him, of divine revelations but of a more mundane sort of intuition associated with great philosophers and artists. Secondly, it is clear Kirk does think the seer – or the more usual type, at least – requires the support and background of a moral tradition he must respect and adhere to, showing he is not completely above it.⁷⁷ There is a reciprocal relationship of support, with Kirk even conjecturing that

⁷⁴ Ibid. 70-80.

⁷⁵ Kirk, Russell, 'Statistics and Sinai', in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 69-78. And. Kirk, Russell, *Rights and Duties: Reflections on Our Conservative Constitution*, Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, 1997. 69.

⁷⁶ Frohnen, Bruce, 'Russell Kirk on Cultivating the Good Life', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 64. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 34-35 and 37-39. Zoll, Op. Cit. 118.

⁷⁷ See for example Kirk's description of the Biblical Prophets - Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 31. And. Zoll, Op. Cit. 125.

many of the normative insights ascribed to timeless, anonymous tradition may be the product of such seers.⁷⁸

Much of what Kirk understands about how the Moral Imagination can grant us knowledge is readily apparent. For example, we can broadly understand how reading a great work of literature might present us with models of good and bad behaviour and might stir the sentiments, without requiring exhaustive philosophical accounts of this process. If we are in the habit of reading such works of literature, we can even, perhaps, see relatively easily how it might add to our instinctive and habitual cultivation of the moral life. It takes no detailed theory of how the mind grasps normative truth to understand many practical aspects at work here. However, it seems certain that more rigour and definition of just what is the nature of the moral truths being communicated and how they are communicated to the individual would be beneficial to Kirk's concept of the Moral Imagination. It would allow a better defence of this concept, but it would also allow a more profound and detailed knowledge of the various aspects of the Moral Imagination and how they fit together, intimately connecting the well-ordered man and cosmic order itself. This is especially problematic when we consider the high emphasis Kirk places on literature and other conscious and elevated sources of the Moral Imagination. It would be useful to understanding the degree to which the Moral Imagination operates more by what Zoll refers to as cognitive variables, i.e., the intellectual and conscious social endeavours such as is often seen in the arts, on the one hand; and the more elemental, basic social associations and habits, images, and sentiments, on the other.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit, 37.

⁷⁹ Zoll, Op. Cit. 131-132.

Chapter Three

The Moral Imagination and Tradition and History

One of the most important sources of the Moral Imagination for Russell Kirk was history and tradition. Of all the defining factors of his thought, it is, perhaps, the role played by tradition, by prescriptive wisdom, that Kirk is most well-known for. Both critics and more sympathetic commentators on his writings have long noted the formative role that the past and tradition has on Kirk's political and social perspective;¹ and he put it prominently in his various lists of the canons or principles of conservative thought.² Even his embrace of the term conservative was largely because of his belief in the importance of conserving tradition and prescriptive customs.

Most fundamentally tradition and history, the past, are, for Kirk, essential ways for man to come to knowledge, including of the normative and social. For Kirk, individual human reason and private experience are limited in their ability to grant man knowledge and wisdom, whether of morality, politics, or mechanics.³ The past is one means in which man can escape the limits of his own faculties, through being integrated into the collected experience (the trial and error) and inherited knowledge and wisdom of his culture, showing again Kirk's integrative perspective.⁴ As Kirk wrote on several occasions, quoting Edmund Burke, the individual is foolish but the species is wise.⁵ What he meant was that many spheres of human activity require development over a period of time longer than the longest individual lifespan, including intellectual and scientific endeavour, moral knowledge, and developments in the institutions, beliefs, and customs of a culture.⁶ One way in which Kirk often refers to the inherited experience of the past, the growth of knowledge over generations, is with Bernard of Chartres' image of the present generation as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants, those who have come before them.⁷ Kirk was fond of using Poor Richard's (Benjamin Franklin's) aphorism that "Experience keeps a dear school, yet

¹ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 89. And. Russello, Gerald. J., 'Time and the Timeless: The Historical Imagination of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer, 1999). 209.

² See for example Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 19-20.

³ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormality in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 29. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. 36-38. And. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 98-100.

⁴ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 98-100.

⁵ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 29.

⁶ McClay, Wilfred. M., 'The Mystic Chords of Memory: Reclaiming American History', The Heritage Foundation, The Heritage Lectures, No. 550, 13th December, 1995. 4-5. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 27-28

⁷ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 27.

Fools will learn in no other” to refer to the travails of individual’s looking only to their own experience for guidance.⁸

As noted, this past experience includes the developments of any particular culture and society. That is, for Kirk, society and community are a complex web of interconnected institutions, mores, values, loyalties, beliefs, and customs rooted in particular circumstances and a particular time and place and whose development occurs gradually over time.⁹ These cannot be planned or even understood in a simplistic, rationalist way, or in an abstract way that takes no account of historical circumstances, so attention to the inheritance of the past is necessary. Society, and the institutions and customs that make it up, develop over time to concrete circumstance, with each generation adding to them and adapting them to changing circumstance.¹⁰

An institution like the legal and justice system, for example, develops out of numerous historical acts and ideas to serve the changing circumstances and requirements of the community.¹¹ And not only is this inherited knowledge necessary for the proper development of social institutions, for Kirk, but as man is a social being some of his moral and spiritual purpose comes to him through the concrete institutions and traditions which historically develop in a society, reflecting and passing on these norms. This is why Kirk advocates a spirit of veneration for this historic edifice and emphasises this rooted development and inherited experience links generation to generation giving a continuity of knowledge, norms, and purpose.¹² Kirk was fond of quoting Burke’s claim that without such continuity men become like “flies of a summer”.¹³ Respect for tradition helps to integrate the man to his society and its past and future, as well as make use of man’s historical being as a source of moral knowledge.

3.1 Tradition

The past, however, is a vast and overwhelming source of human experience. No individual or culture can meaningfully make use of it unless it is, in some way, filtered. As Gerald Russello puts it, the facts of history must be made into social facts, and value judgments and intellectual distinctions must sort the multitudinous facts of history.¹⁴ This process allows the experience and insight of the past to form apprehensible knowledge, including normative and social knowledge. In essence, tradition and

⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 29.

⁹ McClay, Op. Cit. 4-5. And. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 95-109.

¹⁰ Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Op. Cit. 18-19.

¹¹ For an example of Kirk’s commentary on law see, Kirk, Russell, *America’s British Culture*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1994. 29-45.

¹² McClay, Op. Cit. 4-5. And. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 104-109.

¹³ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 36-41.

¹⁴ Ibid. 215-216.

academic history represent the two poles of the spectrum of forms this filtering can take, varying from the most unconscious and discursive folk wisdom and mores on the one hand, to the most academic historical scholarship on the other. Much of the usable past sits between these two poles, combining a form of history or narrative and tradition, but we will explore the two poles separately to better understand them.

Tradition is, in a sense, the coagulation of the past, the embedding of some aspect of wisdom (including norms or the permanent things) or technique in a concrete form; history selected and filtered over a long, gradual, process of trial and error, adaptation and sortation, into a knowledge that can be apprehended by contemporary society.¹⁵ It is, therefore, a useable past at the furthest remove from academic or scholarly analysis of history, representing not the imagination and understanding of a historian but what might be called the folk wisdom of a society. However, history, or the past, is for Kirk essential to tradition, and gets its legitimacy in a society from being the tried and tested, time honoured inheritance from the forefathers - as Kirk pointed out, the Latin verb *tradere*, meaning to hand down or hand over, is the root of the English noun tradition.¹⁶

It may be profitable to compare Kirk's views on tradition to those of Michael Oakeshott in order to better understand their distinctive elements and context. Oakeshott has often been called a conservative thinker, although his exact designation has been debated.¹⁷ He attacked rationalism in politics and gave his own idiosyncratic defence of tradition and practice (as opposed to abstract rationalism) in politics, in works such as *Rationalism in Politics*, reminiscent of a sceptical strain of conservative thought going back at least to Hume and including figures like F.A Hayek and Arnold Gehlen, as we have noted previously.¹⁸ He argued that if abstract or technical reason, formulated into discrete rules and principles, was the dominating force in reform, it would not reflect the complex realities of political circumstance and therefore would be a drastically inadequate means for guiding political life.

Instead, Oakeshott argued for the importance of practical knowledge, a knowledge that came from a careful use and experience and non-discursive know-how, including tradition and custom, rather than abstract or formulated knowledge and rules.¹⁹ Above all, Oakeshott wished to defend everyday, practical life from the intrusions of politics that would force upon it great and rapid changes according

¹⁵ Russello, *Time and the Timeless*, Op. Cit. 216.

¹⁶ Kirk, Russell, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Regnery Gateway, Washington D.C., 1989. 228-229.

¹⁷ Gamble, Andrew, 'Oakeshott's Ideological Politics: Conservative or Liberal?', in Podoksik, Efraim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012. 153.

¹⁸ Smith, Stephen B., 'Practical Life and the Critique of Rationalism', in Podoksik, Efraim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012. 136-137.

¹⁹ Oakeshott, Michael, 'Rationalism in Politics', in Oakeshott, Michael, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen and Co, Ltd., London, 1967. 9.

to discursive, rationalist planning.²⁰ He viewed politics as an activity distinctly lacking in elevation, what he calls a second-rate form of human activity, “neither an art nor a science, at once corrupting to the soul and fatiguing to the mind”.²¹ His primary intent was to preserve civil associations which reflect not a purposive, end-driven activity but the conditions for an individuality which would allow men to develop their own abilities and viewpoints, which would be compromised by an overly interfering state acting for substantive collective norms.²²

In this defence of tradition Kirk concurred. Indeed, he clearly admired Oakeshott’s thought, placing Oakeshott’s essay *On Being Conservative* in his *The Portable Conservative Reader*.²³ They both were enemies of rationalism in politics and were keen to leave much of everyday, practical life out of the reach of state planning. However, there are clear differences in their positions on tradition. Being largely sceptical and based in the limits of individual knowledge, Oakeshott’s defence of tradition would seem to reject the place of the permanent things, or norms, which are at the heart of Kirk’s. For Oakeshott, and sceptical conservatives like him, it is the form of tradition that takes centre-stage rather than the content, whilst Kirk sees both as crucially important, the form of transmitting the permanent things and the permanent things justifying the transmission, including through helping to filter what is useable and necessary from the past, as we shall see.

The lack of norms that should guide our respect for tradition and efforts to continue and adapt it, through the use of the Moral Imagination, leaves Oakeshott’s defence of tradition open to the familiar criticism of conservatism, that it is only a defence of the status quo from radical change and lacks any definitive content or principles of its own in order to filter positive traditions from the negative or obsolete. To a degree Oakeshott might accept this criticism, as he largely rejected the pursuit of ends through political action, rather than the establishment of conditions for individual freedom. Also, his defence of everyday, practical life as a mode of experience that should be kept distinct from other modes, according to Oakeshott’s Idealist philosophy, in some ways echoes Kirk’s foundation of tradition upon the permanent things. One might mention in this regard the clear affection implied towards settled and conventional relationships and sentiments of everyday life evident in his essay *On Being Conservative*.²⁴ Oakeshott clearly respected the non-political, perennial relations and associations of human society. However, in shying away from normative endorsement of the basic forms these institutions and relations take (the permanent things, to Kirk), Oakeshott cannot make these norms, apprehended by the Moral Imagination, the judge of tradition and social arrangements – as Kirk makes

²⁰ Smith, Op. Cit. 136-139.

²¹ Galston, William A., ‘Oakeshott’s Political Theory: Recapitulations and Criticisms’, in Podolsik, Efraim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012. 227.

²² Ibid. 226-230.

²³ Oakeshott, Michael, ‘On Being Conservative’, in Kirk, Russell, *The Portable Conservative Reader*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1982. 567-600.

²⁴ Ibid.

the Moral Imagination the means of filtering the accidental and malign from what is enduring and positive that is transmitted by tradition - and therefore has problems using his criticisms of rationalism to defend them.

Of course, Oakeshott rejects the nature of normative reality which Kirk claims the Moral Imagination can have access to, as he rejects the process of the Moral Imagination in apprehending norms, relying instead on own Idealist understanding of life and the place of morality. Indeed, the sceptical conservative might fault Kirk's traditionalism precisely for making such an important place for universal norms and the Moral Imagination, which many will question and which will therefore distract from the defence of the traditional and practical from political rationalism. Some sceptical conservatives have indeed argued that conservatives should stick to publically defensible, and therefore non-religious, arguments.²⁵ Certainly, Oakeshott held a sceptical Idealist philosophy, though one open to religious experience, quite different to the traditional Christian philosophical assumptions we have seen Kirk embraced.²⁶ Only by settling the question of the existence of the norms and the efficacy of the Moral Imagination in perceiving them would one settle such a dispute.

However, this sceptical conservative tradition of which Oakeshott is a representative neglects the linking of politics to the transcendent or ideal, especially as understood in a substantive, traditional, and authoritative sense. Oakeshott himself believed that morality was an aspect of the practical mode of experience, and that, as all modes of experience were distinct and partial, cannot be applied to objective reality as a whole.²⁷ Kirk, though, was keen to stress the importance for human society and for the individual in feeling connected to the eternal norms that transcend purely material considerations, as well as to the generations which have come before and those which will come after. This connection would seem to imply substantive values and beliefs and purposes being shared across society and influencing politics, like the shared religious and cultural heritage of America that Kirk called attention to, which Oakeshott's emphasis on the limits of purposive politics must be at odds with.²⁸ From this perspective, the view that tradition should reflect the permanent things, if it is to play such an important social role, supplies a deficiency in Oakeshott's defence of tradition and the practical. And it also shows the distinctive integrative role the Moral Imagination plays in Kirk's view of tradition and history, integrating past, present, and future, the mundane and the corporeal. Of course, again though, to a degree it will come down to whether the existence of the norms and transcendent Kirk affirms are accepted and whose ultimate philosophical perspective is correct.

²⁵ Muller, Jerry Z. (ed.), *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to The Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997. 4-7.

²⁶ Tregenza, Ian, 'Skepticism and Tradition: The Religious Imagination of Michael Oakeshott', in Abel, Corey, *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2010. 2-3.

²⁷ Sullivan, Andrew, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2007. 30-31. And Tregenza, Ian, 'Skepticism and Tradition'. Op. Cit. 6.

²⁸ See for example Kirk, *America's British Culture*, Op. Cit.

3.2 Contemporary Criticisms of Tradition

Kirk's views on tradition were strongly at odds with the dominant liberal intellectual perspective on man in his lifetime and today.²⁹ This perspective was often supported by a very different view of man's nature to that of Kirk and traditional conservatism. This liberal position was often, implicitly or explicitly, founded upon a view of human nature that stressed the individual's psychological and sociological autonomy and self-sufficiency.³⁰ Tradition and traditional institutions are secondary, even marginal, compared to the needs, desires, and reason of the individual and the current generation to this liberal viewpoint and could often be an obstruction to the freedom and experimentation of individuals and society, by restraining unnecessarily their action and thought with deference for this inheritance.³¹

This intellectual climate was an important context to Kirk's defence of tradition and his writings on the Moral Imagination, an implicit background against which Kirk's ideas on tradition reacted and interacted. For the most part, American academia and culture was dominated by those of a liberal persuasion – supporters of the New Deal and other forms of progressivism and social democracy – augmented by a significant section of radicals such as Marxists. We have already quoted the liberal literary critic Lionel Trilling on the lack of conservative intellectual tradition in American culture in 1950. Other examples of this intellectual opposition to a significant role for tradition include some of the criticisms of Kirk and the emergent post-war American conservative movement in the 1950s and 1960s. For instance sociologist and Professor Irving Louis Horowitz, somewhat polemically, refers to alleged “anti-intellectualism” in the new conservative movement's aversion to a heavy reliance on reason to solve society's problems and the importance, in reason's place, of such supports as tradition, quoting from Kirk himself as an example.³² This shows the context of Kirk's writings, as well as, through contrast, the significant way Kirk's views about human nature and tradition distinguished his views on society and politics.

There are many other liberal criticisms of a substantive political and social role for tradition and the experience of the past, contemporary to Kirk's career or subsequent. We will briefly explore some that are particularly powerful or representative of such criticisms in general in order to better understand the insights and limitations of Kirk's position on the Moral Imagination and tradition. Albert Hirschman, in his work *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, argues that the conservative insistence on the likely perverse unintended consequences of purposive, rationally guided substantive social action is misguided and

²⁹ Goodwin, Barbara, *Using Political Ideas*, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., Chichester, 2007. 36.

³⁰ Nisbet, Robert, *The Quest for Community*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981. 225-227.

³¹ See Brown, Stuart Gerry, 'Democracy, the New Conservatism, and the Liberal Tradition in America', *Ethics*, Vol. 66, No. 1, Part 1 (Oct., 1955). 7-8, where the author accuses conservatism of being timid.

³² Horowitz, Irving Louis, 'The New Conservatism', *Science & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1956). 23.

exaggerated. As an economist he makes the argument that policy makers with expertise can very often use reason and planning to avoid such outcomes; as he says: “under such conditions yesterday’s experiences are continually incorporated into today’s decisions, so that the tendencies towards perversity stand a good chance of being detected and corrected.”³³

Although on the face of it Hirschman is alluding to the use of past experience to inform future decisions, he is not talking of, for the most part, the deference to tradition and history, and the linked reliance on prudential wisdom and Moral Imagination, but the policy specialists use of reason and largely personal or specialist experience. Hirschman’s argument is a particular representative of all those contemporary and recent liberal and radical intellectual ones that reject Kirk’s fundamental traditionalist thesis of the limits of reason for moral and social knowledge and the significant role tradition and past historical experience can supply in making up for it. For these liberal and radical critics, reason and less rooted, more personal, innovative, and technical experience is capable of guiding and reordering society. Kirk certainly argues strongly against the implicit faith in reason and planning that Hirschman’s point represents, but, although he makes good, common sense points to this effect, Kirk does not use extensive research and statistical analysis to prove his position. This means that he does not completely answer Hirschman’s objection by showing that rational planning cannot replace the knowledge of tradition and prescriptive institutions.

We might use Barbara Goodwin’s popular textbook, *Using Political Ideas*, as a further example of the liberal intellectual opposition to Kirk’s and traditional conservatism’s claims of the significance of tradition. This textbook is an introduction to political theory and the various prevalent ideologies, including conservatism. The chapter on conservatism is somewhat hostile and one-sided, but it does offer a useful representation of liberal and radical criticism of conservatism on this issue. Goodwin lists three central criticisms of conservative belief in tradition.

Firstly, Goodwin criticises the conservative view of tradition for assuming “that what it preserved over time is what is best”.³⁴ As Goodwin notes, tradition can preserve what is accidental or even what is perverse. The fragmentary and illative sources and processes of the Moral Imagination are some response to this criticism; the individual surveys the numerous traditions of his society and gleans from them, with the support of the other sources of the Moral Imagination, cultural and normative knowledge through a sort of illative osmosis – extracting the positive and essential from the negative and accidental. However, Kirk strongly implies that tradition does tend to lead to an increase in real knowledge, such as his invoking of the aphorism of Bernard of Chartres quoted earlier. It is implied that tradition will tend to be formed according to the insights of the Moral Imagination and those with a

³³ Hirschman, Albert O., *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, and Jeopardy*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 1991. 42.

³⁴ Goodwin, Op. Cit. 161.

healthy Moral Imagination will grasp the fruits of this tradition, but this is a strong claim and it is open to question whether Kirk's writings are sufficient proof to fully demonstrate it, rather than outlining a possible response only.

The second criticism of the conservative beliefs about tradition, of which Kirk's thought is an important representative, that Goodwin mentions is that they presuppose a decline in a society over the course of its history. If, Goodwin continues, society draws from its past and learns from it, then surely this should be a progressive process, improving on what has gone before, rather than one requiring continued deference for past traditions.³⁵ From what we have seen of Kirk's view of tradition, he could respond that man without past traditions and mores is isolated from much cultural, normative, and even scientific and technical knowledge. Past tradition does not necessarily form a singular, cumulative accumulation of more knowledge and wisdom, but instead can be read, with the help of the Moral Imagination, as a source of numerous, often disparate insights – which also form the background to the particular social and cultural situation an individual finds himself in.

Also, in a sense tradition just is this accumulation of knowledge, and therefore cannot be simply thrust aside – some aspects of the deep past will be obsolete but others will be useful; it will take investigation of the sort provided by the Moral Imagination to make the proper distinctions. This criticism of tradition as a source of knowledge is weaker than Goodwin's first one, but it does pose questions for Kirk's use of tradition as a source of the Moral Imagination. Sidney Smith, the great Whig pamphleteer, made the same point about those who professed deference to the wisdom of their ancestors: if tradition represents an accumulation of knowledge over time, then surely the current generation will be more knowledgeable than its ancestors.³⁶ Kirk does provide important responses to this kind of objection, but still he could have done with more forcefully pre-empting the objection that tradition as an accumulation of knowledge implies the superiority of latter generations over former ones.

Lastly Goodwin's reasonably representative list of progressive criticisms of the conservative perspective on tradition that Kirk exemplifies is completed with the objection that any existing institution, after an undefined period of time, presumably, can claim to be traditional. She mentions the Stalinist tradition in the USSR as a possible tradition, and one that the conservative is unlikely to support.³⁷ This is a recurrent concern for Kirk, and for all conservatives and defenders of tradition: how are we to sort the positive traditions or customs of the past from the negative ones. The Moral Imagination gives us one way of doing so: by respecting and attuning to the permanent things – the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Smith, Sidney, *Fallacies of the Anti-Reformers, Part One*, Great Literature Online, 1997-2015. <http://www.smith.classicauthors.net/FallaciesOfAntiReformers/FallaciesOfAntiReformers2.html>, accessed 6th August 2015.

³⁷ Goodwin, Op. Cit. 227.

entire edifice of the Moral Imagination – we can select those traditions and mores that represent this normative insight over those less in line with it. However, although this might rule out traditions like communism, there is still the question of competing traditions, as for example English traditions of country life (the green and pleasant land) and conservative ways alongside its traditions of technological innovation and the inheritance of the Labour movement. How does the conservative differentiate between many of these traditions, especially when they might represent certain strains of thought and sentiment he dislikes (as Kirk disliked the Atlee government). Kirk does not give us an in depth method for doing this, leaving it to prudence and particular circumstance.

We might mention here a final important liberal and radical critique of the political and sociological significance of tradition which was raised during Kirk's lifetime. This is the supposed invention of many traditions. That is, it is the argument that many apparently hallowed and ancient customs may be of relatively recent invention. Eric Hobsbawm, the Marxist historian, famously wrote on this subject and edited a work in 1983 with seven essays on the subject, exploring such invented traditions, ranging from many of those adhering to Scottish nationalism to many surrounding the British monarchy.³⁸ Although Hobsbawm does not make an out and out attack on the use of tradition, one could easily see in this argument the suggestion that traditions need not be grounded in any great experience of a society or social group. This would seem to somewhat reduce the need to respect past traditions as a source of moral and other wisdom.

From Kirk's perspective it might be argued, in response, the contention that traditions are invented does not take away from the social and cultural importance of tradition. But it does seem to take something away from the claim that tradition represents accumulated experience of the past that cannot be replaced by reason and purposive action. Kirk can respond by invoking the Moral Imagination and suggesting that, one, these recently invented traditions are not all or most traditions; and two, that these traditions succeed when they take their place amongst a fabric of historically rooted institutions and adapt themselves to it, using a perception analogous to the Moral Imagination to fit in with the pattern and lessons of traditional society and to extend them. However, this does seem to demand a greater focus on how traditions arise, how they embody knowledge, and how they are to be distinguished and the wheat sorted from the chaff than Kirk was typically willing to indulge in. If traditions can arise immediately at any time, even purposefully invented and claiming longevity they do not have, then there does seem to be more analysis needed of what it is that makes tradition such an important source of normative and other knowledge.

Through the criticisms of Hirschman, Goodwin, and Hobsbawm we therefore see that contemporary and recent critics of conservatives did put forward important challenges for those, like Kirk, claiming

³⁸ Hobsbawm, Eric, and Ranger, Terence, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.

tradition as a means to transmit accurate social and moral knowledge. Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination, with its integrative processes, absorbing knowledge from many parts of life and society, went some way to showing how tradition can come to embody such knowledge and how such knowledge can be got from tradition (as opposed to more rationalist sources). That is, how valid traditions are created in concert with and measured against the edifice of traditional society and the insights of the Moral Imagination from its numerous sources. This helps to show how conservative opinions on tradition intellectually still have something to add, although many questions about the exact processes involved do remain.

One further question that arises from Kirk's emphasis of the role of tradition in the Moral Imagination is its situation in modernity. The modern, Western world more and more seems to have turned its back on tradition and prescription, which no longer are a major support for our institutions and are as likely to be treated with outright hostility as with veneration and respect. How is the modern world to then substitute for these lost sources of moral guidance? Some traditionalist conservatives, such as the Paleoconservatives like Thomas Fleming and Samuel Francis, believe that modern society has so turned its back on traditional values and institutions that it is not a matter of repairing neglected but still intact traditions; rather, drastic revival is required – to this end they eschewed the name conservative, to a degree.³⁹ This is an area that Kirk does not fully address in any depth. One reason for this lack of attention is that Kirk fundamentally did believe that there were enough traditional elements alive in contemporary America that could be the basis of the resurrection of a society based in tradition and historical consciousness. For example, Kirk believed that the U.S. constitution and framework of government and law, though much distorted and corrupted by the accretions of long neglect and abuse, was still capable of being restored so as to help bring better order in contemporary American society.⁴⁰ Similarly, Kirk still believed Americans during his lifetime to possess enough of the right conservative qualities, virtues, institutions, and mores for a conservative renewal to have a strong foundation and often liked to talk as if such a renewal would soon be underway.⁴¹

This is a view for which Kirk was often criticised, both by liberals and radicals and by those on the right; it was claimed that America was a land of innovation, change, and progress, not beholden to the stultifying barriers of ancient civilisation in the Old World, like feudal vestiges, established churches, and various other anachronisms and superstitions.⁴² This criticism of Kirk's emphasis on tradition based upon

³⁹ Scotchie, Joseph (ed.), *The Paleoconservatives: New Voices of the Old Right*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1999. 2.

⁴⁰ Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999. 107.

⁴¹ Kirk, Russell, 'The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things are Written on the Sky', in Kirk, Russell, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things are Written on the Sky*, Regnery Gateway, inc., Washington D.C., 1987. 131.

⁴² Malvasi, Mark. G., 'Kirk Among the Historians: Myth and Meaning in the Writing of American History', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 132-136.

his understanding of the permanent things and conservative principles surfaced at the very beginning of his career and the rise of the New Conservatism. Stuart Gerry Brown, for example, claimed that “The fact is that the American tradition itself is revolutionary” and “to be an American conservative it is necessary to reassert liberalism.” Brown criticised conservative conceptions of American traditions like those of Kirk – respect for social classes and orders, restraint of numerical majorities over social and political innovation, and so forth. Instead he explicitly offered the liberal, democratic traditions of Jefferson, Jackson, and FDR as the core of the American traditional inheritance.⁴³ Even some on the right dissented from or criticised Kirk’s views of American tradition and history. Clinton Rossiter, for example, accused Kirk of sounding like “a man born one hundred and fifty years too late and in the wrong country”. He argued in his book *The Conservative Tradition in America: The Thankless Persuasion* America was liberal and progressive nation and its traditions were liberal, democratic, and progressive, marginalising the Burkean traditions Kirk thought still undergirded US society.⁴⁴

These are powerful criticisms of Kirk’s view of America’s traditional inheritance. They remind us just how liberal and progressive America’s history and mind set have been and continue to be. Kirk’s response is that this view of American society neglects those basic areas of society – the permanent things – like family, community, and religion, as well as the constitution, America’s legal system, its balanced and restrained government, and so on, that, whilst often under strain, still provide important conservative impulses to American society and culture. This does partially address these criticisms. A very good argument can be made that America’s society has more Burkean strains, and continues to do so, than many critics have allowed, and Kirk makes this argument frequently and forcefully. On the other hand, Kirk’s insistence on the health and significance of this conservative strain in the U.S. seems questionable, given the strength of social and cultural liberalism in American history, as even many conservatives pointed out to Kirk. Therefore, the emphasis Kirk places on America’s traditionalism, as opposed to its change and innovations – technological, demographic, and cultural, seems to be out of proportion to these facts.⁴⁵ Kirk, although always optimistic, does not seem to properly address the marginalised place of Burkean tradition in America society, leaving open the question of what role America’s traditions and history can play in supporting the Moral Imagination.

⁴³ Brown, Op. Cit. 3-8.

⁴⁴ Dennis, William C., Kirk, Rossiter, ‘Hartz, and the Conservative Tradition in America’, *Modern Age*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Spring, 1980). 161. And. Nash, George, H., *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945*, Basic Books, inc., Publishers, New York, 1976. 197-198.

⁴⁵ Henrie, Mark C., ‘Conservatism in America’, *First Principles*, 11th September 2012, <http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=228>, accessed 6th August 2015. And see Abbott, Philip, ‘Still Louis Hartz After all these Years: A Defense of the Liberal Society Thesis’, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (March, 2005). 104-105. And. Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Von Erik, ‘Liberalism in America’, *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997). 46-50.

3.3 History

On the other side of the spectrum on which the experience of the past can be filtered to be made useable as knowledge, including normative knowledge, is history.⁴⁶ This includes academic history, or the past in its most discursive and scholarly form, and also popular history and legend, which include a more traditional component. We have already mentioned the way in which narrative history and biography were literary genres that Kirk mentions as providing imaginative vision of human nature and norms. Kirk believed that the presentation of historical events and figures by historians was capable of communicating knowledge, especially normative knowledge.⁴⁷ Historians with imaginative insight into human nature and literary skill were capable of powerful and enlightening use of the past, as a moral lesson to later generations. Kirk praises Herodotus and Thucydides for this kind of imaginative history as well as the twentieth century historians Christopher Dawson and John Luckas.⁴⁸

As an example of more popular history and legend, we might mention Kirk's invocation of the American past and American founding, which in its more general forms represents a considerable amount of folk assimilation of a historical narrative:⁴⁹ The main American founding fathers and the events of the War of Independence have a semi-legendary place in Americans' understanding of their nation and its past, against which academic history is secondary. However, the history itself is not irrelevant. The War of Independence is not just folk wisdom for Americans, and exists in the American psyche in a more real, precise, and significant way than, for example, the Norman Conquest does in the English, showing the spectrum of history and tradition in making the past usable as knowledge in the present.

Combining these forms of history, Kirk himself made much of the normative value of early American history, including the colonial and founding generations' example of character, morals, and political wisdom as well as the institutions they bequeathed to their successors and their British and other cultural and political inheritances.⁵⁰ Here we have popular imagery of the virtue and wisdom of early America which may be supported by scholarly research of the figures, events, and debates of the time,

⁴⁶ Malvasi, Op. Cit. 147-148. And See as an example of Kirk's own use of history in this way, Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991.

⁴⁷ Russello, 'Time and the Timeless', Op. Cit. 215.

⁴⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 274. And. Russello, 'Time and the Timeless', Op. Cit. 213.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 393-439.

⁵⁰ See for example, Kirk, Russell, 'The Framers: not Philosophes but Gentlemen', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 451. And. Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit.

of which Kirk's *The Roots of American Order*, originally meant to be a high school textbook, is an example.⁵¹

Again, Michael Oakeshott, Kirk's near contemporary and fellow conservative of sorts, wrote on the subject of the practical past and history and, although Oakeshott, unlike Kirk, wrote philosophically about history, we can still increase our understanding of Kirk's views by comparing their viewpoints. Oakeshott more strongly differentiated between the practical past and history proper than Kirk. For Oakeshott, a practical past from which moral lessons may be taken must be filtered through a framework of tradition, converting the past into the utterly distinct discourse of the practical, which simplifies the content to the point of it no longer being true history.⁵² History *qua* history entails a particular attitude to the past that is quite different to the past that is invoked in practical experience. For Oakeshott, history is not the past in full but just what can be reconstructed from it out of evidence that survives in the present.⁵³

For Oakeshott this meant that historians, as historians, were interested in the past for its own sake and enjoyment, and were therefore engaged in quite a distinct activity to any who would make the past usable for the present, such as for moral or political reasons.⁵⁴ Here Kirk differs from Oakeshott. Kirk believes the historian as historian can be interested in the moral and political uses of the past. This is because, through the Moral Imagination and the historian's presentation of the contents and particularities of historical events, the historian can make known the continuities between the past and present, and, even where the history being explored is very remote from the present, can stride across the boundaries of time and place to perceive universal human nature.⁵⁵ In this way moral lessons do not require simplification of or abstraction from the past, at least no more than all historical scholarship requires to be manageable, but can be read through it. Though we may still wonder if there is a tension between literary and imaginative presentation of history and pure historical knowledge, Kirk still gives some answer to the complete distinction Oakeshott draws. This shows that for Kirk the academic historian's work can be legitimate grounds for moral inspiration and the power of the imagination to integrate all aspects of human experience and knowledge.

⁵¹ See Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit.

⁵² Macfie, Alexander Lyon, 'Oakeshott's Answer', *Rethinking History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (December, 2010). 522-523.

⁵³ Tseng, Roy, *The Sceptical Idealist: Michael Oakeshott as a Critic of the Enlightenment*, Imprint Academic, Thorverton, 2003. 257. And. Macfie, Op. Cit. 523-524.

⁵⁴ O'Sullivan, Luke, *Oakeshott on History*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2000. 97-98.

⁵⁵ Russello, 'Time and the Timeless', Op. Cit. 210-211.

3.4 American History

Due to the place American history has in Kirk's presentation of the role of history and tradition as a source of normative and social knowledge, he was greatly interested in debates over the scholarship of U.S. history, opposing many popular contemporary readings of American history. First of all, Kirk objected to those views of American history that stressed American exceptionalism, such as the perspective of the nineteenth century historian and statesman George Bancroft.⁵⁶ In this view of American history, the U.S. was a new nation, largely cut off in its history and its purposes from the older European civilisation, and it had to strike out on its own, blazing its own path. Kirk, on the other hand, although he was thoroughly American and not alienated from U.S. society, always stressed the roots of American culture, and even its polity and political forms, in its Western, and especially British, inheritance, alongside its own colonial experience and peculiar circumstances, history, and mores.⁵⁷

A related school of historical scholarship of American history which Kirk objected to was that perspective that saw U.S. history as the march of progress.⁵⁸ This viewpoint saw America as a land where democracy, freedom, equality, and prosperity were, generally, always on the increase. This was related to the view of American exceptionalism as it was often seen as America's unique role, cut off from the obstacles of European history and society, to be a bastion of progressive freedom.⁵⁹ This view has always, to a certain degree, existed in post-colonial American.⁶⁰ Gordon Wood, with his historical work in which he claims the revolution was, often, a truly radical event, forerunner of the democratic egalitarianism of later times, represents a more contemporary version of this thesis.⁶¹ The American founding, for Kirk, was no foundation of liberal and progressive idealism, but the continuation of a Western and British inheritance of ordered liberty and Moral Imagination that provides support for freedom, justice, and order, but only if wise, imaginative leadership and good general character prevailed. The idyllic imagination and expansive egalitarian idealism Kirk espied in progressive views of American history were unlikely substitutes for this leadership or this character.⁶²

The last major scholarly perspective on U.S. history that Kirk dissented from was that of the consensus historians, represented by Richard Hofstadter amongst others.⁶³ Rising to prominence during the early Cold War, and rejecting the progressive, social conflict historiography, they stressed

⁵⁶ Ibid. 134.

⁵⁷ Kirk, *America's British Culture*, Op. Cit. 1.

⁵⁸ Malvasi, Op. Cit. 134-137.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 135.

⁶⁰ Jefferson, Thomas, *Thomas Jefferson: Political Writings*, Appleby, Joyce (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005. XXIII-XXV.

⁶¹ See Wood, Gordon S., *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Vintage Books, New York, 1993.

⁶² Malvasi, Op. Cit. 133-148.

⁶³ Ibid. 139-141.

convention and an experience of compromise in American history over disunity amongst differing factions and sections. However, the consensus, the vital centre as it was sometimes called, around which American history developed was asserted, by this school, to be essentially liberal, though not stridently progressive, including such tropes as self-reliance, free enterprise, democracy, and even American exceptionalism.⁶⁴ This contrasts with Kirk's view of America's more conservative heritage of ordered liberty, in which Kirk recognised a powerful liberal strain but one which was balanced by respect for inherited institutions and the experience of the past, Protestant Christianity, Common Law, and traditional morality.⁶⁵

To Kirk, therefore, American history had an important conservative strain. Kirk very much understood that individualism, dissent, egalitarian tendencies, and an expansive desire for material prosperity had also been a part of American society since near its beginnings.⁶⁶ However, Kirk maintained that some of the most consistent qualities in American history, and those which most guaranteed its long term and continued order and stability, freedom, and even prosperity, included its essential respect for its established institutions, its Christian values, and its dislike of the application of abstract principles and utopian scheming in political and social concerns. In short it might be said that Kirk believed that an enduring element of the American character and American history was Moral Imagination. Kirk's dispute with these schools of American historical thought then, largely boils down to the importance of the permanent things Kirk prized, compared to the more liberal and progressive values and achievements these schools esteemed. This shows the central place of his vision of norms in his historical thought, as well as the issues of America's traditions and mores, and whether they are conservative or not, which we discussed above.

Kirk eschewed all progressive or cyclical philosophies of history, such as those of Hegel, Toynbee, Spengler, and the Whig theory of history; or, indeed, any philosophy of history that would seem to try to force the vast, bewildering array of historical events and facts into a rigid scheme or framework.⁶⁷ Kirk fundamentally believed in individual free will and agency and was fiercely opposed to all deterministic theories of history. He was fond of quoting a passage from the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in which Burke expressed the significant role individuals and the fortuitous might play in history, he felt was in sympathy with his perspective.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ McDonald, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 110. Also See Kirk, Russell, *America's British Culture*, Op. Cit. For a book length analysis of this heritage.

⁶⁶ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 443.

⁶⁷ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 259-268.

⁶⁸ For example, Kirk, Russell, 'Civilisation without Religion', In Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 5-6.

Kirk did believe that history was shaped by the hand of divine providence - history was the framework of the logos.⁶⁹ That is, he believed that, although God gave man free will - which was the peculiar gift and responsibility of man, he also guided history for the best. This was the classical view of providence as understood by Saint Augustine and the Christian tradition. However, Kirk was hesitant about man's ability to understand God's purposes in the shifting sands of history. Only the utmost development of historical consciousness and Moral Imagination might discover the ways of God to man, but even then Kirk is profoundly cautious of too strident and confident an assertion of the apprehension of providence.⁷⁰

Kirk, we can also add, seems to have thought the past, the passing of time and longevity, endowed real qualities worthy of veneration and respect. Kirk always had a profound affection for what was ancient and the long established, as he tells us himself. His attachment to his ancestral home of Piety Hill in Mecosta Michigan, where his maternal family had lived for several generations and laid down strong roots, was a pertinent example of Kirk's love for the past and the inherited for their own sake.⁷¹ What Augustine Birrell said of Burke and George Eliot - that they loved old things and ruins and rust - seems as true of Kirk.⁷² In Kirk's travel writings we see the accuracy of this characterisation: immemorial customs, long established ways, visible continuity, and the rust and ruin of devouring time seem to have elicited deference in Kirk.⁷³ But this was not simply a personal trait on Kirk's part, it was an affection he considered natural and right. Kirk was fond of citing Richard Hooker's aphorism, much loved, as Kirk noted, by, Burke as well, that man most admires and respects those things most ancient and most great because they remind us most of the eternal and infinite nature of God.⁷⁴ Kirk believed strongly in the rightness and social necessity of general veneration for established institutions and custom – men should have warmth and love for the social institutions and traditions that shaped them.

Here we have, indeed, the sentimental accompaniment to historical consciousness and the Moral Imagination, which also through imagination and reason inform us of the importance of the past and tradition in shaping our social and moral existence. What is also evident, however, is that for Kirk there is a real or objective quality that exists in the inheritance of our past, cultural and even physical, which demands a certain response and integration from us, rational, imaginative, and sentimental. This

⁶⁹ Quinn, Dermot, 'Religion and the Conservative Mind', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 217-219. And. Russello, 'Time and the Timeless', Op. Cit. 214.

⁷⁰ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 263.

⁷¹ Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 9-18.

⁷² Birrell, Augustine, *Obiter Dicta: Second Series*, Elliot Stock, London, 1896. 175-176.

⁷³ See for example Kirk's description of his time in St. Andrew's, Kirk, Russell, *The Sword of the Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995. 85-107.

⁷⁴ Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Peru, 1988. 138.

underscores the sense in which the past and continuity are a real presence in the present for Kirk, an aspect of man and reality that the individual and society need to assimilate.

3.5 Historical Consciousness

The notion of historical consciousness, used by Kirk, presents a good overview of his views of the relationship between the past as a source of moral and social knowledge, though Kirk does enter into the philosophical debates of the nineteenth and twentieth century touching upon this term. For Kirk, the properly developed individual is ever alive to the inheritance and lessons of history. This man senses the continuity of social institutions and beliefs; combines the input of numerous traditional and historically rooted sources, like traditional ideals and historic identities; respects the hard won wisdom of his ancestors; and strives to hand on what his ancestors have given to him to posterity. He adapts and reforms only where necessary and with a spirit of veneration for the time-honoured social fabric. This is historical consciousness. It is, in a sense, a component of the Moral Imagination, that part of it that deals with history and man's connection to and consciousness of humanity's historically rooted nature. Kirk does not give, as usual, a systematic explanation of the processes of historical consciousness and the way they communicate knowledge to the individual. However, we can, from his writings and what we have said previously, surmise that history makes use of imagination, in its use of imaginative examples, whether figures or ideal standards; sentiments, by using the traditions and examples of the past to guide affections; habits, when the traditional associations and ways of life handed down accustom the individual to act, feel, and think in certain ways, which follows from the fact tradition is a non-discursive, immersive guide; and reason, which must be necessary in some sense to apprehend the lessons and conclusions accumulated, though Kirk would keep it in its place.⁷⁵

As we have seen, Kirk recognises the past is so vast and overwhelming in its entirety that it requires tradition and historical legend and analysis to interpret, select, and communicate truths from history. These, however, require the ability to discover the permanent things, or norms, in history and communicate these in a comprehensible form: the Moral Imagination.⁷⁶ As historical consciousness, supported by tradition and history, is a major source of the Moral Imagination, there is clearly a two-way relationship at work here. The Moral Imagination, with its grasp of normative reality and the permanent things, is what allows for ordering and filtering of the experience of the past to communicate a moral and spiritual message to the present. But this message, or the illative combination of many such

⁷⁵ Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 138. And. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 98.

⁷⁶ Russello, 'Time and the Timeless', Op. Cit. 216.

messages, is itself a primary formative influence on the ability of the Moral Imagination to perceive and understand the permanent things.

This is saved from being a simply closed circular process by what we have been referring to as the illative nature of the Moral Imagination and historical consciousness. That is, moral knowledge is gleaned from numerous sources in a complex and intricate way in which the inputs of each source presumably reinforce and support each other.⁷⁷ Gerald Russello describes this process as the authorities - Church, old families, universities, and all such historically rooted bodies - in a gradual, sometimes almost imperceptible way, separating true elaborations of tradition from the false, in an institutional and collective operation of historical consciousness and the Moral Imagination.⁷⁸ History and tradition thereby are, as just stated, a support for other sources of moral knowledge, such as literature or religion, whilst being supported and made sense of by these other sources. However, this seems to still leave unanswered where the initial entrance into this process of moral knowledge arises, where the individual gets the initial moral insight to be able to make use of any other source of norms. It seems that the answer to this question must be supplied by innate moral awareness and by the habits formed in early life that provide the foundation for the correct and beneficial attitude to the sources of moral knowledge that are less habitual or innate.

When it comes to historical consciousness, Kirk does not inform us how much of it is based in an innate or intuitive ability to grasp the permanent things in history, and how much must be supported by those aspects of the Moral Imagination that require more effort and cultivation. Judging, however, by the capacity for widespread and background historical consciousness to fluctuate in society across time and place, we may surmise that a robust and imaginative historical consciousness is not so innate as to not require powerful support from a properly functioning Moral Imagination. As Kirk says of liberalism, which in a sense for him represents the attitudes he has been defending history and tradition against, it “repudiated authority, tradition, and the wisdom of the ancestors”, and therefore the widespread influence of liberalism would show that this historical consciousness can be suppressed.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Op. Cit. 249.

⁷⁸ Russello, ‘Time and the Timeless’, Op. Cit. 216.

⁷⁹ Kirk, Russell, ‘The Dissolution of Liberalism’, in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of a Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 35.

Chapter Four

The Moral Imagination and Literature and the Arts

As we have already noted, literature was a topic that was of prime importance to Russell Kirk, standing out as a chief source of the Moral Imagination.¹ He wrote often on the subject. For example, *The Conservative Mind* had a distinctive focus on literary and aesthetic elements; and the first half of *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, one of his most sustained endeavours in social and cultural thought, examines the relationship of literature and the Moral Imagination. And many other works, like *The Roots of American Order*, and *America's British Culture*, touch on literature and the Moral Imagination. Indeed, Kirk considered himself, first and foremost, a man of letters,² writing fiction,³ as well as nonfiction in which he aimed to combine literary style with Moral Imagination and scholarly content.⁴ Furthermore, throughout his career he was in contact with literary figures whom he felt embodied his views on the moral duty of writers— from T. S. Eliot to Ray Bradbury, George Scott-Moncrieff to Flannery O'Connor – and immersed in a literary atmosphere which his memoirs and writings show was influential on him, writing on many of these figures.⁵ This all shows how important literature was to his life and moral and social thought.

4.1 Literature and Norms

First and foremost, for Kirk literature and the arts are a source for the Moral Imagination, because they are a powerful and perennial means of expressing normative reality and, in consequence, man's place in the universe and the nature of the virtuous and vicious life.⁶ What preoccupied Kirk most centrally, in this respect, was his afore mentioned dualistic view of human nature, imbibed from

¹ Zoll, Donald Atwell, 'The Social Thought of Russell Kirk', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 2 (Autumn, 1972). 121.

² McDonald, W. Wesley, 'Reason, Natural Law, and Moral Imagination in the Thought of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter, 1983). 16.

³ For in depth discussion of Kirk's fiction see Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999. 109-150.

⁴ Frum, David, 'The Legacy of Russell Kirk', *New Criterion*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December, 1994.). 10.

⁵ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormity in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 116-120. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Sword of the Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995. 91-94, 180-184, and 212-225.

⁶ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 1.

Christian and Classical traditions. Man, for him, was capable of goodness, but also prone to foolishness and sin. Through spiritual effort, supported by Moral Imagination and its sources like literature, he could overcome his negative tendencies and integrate his various aspects – like imagination and sentiment – towards good and moral action.⁷ Literature captures this drama of human existence and the nature of humanity particularly powerfully, wedding timeless moral issues to the particular and individual narratives and drama of the art form, as implied, for example, in Kirk's opposition to overly didactic literature (which shows he believes that it is through the particular characters and stories that norms must most centrally be revealed).⁸

This is in contrast to discursive reason, which can only provide abstract reasoning and precepts that need complex and careful application to the circumstances of life, offset with moral lessons from other sources – a point at the centre of Kirk's entire thesis of the Moral Imagination – and therefore can often lack the power to move men and provide the insight into everyday moral choices that literary imagination can provide. Literature is therefore an important means of integrating the particular with universal norms, as well as (as we shall see) the individual imaginative and creative capacities with the artistic and imaginative expressions of society as a whole and the imagination with the other faculties involved in literature.

Imagination is clearly at the centre of the operations of the Moral Imagination in art, for Kirk, offering us models and images of human behaviour we can apply to our own lives, extracting the lessons and the truths from the particular settings.⁹ But literature and art are not just about the imagination; they are also about sentiment. They can inculcate feelings and affections in man, connecting these to the moral drama of the work.¹⁰ Indeed, the role of sentiment in the impact of literature is well demonstrated in some of the references Kirk makes to literature and the works he talks about, such as the poems of Coleridge or Kipling that he lists on one of his prospective literary curricula for high school students or his references to the images of Dante; all of these examples clearly include the stirring of sentiment and feeling as part of their power.¹¹ We may also add habit and instinct as immersion in literature and art may reinforce instinctive and habitual moral beliefs and feelings. And we even surmise that discursive reason itself is not absent as a means through which art and, especially, literature can support moral insight. This is both because literature in particular may bring up and discuss ideas, and because art may stimulate at least partially conscious and discursive moral thought. Art may, for Kirk,

⁷ Ericson, Edward E Jr., Christian Therefore Conservative, *Modern Age*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Winter, 2002). 22. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 1.

⁸ Ericson, Op. Cit. 22. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 42.

⁹ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, Gateway Editions, Limited, South Bend, 1978. 272. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 45.

¹⁰ Russello, Gerald J., *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2007. 52.

¹¹ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. P 271 and 275.

therefore, move its audience through (often complex and intricate) combinations of these faculties, making use of many of the central faculties of man.

Because of this ability to morally move the audience, Kirk felt literature was capable of spiritually, morally, and culturally benefitting a society, as well as corrupting it, and having a widespread effect on it. This implies in part the importance of integrating man's imaginative and creative powers, which Kirk clearly feels are central to man, under the correct moral direction.¹² Presumably, it is the entire mass of literature read in society that exerts this influence, with some works more influential than others, as Kirk frequently discusses this influence in reference to a long list of works and even to whole movements of literature or arts.¹³ This represents also the importance of harmonising the individual with society, for which society itself must be properly ordered, artistically and imaginatively. However, he provides no exact model for how art as a whole may so contribute. He does make it clear, though, art, especially literature, is able to set a corrupting and negative example for society as well, by engaging the imagination through the degenerate and deceptive forms of the idyllic and the diabolic imaginations.

The term idyllic imagination is one that Kirk borrows from Irving Babbitt, though Kirk devotes less space to it.¹⁴ It represents those views of human nature that stress man's innate goodness and base morality on expansive moral feeling and sympathy that can, when obstacles are removed, gush forth almost effortlessly.¹⁵ The dualism that the classical and Christian view locates within the individual, which then effects society, is relocated to the social level: any problems must be in institutions, customs, and mores, rather than innate individual proclivities.¹⁶ Babbitt and Kirk consider Rousseau as the prime exponent of this form of sentimental humanitarianism in modern times, but it is a perspective that has sunk deep into many parts of modern thought and culture.¹⁷ In terms of literature, therefore, the idyllic imagination presents a vision of man's goodness, his innate and expansive moral feelings and sympathies, and the repressive and restricting nature of many social institutions, traditions, and beliefs. This imagination, therefore, is hostile to moral effort, self-restraint, and the importance of the vast web of sources of the Moral Imagination, as these are seen as unnecessary and often the cause of injustice.¹⁸

The diabolic imagination on the other hand, a term which Kirk takes from T. S. Eliot's 1934 lectures entitled *After Strange Gods* but he himself pioneered in this context, is the sort of imagination which, as Kirk states, "delights in the perverse and subhuman" – it is nihilistic and celebrates violence and

¹² For example, Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 15 and 63. And. Zoll, Op. Cit. 121.

¹³ Kirk, Russell, 'The Moral Imagination', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 207-212.

¹⁴ Ibid. 208.

¹⁵ Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999. 22-23.

¹⁶ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 48-54.

¹⁷ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 208.

¹⁸ Ryn, Claes, 'American Intellectual Conservatism: Needs, Opportunities, Prospects', *Modern Age*, Vol. 26, No. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn, 1982). 309.

indecenty.¹⁹ Kirk means by this term not just the most infamous examples, like place the Marquis De Sade and Nietzsche, but also more mundane examples, such as those modern authors so intent on what they consider realism that they portray man in a way essentially shorn of any dignity or purpose. Kirk considered the diabolic imagination to be a growing presence in contemporary literature and in society.²⁰

We find him, for example, labelling a good swath of contemporary authors as nihilistic and he makes the comment that “in the franchise bookshops of the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and eighty-one, the shelves are crowded with the prickly pears and the Dead Sea fruit of literary decadence.”²¹ It is clear that Kirk thought that many contemporary works were full of needless gore, violence, and depravity and lacked a moral purpose and vision, inflicting instead, upon their audiences, an amoral or immoral outlook. For example, in reviewing the Hunter-Macmillan English textbook entitled *Something Strange*, Kirk complains that the combined impression of the works included in it make its world seem one “without mercy, faith, hope, charity, justice, or purpose.”²² Kirk only gives brief mention of actual contemporary authors whose work has the qualities of the diabolic imagination – though he mentions Tennessee Williams as an author of decadent literature - but it is clear Kirk believes they were very numerous in his time, and his favoured authors, like T. S. Eliot, are unusual in being legitimately moral writers.²³ Kirk suggests links between the idyllic and diabolic imagination, links which suggest that the errors and illusions of the idyllic imagination can create the boredom and disillusionment which feed the diabolic imagination.²⁴ But he does not give detailed explanations of the relationship of these forms of the imagination to each other.

We have already noted an important focus on literature taken as an aggregate in Kirk’s views on its relationship to the Moral Imagination, and we may note, for Kirk, Western literature forms a whole tradition of literary material for Western society to use as an important fuel for its Moral Imagination.²⁵ For example, Kirk often lists those authors whom he feels form a chain of insightful literature. Homer; the Bible; Aeschylus; Sophocles; Aristophanes; Cicero, Virgil; Plutarch; Dante; Shakespeare; Swift; and others: these are the sort of names that appear when Kirk references a tradition of profound and moral literature in the West.²⁶ But not only does Kirk reference such classics; he also mentions more recent writers; for example, at one point he mentions the great nineteenth century novelists – Scott, Dickens,

¹⁹ Kirk, ‘The Moral Imagination’, Op. Cit. 208.

²⁰ Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot’s Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Peru, 1988. 213-215. And. Kirk, Russell, ‘The Moral Imagination’, Op. Cit. 208-212.

²¹ Kirk, ‘The Moral Imagination’, Op. Cit. 206.

²² Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 266.

²³ Kirk, ‘The Moral Imagination’, Op. Cit. 208-209 and 215.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Zoll, Op. Cit. 124.

²⁶ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 275-277. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 33, 42, and 49-51.

Thackeray, and Trollope – in such a way as to suggest they continued this tradition of moral insight. And Kirk includes twentieth century exemplars of the Moral Imagination, such as his friends T. S. Eliot and Roy Campbell, in a similar way.²⁷ Aside from their individual creative and moral power, for Kirk these figures clearly represent, in some way, a tradition repository of moral knowledge.

We will discuss Kirk's use of a tradition or canon of Western literature more fully in the chapter on education as a source of the Moral Imagination, including problems and criticisms of the concept of an authoritative canon. For our purposes here, we will address just how the writers and works that Kirk alludes to actually can be said to form a tradition, from his perspective, of any meaningful sort. We can give part of the answer to this question by noting that these writers, in Kirk's view at least, were exponents of moral insight and tradition, representing human nature and the drama of human existence in such a way, and with the necessary literary talent, that they contributed to moral knowledge. Or as Donald Atwell Zoll puts it, this tradition has the "ethical authority....[of the] corpus of literature produced by the great men of the race".²⁸ As it can hardly be doubted but that there was a huge difference in how Sophocles might communicate the truths of human nature compared to Anthony Trollope, and even much difference in some of the details of that nature as each saw it, we must look, as Kirk's writings on the subject hint, at certain shared spiritual and moral assumptions, for all the difference in philosophy and details, time, and place. This tradition of ethical literature, whatever its differences in philosophy or detail, "teaches us what it is to be a man", in Kirk's phrase, and "join[s] us in an intellectual community".²⁹

On some level Kirk clearly feels that these figures (to a greater or lesser degree) possess, capture, and communicate a shared imaginative vision of humanity, in a way analogous to the shared assumptions and vision he understood between the great moral schools of Hellenism and Christianity, as we have seen. Though his idea of a Western canon is reminiscent of many formulations of such a tradition, his peculiar moral vision behind the canon does see him neglect certain figures, such as Voltaire or Ibsen, and also elevate certain less well known writers to an increased prominence. We might mention Kirk's life-long championing of the English novelist George Gissing, whose works he first read after discovering them in a second hand bookshop as a young man.³⁰ This marks out his canon of Western literature as distinctive.

Another answer to the way in which these figures, mentioned by Kirk as a tradition, seem to form a literary tradition is their connections to each other. We need not go into much detail on what is a vast

²⁷ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 41-42 and 109.

²⁸ Zoll, Op. Cit. 124.

²⁹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 33.

³⁰ Kirk, Russell, 'Who Knows George Gissing?', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 248. And. Kirk, *The Sword of the Imagination*, Op. Cit. P 152. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 245-255.

topic, beyond our immediate interest here for the most part – and after all it is a generally well known process – but from the Greeks onwards past literature has long had an influence over later Western literature, and inspiration and reaction have abounded. Kirk gives little detail on this topic, but he does make brief mention of such literary influence in a context which implies continuity of an artistic or literary tradition.³¹

The fact that Kirk saw Western and Anglo-American literature as traditions within which the writers belonging to them lived and wrote, has an important place in understanding Kirk's view of the relationship between Moral Imagination and literature. It is not just individual authors that provide a literary source of the Moral Imagination, but, rather, it is the whole tradition that can communicate the drama of human existence to society. The weight of a literary tradition of centuries unifies the productions, diverse in content, style, and background, so as to supply normative insight.³² This accords with the nature of the Moral Imagination, as we have seen, which tends to operate by uniting the moral insights of numerous and diffuse sources gathered together by the various faculties of human perception and consciousness.³³

Of course, contemporary society would have to treat this tradition in just the way Kirk does in order for the tradition of Western literature to play this beneficial social and cultural role. There is no guarantee that otherwise our literary inheritances will be viewed always in a way similar to Kirk's perspective or made consistent use of at all, even if, as Kirk notes, contemporary literature and arts will always be with us and an influence on society and culture. Kirk is well aware of these difficulties, and his writings on literature and education are centrally concerned with reminding us - including writers and educators - of what he felt was the traditional purpose and insight of Western literature.

Kirk's writings on literature as a source of the Moral Imagination also include ruminations on the features and merits of different varieties of literature, particularly fantasy and mythology, in its broadest ambit; and narrative history and biography. Kirk makes it clear he considers fantasy a particularly potent way to communicate moral truth, by stimulating the imagination, raising the audience powerfully out of the mundane, and efficiently veiling truths that can be shown to the audience in a way that is persuasive without being didactic.³⁴ Fantasy writers and writings that Kirk praises include the Bible (which he views as mythology as well as sacred Scripture); Greek and Norse myth; fairy tales such as Grimm's, Anderson's, and Lang's; Tolkien, Charles Williams, and C. S. Lewis; and the science fiction writer Ray Bradbury, Kirk's friend.³⁵ This list clearly shows that Kirk had a respect for a wide variety of fantasy and

³¹ One example is his comments on Fischer Ames and the Federalist pamphleteers and their seventeenth century stylistic influences. See Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. 72-73.

³² Zoll, Op. Cit. 124.

³³ East, John P., 'Russell Kirk as a Political Theorist', *Modern Age*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Autumn, 1984) . 39.

³⁴ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 112. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 160-161.

³⁵ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 111. And. Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 216.

myth, but was especially interested in that which was both literary and provided moral insight of one kind or another. Kirk was very interested in the continuation, or revival, of fantasy literature in his own time, as can be shown by the amount of the fantasy authors just mentioned who were contemporary with Kirk.

That he considered fantasy a potent kind of imaginative writing that could convey important normative truths in the modern world is powerfully illustrated by Kirk's own writing of ghost stories and a gothic novel. He deliberately suffused these works with an almost didactic level of normative aspects; as he writes, "the better uncanny stories are underlain by a healthy concept of the character of evil".³⁶ For example, in his ghost story *Ex Tenebris*, one of his early works, he depicts a character who is murdered by a ghost as an officious town planner who is intent on knocking down centuries old cottages in order to put up rigorously planned council estates.³⁷ This story shares many similarities to his essays on the nuisance of such planners in modern Britain in his collection of essays entitled *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*.

Although we have examined Kirk's views on the Moral Imagination and history previously, we can now note that Kirk singles out narrative history and biography as a powerful genre through which normative insight may flow.³⁸ What he has in mind is the arrangement of the deeds, words, and thoughts of great individuals of the past, whether described with the focus on one individual's life or on a broader historical narrative, so that they can present, in a readily accessible way, an image of human nature and the moral drama which Kirk believes follows from it. As he says, "reading of great lives does something to form decent lives".³⁹ Kirk mentions, for instance, the works of Plutarch and the great ancient historians, like Herodotus and Livy, and Boswell's biography of Dr. Johnson as examples of history and biography that can provide insight into human nature.⁴⁰ There is here a combining of scholarly research and literary quality to make use of, not the guise of fantasy, but the past and past figures so as to speak to the present. In comparison to the just mentioned genre of fantasy, this genre cannot make use so easily of marvellous to clothe its moral message, but it can show real human societies and connect present audiences to the past and past figures in such a way that they can imaginatively see the parallels with themselves and their times.

³⁶ Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelico Press, Tacoma, 2013. 223-230. And. Kirk, Russell, 'A Cautionary Note on the Ghostly Tale', in Kirk, Russell, *Ancestral Shadows: An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2004. 403.

³⁷ Kirk, Russell, *Ex Tenebris*, in Kirk, Russell, *Ancestral Shadows: An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2004. 3-17.

³⁸ Kirk, 'The Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 216-217.

³⁹ Kirk, Russell, 'Teaching Humane Literature in High Schools', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 442. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 161-162.

⁴⁰ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 50.

4.2 Authors

Turning to the writers of literature, Kirk provided us with some important information about his views of them and their creative activity. Kirk suggests that the moral writer has an intuitive grasp of moral truth and crafts this truth into a persuasive form that can present this truth to his audience, though he does not delve into the nature of this poet's intuition in any deep or clear way.⁴¹ In some sense the poet can be said to have a grasp of the eternal moral truths in a way that is denied to most men. Homer, for example, Kirk refers to as one of the seers, those "few men mysteriously endowed with a power of vision denied to the overwhelming majority of us". He then goes on to mention Sophocles, Virgil, Livy, and Dante, alongside other figures who were not writers of creative literature, as other examples of seers of especial, intuitive vision.⁴² This intuition is not necessarily revelatory; it is not necessarily the outcome of any overwhelmingly spiritual or transcendent sense or experience. This is implied in the fact that Kirk discusses a wide range of writers, not just the afore mentioned seers but those other writers he feels exhibit important examples of a profound moral insight communicated through their work, from ancient Greek playwrights to modern novelists. These writers have widely divergent contexts to their writing and many did not approach their writings in an overtly spiritual way or claim to have any direct transcendent experience as part of their creative process; it can hardly be said that Wyndham Lewis or Ray Bradbury or even T. S. Eliot wrote their work under a directly mystical imperative.⁴³ And at times Kirk even states his reluctance to grant those he calls seers, which includes the writers of great literature, any kind of revelatory or strongly spiritual side to their intuition at all, reserving that only for those he considers genuine prophets, sages, and saints.⁴⁴

On the other hand, it does not seem like Kirk wishes to portray writers as exercising the most purely mundane good sense in crafting moral truths into art, at least so far as the better writers are concerned. These writers do have some sort of heightened and direct insight of moral truth, something not just contrived or thought up at the most deliberate level, but a sort of direct intuitive or illative insight that allows them to see, without overly discursive mediation, the nature of the human drama and how it can be condensed into a particular work of art. This is both shown by the, somewhat vague and ambiguous connection of great authors (the archetype, for Kirk, of the art) and seers and implied in Kirk's whole description of their art as the particularly potent embodiment of normative truth capable in works of

⁴¹ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 67.

⁴² Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 37-38.

⁴³ See for example, Kirk, Russell, 'Wyndham Lewis's First Principles', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 256-268. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 116-124. And. Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit.

⁴⁴ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 34.

art.⁴⁵ However, Kirk leaves us, largely, to guess at this process whereby the artist can perceive moral truth especially strongly and can capture it in the artistic form.

In a sense this intuition can be said to replace the Moral Imagination in writers, in the sense that it offers a peculiarly individual and direct way of generating moral consciousness, with less stress on the illative gathering of moral knowledge from diffuse sources and more emphasis on the writer's individual capacity to apprehend significant portions of moral truth. But it is also true that Kirk does not separate the writer from the Moral Imagination completely. The insights of the Moral Imagination are to provide the foundation of the writer's grasp of moral knowledge. It is his immersion in the habits, examples, and teachings of his society that provides the support for the poet to embark on his own deeper and more unifying grasp of this knowledge. We are again reminded of Kirk's statement that the poet immersed in a tradition might become a prophet through whom the accumulated wisdom of humanity speaks.⁴⁶ Kirk makes this clear, also, when he likens the position of the writer, and indeed us all, to Bernard of Chartres' image of dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants.⁴⁷

We may therefore surmise the writer can be said to represent, for Kirk, not someone who steps completely outside the Moral Imagination and is yet still capable of gaining significant access to normative reality. Rather, he is someone who gains this very access largely through the same illative process as the Moral Imagination – the writer simply being more attuned to it and possessing knowledge of this reality in a greater degree than many, as one would expect from what Kirk states about those he calls seers in general. These great writers are the very epitome, it may be said, of human moral awareness, in certain respects at least; their profession requires a particular focus and openness to norms, that a writer grasps and communicates, to the degree he fulfils his purpose in his craft.⁴⁸

For Kirk the writer's task and duty takes its meaning from its moral purpose.⁴⁹ Although Kirk is keen to avoid too didactic a moralising tone in art,⁵⁰ he considers moral vision to be indispensable in the definition of true literature and art and indispensable to the vocation of the artist. The writer, therefore, who indulges the idyllic or diabolic imaginations has failed in the main purpose of his art, and abdicated the central moral obligation of his vocation. He has influenced society for the worse through his art. And it is not just literature and writers who influence society, however, for Kirk. The influence is reciprocal. Although it is certainly the case that Kirk thinks a writer can soar above social limitations and decadence, he describes, also, the way in which a diseased social and cultural situation can cause many writers to

⁴⁵ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 37-38. And. McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 59-61. And. Zoll, Op. Cit. 121.

⁴⁶ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 27-28.

⁴⁸ Panichas, George A., 'Russell Kirk as Man of Letters', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 10. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit.. 41-43.

⁴⁹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 41-43. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 155.

⁵⁰ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 42. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 88.

forget their moral duty and purpose as writers and to betray the Moral Imagination in their work. As he notes of contemporary writers, “this sort of aimless and unhappy writer is the product of a time in which the normative function of letters has been badly neglected.”⁵¹ This reciprocal relationship is not surprising; as we have seen, Kirk considers receptivity to the Moral Imagination, and its social and cultural sources like tradition and prescriptive wisdom, as the foundation of the artists grasp of moral truth and human nature. In a society bereft of many of the sources for the Moral Imagination, it is hardly surprising that many authors have little access to the guidance it provides.⁵²

A special category of writer that Kirk gave a not unimportant role to in the relationship between literature and society was the man of letters. By this phrase Kirk referred to those literary figures whose involvement in literature and culture was spread over multiple disciplines or genres, such as poetry, imaginative prose, literary and cultural criticism. In other words, the man of letters was not simply a poet or a novelist; rather, he was a figure who was intimately bound up with the literary culture of his period, contributing to it both his own creative talents and his talents as a critic and scholar.⁵³ Examples of men of letters whom Kirk offers include T. S. Eliot, an example of a writer who wrote his own literary productions and was also deeply involved as a literary and cultural critic.⁵⁴

For Kirk the man of letters can play a role in the support of the Moral Imagination in contemporary literature and culture. He does this not just by his talents as a writer of imaginative poetry or prose but also through his censure and praise of past and contemporary writers, based on (hopefully) incisive critical insight; through his discussion of the moral, cultural, imaginative, and technical duties and capabilities of literature; and his bringing order to past and contemporary writers, and how they should be viewed, according to this discussion.⁵⁵ Although Kirk does not give an exhaustive sociological analysis, or even suggest a necessary rather than simply beneficial role for the man of letters in a society, we can see that he plays something, in a loose and low key way, of the role of a scholarly or priestly function. That is, the man of letters can make more explicit the role of the Moral Imagination in the purpose of literature than is usually done in the works of creative authors themselves and can evaluate contemporary and historical literature according to this purpose.

Kirk saw himself as a man of letters, following in the footsteps of Henry Adams, George Santayana, and T. S. Eliot.⁵⁶ This was the vocation that he felt he had embarked on and pursued from his resignation from Michigan State College (now University) onwards. He set out to exemplify both the creative side of the man of letters, in his ghost stories, short stories, and novels; and the office of literary and cultural

⁵¹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 44.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Panichas, ‘Russell Kirk as Man of Letters’, Op. Cit. 10 and 14-15.

⁵⁴ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 51-52.

⁵⁵ Panichas, ‘Russell Kirk as Man of Letters’, Op. Cit. 10 and 14-15.

⁵⁶ Whitney, Gleaves, ‘Seven Things You Should Know about Russell Kirk’, Delivered to the Russell Kirk Society Inaugural Lecture, Michigan State University, Lansing, Michigan.

critic that he associated with the man of letters, across numerous non-fiction books and a vast amount of newspaper columns, articles, and essays. To this end he not only set out to arouse the Moral Imagination but also to develop a prose style adequate for this purpose, forging his signature baroque, ornate, and polished style full of allusion to and quotes from authors he admired - this latter an attempt in itself to aid the continuity of the Western tradition of moral literature that he so cherished.⁵⁷

4.3 Limitations in Kirk's Views on This Subject

There are areas in which Kirk's treatment of the relationship between literature and arts and the Moral Imagination seems to be incomplete, limited, or open to some criticism. The first such criticism is that Kirk does not prove the powerful effect he thinks that the arts, especially literature, have over the moral awareness of the individual and society. Kirk, as we have seen, gives a plausible and eloquent argument that works of art and literature may support or discourage moral consciousness. Kirk does explore the way in which certain societies (such as eighteenth century Europe and contemporary America) parallel the moral awareness of the works popular in these times, but does not provide either a systematic philosophical analysis or detailed empirical study to support the connection he draws between morality and the arts, which lessens the power of his argument.⁵⁸

This issue of the link between morality and the arts has been brought up recently by eminent British literary critic John Carey in his *What Good are the Arts?*, whose commentary involves central questions for those claiming a moral role for art and the aesthetic. Carey questions the claim central to Kirk's views on the subject: that the arts can have provable moral effects. Carey brings up philosophical and scientific studies that have struggled to find such a link, which helps to put into focus the fact that Kirk's writings do not prove (in this sense) such a link either, which limits the strength of his claims.⁵⁹

Carey also writes about the difficulties of defining the benefits of the arts and how they can be measured.⁶⁰ Here Kirk has some response as he is able to give at least an overview of the norms that art can allegedly help us to apprehend and a plausible way in which this occurs, and therefore the outlines of a framework for defining the benefits of the arts and how these are to be brought about, though he gives no precise way of measuring them. And Carey mentions some cases (like Hitler and Paul Getty) of those whose interest in the arts did not seem to make them more moral, which underscores the

⁵⁷ Zoll, Op. Cit. 112.

⁵⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'The Framers: not Philosophes but Gentlemen', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 458-459.

⁵⁹ Carey, John, *What Good Are the Arts*, Faber and Faber, London, 2005. 65-134.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 102-107.

complexities of the relationship between the arts, morality, and the whole life of man, which Kirk does not fully address by providing a systematic and detailed account of this process.⁶¹

Carey also presents a humanitarian brand of ethics - which Kirk and Babbitt would have referred to as a product of the idyllic imagination - which stresses sympathy and service to other people. He thinks this care for others is neglected by those who see great value in the sublime and ecstatic experience of great art, who may feel themselves morally superior without regard for their fellow man, a not uncommon variety, in various guises, of criticism of the moral value of art.⁶² Whilst Kirk does not emphasize the ecstatic experience of art, he does believe that art can provide moral encouragement. And his doctrine of art as a vision of human nature and norms, a source of the Moral Imagination, does provide a counterpoint to Carey by showing how art could in fact make man more moral and presumably more properly humane and correctly compassionate. This is because it allows a better apprehension of human nature, both the source according to Kirk of moral norms and presumably a central way to understand the full humanity of others and empathise with them, though he could develop his case more rigorously and fully.

Besides, Kirk dissents from Carey's humanitarian ethics and, although it is partly a question of moral philosophy (which neither Kirk nor Carey undertake), and, as we have mentioned, a plausible case can be made that there is more to morality than the sympathy and concern for others Carey enjoins, including the self-restraint, humility, and piety Kirk believed in. This would mean, even if art does not properly support the moral thought and action that was Carey's primary concern, it might support other virtues that Kirk and others feel are just as important, just as Kirk claims it does. Kirk, therefore, has something of worth to contribute to contemporary discussions of the moral effects of art, whilst some of these discussions can help to put into greater focus his own writings on the subject and their shortcomings.

It is his vagueness and lack of detail about how art may serve as a source for moral apprehension which is the greatest limitation in Kirk's views on the subject, as it robs him of a deeper, more persuasive and comprehensive account.⁶³ There are, however, modern figures and movements who have believed in a moral vision for art not dissimilar to Kirk's and provided a more systematic explanation of how these may be connected. By exploring one perspective, we may be able to see how Kirk's views may be improved by a more systematic and philosophical framework and also those areas where the incompleteness of his writings leaves important questions unanswered which such a framework may give answers to.

⁶¹ Ibid. 130-133 and 140-144.

⁶² Ibid. 121-132.

⁶³ McDonald, 'Reason, Natural Law, and Moral Imagination', Op. Cit. 16. And. Zoll, Op. Cit. 129.

The alternative approach we will examine is the Platonic and Aristotelian approach to the arts represented importantly in the twentieth century by Anglo-Tamil writer Ananda Coomaraswamy and by Roman Catholic writer and artist Eric Gill (who was greatly indebted to Coomaraswamy, as well as Neo-Scholastic writer Jacques Maritain, on the subject of art).⁶⁴ These figures influenced what may be defined as a loose tradition of thinking on the arts, many members of which were associated with the Temenos Academy like Brian Keeble and Kathleen Raine, whilst others were amongst the Perennialist school.⁶⁵ We only need briefly outline the beliefs of this tradition for our purposes. This broad school of artistic thought saw art as founded on rhetoric and not aesthetics and, therefore, meant to convey transcendent Ideas or Forms (in the Platonic or Aristotelian sense), which would be spiritually and morally inspiring and enlightening to those who viewed them correctly.⁶⁶ These transcendent Forms or Ideas needed to be conveyed through material forms and symbols whose spiritual and material qualities can efficiently lead the mind to these higher realities. All corporeal reality was held to reflect transcendent Forms and spiritual realities, though certain material forms or symbols were particularly evocative of such Forms. Apprehended correctly they could make man powerfully aware of the transcendent truths they were intimately connected to.

Such material forms and symbolism were at the centre of art for this school. Therefore, the artist must envisage the Form or Idea in his mind and give it material form, making the best use of his materials and techniques in order to do this.⁶⁷ This school of artistic thought agrees with Kirk that art can (and this is its purpose) grant access to moral and spiritual truths through the concrete and particular medium of the artwork. However, unlike Kirk, the figures in this school attempt to give a firm philosophical account of how this occurs. This allows them to address areas Kirk does not.

The most central of these areas is the relationship between the (material or literary) form (not to be confused with the transcendent Forms themselves) of the work and the spiritual and moral essence or truths this embodies. By form here is meant all the structural elements of the work – for literature, characterisation; plot; language; and the types and genres of literature. Kirk does give some partial and non-systematic comments on material form and its relationship to morality. For example, Kirk's aversion to an overly didactic presentation of moral and spiritual issues in works of literature implies that

⁶⁴ Keeble, Brian (ed.), *A Holy Tradition of Working: Passages from the Writings of Eric Gill*, Golgonooza Press, Ipswich, 1983. 35-36.

⁶⁵ Keeble, Brian (ed.), *Every Man an Artist: Readings in the Traditional Philosophy of Art*, World Wisdom, Inc., Bloomington, 2005. XIV. And Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Crossroad, New York, 1981. 105-106 and 109-110.

⁶⁶ Coomaraswamy, Ananda, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1956. 10-11.

⁶⁷ Keeble, *A Holy Tradition of Working*, Op. Cit. 88-89. And. Ibid. 17-18.

character and plot, as opposed to didactic statement, must have a central role in works of literature.⁶⁸ And he shares many quotes from authors and works that he feels are morally enlightening, seeming to savour the style and the expression.⁶⁹ And he even crafted his own particular prose style, as already mentioned, which was ornate and polished and deliberately rich with allusion to great works, thereby exhibiting a continuity with the tradition of normative literature he so prized.⁷⁰ But, beyond such general statements and inferences, and what may be constructed from his comments on specific works, especially his book long study of T. S. Eliot's work, there is little else that can be gleaned from Kirk's writings about these essential structural elements of works of literature and their relationship to the Moral Imagination.

And, of course, Kirk does provide us with certain evaluations of some genres of literature, namely, fantasy and narrative biography. For these genres Kirk notes important ways in which they can enliven normative perception, such as the presentation of past figures as models for ethical behaviour in narrative biography. But apart from narrative biography and fantasy, Kirk grants us only partial and almost incidental commentary on other genres of literature. He, for example, makes mention of epic, satirical, dramatic, historical, lyrical, travel and various other genres of literature; poetry and prose; as well as forms stretching from the novel to Scripture. He even gives some slight commentary, in places, of how a particular form or genre may have been used in a particular way for a particular effect.⁷¹ But what we are not given is any sort of detailed and wide-ranging study of how each of these genres and these forms of literature can be used to influence normative consciousness; nor are we supplied with such a study of the relationships of the different forms and genres to each other.

This Platonic and Aristotelian school of artistic thought we are examining, however, has written on the way that literary and artistic form and technique can be used to embed transcendent truths, as part of a wider commentary on material forms and symbols.⁷² For example, the writer Martin Lings, student of C. S. Lewis, wrote at length on Shakespeare from this perspective. He examined Shakespeare's use of symbolism, such as that of marriage in numerous plays; his use of character; his use of the dramatic medium; and his use of language; to present spiritual truths to the audience.⁷³ The important point for our purposes is that this tradition's more philosophical and less vague treatment of the issue, based

⁶⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 42.

⁶⁹ A couple out of a myriad of examples include, Roy Campbell in Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 153. And. Dr. Johnson in Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 19.

⁷⁰ Zoll, Op. Cit. 112.

⁷¹ Kirk, Russell, 'Ten Exemplary Conservatives', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 40-41. And. Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 48-51. And. Kirk, 'Wyndham Lewis's First Principles', Op. Cit. 258-259.

⁷² Coomaraswamy, Ananda, 'A Figure of Speech or A Figure of Thought?', in Keeble, Brian (ed.), *Every Man An Artist*, Op. Cit. 32-33. And. Benson, John Howard, and Carey, Arthur Graham, 'The General Problem', in Keeble, Brian (ed.), *Every Man An Artist*, Op. Cit. 108-111.

⁷³ See Lings, Martin, *The Sacred Art of Shakespeare: To Take Upon Us the Mystery of Things*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, 1998.

upon the relationship of material forms to transcendent ones, allows them to treat such questions more deeply and systematically. Lings, for example, can write in far more depth about forms and techniques and their specific moral place than Kirk.

This tradition of artistic thought, of which Gill and Coomaraswamy are important representatives, also addresses the question of beauty and aesthetics. For this tradition, the core of art is the presentation of truths, and beauty is the attractive element of this truth. But it is primarily the truth itself which gives art its purpose and value.⁷⁴ Certainly, this tradition condemns those who seek aesthetic pleasure alone as an end or beauty as the sole criterion of a work of art. Kirk himself, despite his clear aesthetic concerns and the high regard for the aesthetically pleasing in his social and even political thought, in valuing works of art according to their moral purpose and insight, would seem to share the view that aesthetics is subordinate to this purpose.⁷⁵ But he gives no comprehensive description of what he feels is the role of beauty and the aesthetic in normative art or their relationship to the moral norms to be communicated. This is an incompleteness in his work, which this Platonic-Aristotelian tradition highlights by contrast and shows one way in which it could be remedied.

Of course, it is controversial whether or not the artistic thought of Eric Gill and Ananda Coomaraswamy, and those like them, should be accepted. It may even be argued that Kirk's vague but plausible account of the relationship between art and morality has advantages in skirting contentious philosophical disputes. However, this alternative tradition does give an example how of Kirk's artistic concerns could be translated into a more detailed and systematic philosophical framework, as well as some of the limitations of his incomplete explanation which such a framework could amend, creating a fuller, integrated account of form and essence, literary style and technique and their relationship to the expression of moral and artistic truth, and the role of beauty in his explanation of art as a source of the Moral Imagination.

Finally, an area of neglect that has no doubt already been glaring to the reader of this thesis is Kirk's treatment of the relationship of all areas of art and the Moral Imagination other than literature. It is overwhelmingly literature whose normative influence Kirk explores in his writings. Kirk does mention, at least in passing if not in a sustained examination of their normative influence, other art forms.⁷⁶ We might mention, again, for example, Kirk's frequently disparaging references to television or his commentary on the immoral nature of most films he found were available to hotel guests.⁷⁷ Kirk's aesthetic view of the world often comes through in the discussion of numerous areas of art other than

⁷⁴ Coomaraswamy, 'A Figure of Speech or A Figure of Thought?', Op. Cit. 27-28. And. Keeble, Brian (ed.), *A Holy Tradition of Working*, Op. Cit. 74-75.

⁷⁵ Zoll, Op. Cit. 113.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 124.

⁷⁷ Kirk, Russell, 'Humane Learning in the Age of the Computer', in Kirk Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Wilmington, 1998. 115-127. And. Kirk, Russell, 'The Age of Sentiments', in Kirk Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Wilmington, 1998. 135-136.

literature, from his appreciation of Gothic architecture and gargoyles to his portrayal of places, buildings, and crafts in his travel writing.⁷⁸ Kirk even wrote essays on certain aspects of art other than literature, such as architecture.⁷⁹ However, none of these examples amounted to anything like even the examinations that Kirk made into the normative value of literature, and was certainly not a thorough analysis of these art forms and their normative features.

This creates a certain imbalance in Kirk's view of arts and the Moral Imagination, with, perhaps, too much emphasis being placed on literature as compared to other forms of art. It also means that Kirk's thought lacked a perspective, in any general and comprehensive way, on many modern artistic media – television and films, for example. This means that any deep judgment of the value of these media and any impetus to improve their normative quality find little support in Kirk's writings. Almost the most that Kirk had to say on television amounted to a complete dismissal of it, for example; valid though this position may be, Kirk did not provide the necessary scholarly investigation to back up his visceral dislike of the medium.

What Kirk's neglect of types of art other than literature also means is that Kirk's writings lack a holistic expression of man's relationship to art and the spiritual and moral influence art can wield over him, which is more glaring given the holistic nature of the Moral Imagination. This is at least the case so far as any explicit and sustained treatment is concerned – although Kirk's aesthetic temperament, that pervades all his writing, is not without a certain compensation here, hinting at a larger attitude to art that is fundamentally traditional and rooted in pre-industrial tastes (we might note, for example, Kirk's enthusiasm for the Gothic, his attachment to his grandfather's house, and his deliberate wearing of old fashioned clothing). Arts and crafts are a facet of much of man's existence, whether his furniture or clothes or the buildings he inhabits, but Kirk's writings give little explicit insight into these areas of art. Even such an art form as music, one that can move and stir the passions and the imagination so readily, is largely neglected by Kirk. Therefore, there is quite a gap, and quite an imbalance, in Kirk's exploration of art and the Moral Imagination.

⁷⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'A House in Mountjoy Square', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 319-323. And. Kirk, Russell, 'Eigg, in the Hebrides', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 305-319. And. Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. XVII.

⁷⁹ Kirk, Russell, 'The Architecture of Servitude and Boredom', in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 87-99.

Chapter Five

Education and the Moral Imagination

5.1 The Moral Imagination and the Disciplines of Education

We will now explore education as a source of the Moral Imagination, by examining Russell Kirk's writings on the subject of education, including through some commentary on their original context and contemporary debates. For Kirk the primary way in which education can inform the Moral Imagination is, like all its sources, by teaching us what it means to be human, because Kirk's view of norms and morality are tied to human nature and order in the soul. Education can communicate this common humanity in a peculiarly comprehensive and distilled form. As Peter Stanlis puts it, Kirk "believed the greatest single objective of genuine education was the inner development of students – their intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and social nature".¹ This is its central purpose, for Kirk, as well: not only can education be a distilled platform through which the central core of human nature and norms is consciously presented to students, but this is its primary aim and the primary end around which it should be organised,² which lost sight of will lead to what Kirk refers to as decadence, following C.E.M Joad, and will inevitably lead to wrong decisions and developments.³ As Kirk says of the arts of *humanitas*, which are for him the core of education, they "teach a man his nature and his duties".⁴

Indeed, the liberal arts - those literary, imaginative, and scholarly disciplines, especially literature, history, *belles lettres*, classics, languages, philosophy, and theology -⁵ are the primary medium through which he believes education can inform us of our human nature and its norms.⁶ Important qualities and attributes of these liberal arts disciplines, when it comes to the Moral Imagination nature, include

¹ Stanlis, Peter J., 'Prophet of American Higher Education', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 77.

² Ibid.

³ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning*, Gateway Editions Limited, South Bend, 1978. IX-X.

⁴ Kirk, Russell, 'The Inhumane Businessman', in Kirk, Russell, *The Intemperate Professor and Other Cultural Splenetics*, Louisiana State University press, Baton Rouge, 1965. 111.

⁵ Ibid. 302-303.

⁶ Kirk, 'The Inhumane Businessman', Op. Cit. 302-303. And. Stanlis, 'Prophet of American Higher Education', Op. Cit. 77.

creativity and imagination.⁷ That they are capable of presenting elevated sentiments and truths through the use of images, is one reason why literature, whose role in inculcating normative knowledge we have already discussed at length, forms such an important aspect of education for Kirk. The other core studies of liberal education, such as history (which we have also explored previously as a source of the Moral Imagination), similarly have an important imaginative aspect, seeing in historical events and figures images of human nature and norms.

However, unlike Cardinal Newman, one of the earliest modern defenders of liberal education and an important influence on Kirk's views on education (as seen in Kirk's 1952 essay *The Conservative Mind of Newman*, in which he writes Newman "was the noblest exponent of liberal education"),⁸ Kirk does not emphasize intellectual discipline and improvement as an end of education so much as the moral and imaginative one. Despite Kirk's explicit references to the importance of other studies, as we have mentioned, such as mathematics and scientific subjects, Kirk gives little deep analysis of their ability to contribute to the understanding of human nature and life. In this approach Kirk differs from many modern defenders of classical, liberal education and especially the *Trivium*, its medieval ancestor (alongside the *Quadrivium*), of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, which as Dorothy L. Sayers puts it in her essay *The Lost Tools of Learning*, concentrated on first forging and learning to handle the tools of learning and creating intellectual discipline and competence.⁹

Kirk, in so emphasising the moral and imaginative end of education, seems to be especially influenced by Irving Babbitt. Babbitt was in the conservative tradition of writers on higher education, but, he gave a central role, as we have seen, to the imagination in determining how to act and what to believe. He also argued that man's primary concern was acting morally according to his higher will or self, supported by the imagination, rather than intellectual. In such works as *Literature and the American College*, he applied his views on imagination and the higher will to the subject of education and argued for importance of imaginative instruction for college students to encourage the development of the Moral Imagination that will help them to live according to the higher will and be cultural and social leaders in this regard. Glenn A. Davis writes of Babbitt's educational thought that "In order for any educational institution to succeed in its purpose of assimilating wisdom, it must first and foremost foster vibrant imaginative qualities of its students, and imagination is the tool used to pursue the common standards inherent in wisdom."¹⁰ For Babbitt, as for Kirk, the classics could foster moral

⁷ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 258.

⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'The Conservative Mind of Newman', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1952). 659-676.

⁹ See, for example, Sayers, Dorothy L., *The Lost Tools of Learning*, Methuen and Co, Ltd., London, 1948.

¹⁰ Davis, Glenn A., 'Irving Babbitt, the Moral Imagination, and Progressive Education', *Humanitas*, Vol. 19, No. 1 and 2 (2006). 51.

wisdom through the imagination, which the end of education.¹¹ Kirk, therefore, though influenced by Newman, was also clearly influenced by the modifications of this tradition on educational criticism by Babbitt.

It has been argued, by Sister Miriam Joseph and others, that the disciplines of the *Trivium* provide a necessary capacity to properly understand (grammar) and use language (rhetoric) and analyse claims and arguments (logic), and it would follow that these arts are obviously extremely important to correct apprehension of truth, including moral truth, even in works of imaginative literature.¹² Though neglected by Kirk, if these other advocates of classical, liberal education are correct, then in depth study of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, as traditionally taught, would be seem to be a very useful aid and addition to the moral education Kirk sought and such strong focus on the intellect as the centre of education not compromise his desire for the integration of the different aspects of man - intellectual, imaginative, and moral - by an overbearing rationalism, but aid it, as long as correct balance is maintained.

Another important quality of the liberal disciplines of education emphasised by Kirk is respect for traditional wisdom and moral insights - they are respectful of Western traditions and themselves formed out of a tradition of creative and normative insights. For example, Kirk's proposed reading program for high school students is clearly structured around what he sees as the tradition of great Western literature and letters - including many figures who usually appear on such lists, from Shakespeare to Robert Frost.¹³ Kirk sometimes refers to this aspect of normative education as dogma or dogmata, especially important in pre-tertiary schooling, where such basic norms and scholarly tools are passed on. That is, these arts can provide authoritative dogmas or formulated certainties, handed down, that provide ready moral and cultural knowledge to individuals which private rationality and experience would fail to supply.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, this belief in dogma and settled opinions was in contradiction to a lot of contemporary opinion about education. The typical opposing position to Kirk on this issue of dogma is represented well by John Dewey, one of the most influential educational reformers of the last century. He defended the experimental method and he criticised those with a strong emphasis on imparting authoritative knowledge to students for not encouraging the freedom of thought and free and critical inquiry that he felt were especially important to democratic society.¹⁵ Such views have been common in

¹¹ Ryn, Claes G., *Will, Imagination, and Reason: Babbitt, Croce and the Problem of Reality*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1997. 180. And. Davis, Op. Cit. 54-55.

¹² Joseph, Sister Miriam, *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric*, Paul Dry Books, Inc., Philadelphia, 2002. 3.

¹³ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 274-278.

¹⁴ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 187-188.

¹⁵ Wraga, William G., 'Dogma, Democracy, and Education', in *Experiencing Dewey: Insights for Today's Classrooms*, Donna Adair Breault, and Rick Breault (eds.), Routledge, New York, 2014. 195-196.

recent and contemporary progressive views on education.¹⁶ However, it does not seem like this objection to his position is strong. Kirk did not advocate the inculcation of dogma or unquestionable certainties as the sole end of education. They were for Kirk necessary as the foundation for all knowledge and instruction, as he believed that no action or learning could take place if a solid basis, free from constant questioning, could not be found. As he writes, “life is short, personal experience is limited, and learning through demonstration may be both difficult and dangerous.”¹⁷

Kirk’s very doctrine of the Moral Imagination does, in having man draw and integrate normative insights from a multitude of authorities, imply that the individual must trust in some settled opinions and authorities they cannot personally question. A moral position which referred all to private verification would have greatly reduced the sources and faculties of moral instruction, for the private, limited individual could hardly be expected to verify all that makes up the diverse sources and processes of Moral Imagination. Moral truisms, for Kirk, are an aspect of these settled opinions to be handed down in education, as, he implies, are basic social values and traditions and the basic disciplines which make further study possible.¹⁸ To a degree Kirk must surely be correct. Education must include the handing down of basic skills and knowledge, if it is to have any success at all. Before students can freely inquire, they must surely have the necessary abilities and skills to make their inquiries worthwhile.

And, whilst it is certainly true that Kirk could have spelled out better the limits of dogma in education, Kirk’s educational writings as a whole do imply that he is not suggesting that education is simply about rote learning or the handing down of unquestionable opinions. The Moral Imagination, which is at the centre of his pedagogic views, when properly used by the individual, allows him to apply universal norms to the concrete and proliferating details of everyday life. This clearly implies a dynamic and creative process and not an overly dogmatic and rigid one.¹⁹ The picture Kirk paints of the well-developed individual is of one who, whilst respecting tradition and the permanent things, is no unquestioning drone restricted to a limited and narrow outlook. Therefore we see Kirk, in *Eliot and His Age*, refer to T. S. Eliot as the greatest twentieth century representative of the Moral Imagination, and go on in the rest of the work to describe Eliot’s strong, independent intellectual and imaginative abilities.²⁰ The question then becomes how to construct the exact relationship between instruction in authoritative certainties and encouraging intellectual curiosity and vision. Kirk does not give anything more than overview of the place of dogma in education, and therefore a detailed explanation is lacking.

¹⁶ See Faust, Carolyn J., ‘Progressive Education in Transition: An Intellectual History’, Electronic Theses & Dissertations, Georgia Southern University, 2007, Paper 508.

¹⁷ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 250.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Quinn, Dermot, ‘Religion and the Conservative Mind’, *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 221-224.

²⁰ Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot’s Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Peru, 1988. 7.

However, anyone who believes in extreme free inquiry in schoolings, based almost entirely on prompting self-expression and choice of students, and who rejects any objective sanction or reality for the moral, social, and intellectual dogmas that Kirk takes as necessary for life, social harmony, and intellectual endeavour, cannot be answered over the question of dogma in education alone. They reject Kirk's traditional idea of normative reality and his view of man as a socially and historically rooted individual, and the response of Kirk's position on the Moral Imagination must be in these areas.

A comparison of Kirk's views on education to Martha Nussbaum's (whom we mentioned earlier) views is a good illustration of the importance of his vision of norms and of dogma or settled opinion in education for Kirk. Nussbaum, in works such as her bestselling *Cultivating Humanity*, defends, like Kirk, liberal education and the need for humanities to be studied at all levels of education and the role of classical literature and imagination in education, partly to help to engage and improve the imagination of students so that they better approach and apprehend moral issues.²¹ The most central moral principles that she sees imaginative liberal education inculcating are empathy and the ability to see others, especially oppressed others, as fully our equals.²² She believes that liberal education can foster democratic citizenship alive to the democratic needs of equality and tolerance.²³ This leads her to advocate multiculturalism in education: the study of other cultures, as well as diverse viewpoints (like those connected with race or sexuality) in Western culture, alongside classical Western texts, which we mentioned in the introduction.

So, they both agree in the importance of liberal education, based on imaginative reading of texts, including an important role for classics of Western culture. However, Kirk and Nussbaum, the latter who is representative of much modern moral thought and priorities, come to some divergent conclusions about the ethical insights of the imagination most particularly to be grasped through this education and its central aims. Kirk, like the New Humanists, whose critique of the idyllic imagination he echoes, believed that empathy and sympathy, whilst virtues in themselves, should not be the defining feature of virtue, and neither should equality or tolerance be elevated beyond their proper roles, believing in traditional virtue, self-restraint, and religious norms, as we have seen. And although he thought that moral education could help to provide for order in the commonwealth as well as in the soul, Kirk did not believe that this should be done by focus on the values of citizenship, but through cultivation of personal ethics.²⁴ This reflects his belief in traditional and restraining virtue, showing not only that Kirk's

²¹ Nussbaum, Martha, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997. 85-89.

²² Nussbaum, Martha, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010. 95-96.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 291.

writings on education fit in with recent interest in the imaginative and liberal education, but also how important his normative perspective is to the ends towards which this imaginative education is to aim.

Nussbaum, alongside her concern for empathy, emphasises the importance of Socratic questioning of received opinions and knowledge in education. This, she thinks, will help break down prejudice which stops students from understanding and identifying with the suffering of alien and oppressed groups.²⁵ We have already seen that Kirk disagrees that received dogmas and settled opinions cannot have an important role in education, and argued strongly that the impartation of settled knowledge and norms is needed in education, alongside critical thinking. Nussbaum's writings on the issue do not really address Kirk's beliefs about the requirement for dogma in education, such as the importance for the moral tuition of such settled standards and the inability of most individuals to reason themselves to moral knowledge without drawing on the knowledge handed down in numerous important sources, from tradition to literature. A lot of the differences between Kirk and Nussbaum on the place of sympathy and on critical questioning can only be decided according to which moral system is ultimately true, a philosophical problem Kirk largely avoids. And the question of which system of education would produce the most moral, wise, and knowledgeable graduates can only be definitively answered by a close, detailed, and extensive empirical study that neither Kirk nor Nussbaum attempts.

But what we can say is that Kirk's vision of education seems to be the more comprehensive and to aim to unite and give order to a more extensive range of human moral realities and sources of knowledge. So, whilst not dismissing the place of the understanding of others and the right sentiments and affections for them, Kirk is more strongly concerned with a wide range of virtues and norms than Nussbaum, as focused on in her writings on education at least, such as traditional virtues like prudence or humility as well as piety and respect for prescriptive institutions. And Kirk's perspective on education combines the use of dogma and respect for traditional knowledge and settled opinions with encouragement to the use of reason and critical thinking, as we saw above in our discussion on his views on dogma, seeing the importance for both in moral education. This is surely a sensible position - too much dogma may well create complacency and ignorance, but Kirk is surely right about the real limits to the knowledge, even moral, we can develop anew through our own reasoning and investigation alone. This makes Kirk's position more balanced and integrative, although this alone, without further research and philosophical argument (perhaps the simpler, narrower focus of Nussbaum ideas on moral education does produce more moral graduates) is not proof of its superiority.

²⁵ See Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, Op. Cit. 15-49.

5.2 Debates on the Canon

Kirk's belief in a canon of Western literature that can provide on-going and extensive moral knowledge to American students of higher education is relevant to debates in recent decades about the canon and related issues in American higher education. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1987, prompted by what he saw as the failures of contemporary higher education in providing for the wisdom of many of its students,²⁶ and the storm of controversy it released, is a good example of these discussions.²⁷

Bloom, to put it his complex viewpoints briefly, argued that the purpose of great literature and the classical, liberal education he advocated was to help us break free from our particular cultures, which he likens to Plato's cave, and to glimpse the universal nature of things that they obscure. This was both the end of philosophy and what America was uniquely founded upon.²⁸ He saw in the rise of movements that wished to change the curricula to reflect the voices and experiences of marginalised ethnic and social groups, such as women, African-American, and homosexuals, a major immediate cause of the loss of sight of universal nature in contemporary higher education in favour of a relativistic focus on one's cultural experiences.²⁹

Kirk too criticised such deconstructionism and multiculturalism, in *America's British Culture*, for example, and in *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, where he criticizes the inclusion in one important secondary school English textbook of LeRoi Jones at the expense of Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Frost.³⁰ Making no explicit assertion of the universal superiority of the Western literary canon for all cultures and more explicitly than Bloom showing great respect for the historic cultures of the world,³¹ Kirk clearly feels, in general, the cultural and national inheritance of Westerners, bound up with the historic development of their culture and nations, is the best medium for ethical instruction, as can be seen in his argument for the importance of British and American history and culture to contemporary Americans.³²

²⁶ Thompson, James, 'Allan Bloom's Quarrel with History', *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1988). P228.

²⁷ Iannone, Carol, 'What's Happened to Liberal Education?', *Academic Questions*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 2003/2004). 54. And. Martin, Jane Roland, 'Curriculum and the Mirror of Knowledge', in Barrow, Robin, and White, Patricia (eds.), *Beyond Liberal Education: Essays in Honour of Paul H. Hirst*, Routledge, London, 1993. 111.

²⁸ Bloom, Allan, *The Closing of the American Mind*, A Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987. 38 and 344-345. And. Iannone, Op. Cit. 55.

²⁹ Bloom, Op. Cit. 27-43.

³⁰ Ibid. 265.

³¹ For example in his discussion of his travels in North Africa. Kirk, Russell, *The Sword of the Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995. 278-285.

³² Kirk, Russell, *America's British Culture*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1994. 9-12.

Kirk placed less emphasis than Bloom on the need to escape from culture, despite also stressing the need to see the eternal truths or norms behind our cultures and our literature. This means that Kirk may be better able to answer those who ask why it should be the Western and especially British and American classics which supply some of the best teaching resources for American education. In works like *America's British Culture*, Kirk presents this literature as a patrimony deeply rooted in the traditions of America, and therefore particularly useful for presenting enduring norms to its students.³³ For Kirk, culture and art are a concrete means that may aid us in glimpsing the universal through the process of the Moral Imagination. Kirk, indeed, believed that, often, discursive reason and too strong an emphasis on the universal whilst bypassing the concrete were not the best means of apprehending eternal norms for most men. And therefore the Moral Imagination does not neglect the intricacies of the concrete and the particular, which draw the attention of multiculturalists and deconstructionists. Rather, it integrates these to try and reach universal norms embedded within them. It may, therefore, balance Bloom's insistence on the universal and the possible over-abstraction his approach to normative perception.

Kirk, disagreeing with the multiculturalists about what the most important educational value of literature is, helps to remind us this debate partially revolves on differences in the most fundamental moral principles and priorities. Reminiscent of Bloom in his emphasis on the universal, he sees it as a pedagogic instrument to instruct students in the central and permanent moral questions of human existence, which he equates not to issues of social equality and inclusiveness but to the permanent things, of which the social experiences of marginalised groups are only marginally useful.³⁴ But this standard of educational value of literature will certainly be questioned by many advocates of minority viewpoints, such as feminists. And it is certainly a debate where Kirk would have been better served by giving a more detailed argument and analysis: he would need to properly defend his vision of norms and the ability of works of literature to communicate them. So, although his writings can add something to these debates, they cannot lay these controversies to rest.

Bloom believed one of the fundamental reasons for the rise of such relativism was the influence of German thought, especially that of Nietzsche and Heidegger, through intermediaries like Freud, Weber, and Foucault, that he thought encouraged the belief that universal nature or truth could not be known and culture transcended.³⁵ He also saw in the German emphasis on value free social science an encouragement to relativistic study of cultures that did not try to find the universal truths beyond

³³ Ibid. 13-27.

³⁴ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 278.

³⁵ Forbes, H.D., and Clifford, Orwin, 'The Openness that Closes: Allan Bloom and the Contemporary University', *Interchange*, Volume 22, No. 1-2. 122. And. Wolff, Robert Paul, 'Book Review: The Closing of the American Mind', in Stone, Robert L., *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, Chicago Review Press, Chicago, 1989. 20. And. Bloom, Op. Cit. 202-204.

them.³⁶ Kirk, however, does not investigate German philosophy as one of the ultimate influences on contemporary relativism in higher education, meaning Bloom adds an extra insight and field of inquiry into this important concern of Kirk's. On one hand, some have agreed the influence of these German figures has been important;³⁷ on the other hand, it has been argued that Bloom greatly overstates their influence on contemporary American education.³⁸ It certainly true that Nietzsche and Heidegger were influences on some major sources of movements like deconstructionism, but there were numerous sources for these movements and events. Kirk may, therefore, balance Bloom and add to our understanding of the different causes for the current situation, especially utilitarianism and the gigantism and similar institutional failings examined in *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*.

Bloom's criticisms came after several decades of increasing debate on the use of the traditional canon and instruction in Western higher education, and they touched off a firestorm of discussion and criticism themselves. For instance, of the canon it was claimed its works are so different in their context, structures, themes, and values that they cannot effectively provide any sort of coherent, substantive instruction to students.³⁹ Even the conservative political philosopher Michael Oakeshott has criticised the position that education is simply the assimilation of a defined body of knowledge and beliefs, which would be implied if the harmony of this traditional canon was stretched too far, rather than entering into a conversation with a number of inherited voices.⁴⁰ Kirk can contribute to this discussion. He can, and essentially does, make the claim that the Moral Imagination's power of normative perception and integration can stride beyond the momentary and particular, the divergent backgrounds, approaches, and views of great literature. In this way the eternal norms and truths behind their differing particularities can be apprehended.⁴¹

However, Kirk's description of how exactly the awakened (through instruction) normative consciousness might perceive these truths is vague and limited; bereft, again, of deep philosophical study of how works of art communicate eternal truths to the consciousness of the individual. His perspective would benefit from further study in this area, as critics will want proof that the canon's diverse authors and works do represent a pedagogic source that can be brought together for the Moral Imagination to draw from. His implicit answer is that the classic authors have been selected by tradition.

³⁶ Gottfried, Paul, 'A Half-Open Mind', in Stone, Robert L., *Essays on the Closing of The American Mind*, Chicago Review Press, Chicago, 1989. 12-14.

³⁷ Forbes, Op. Cit. 122

³⁸ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 184. And. Wolff, Op. Cit. 20.

³⁹ Gullory, John, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993. 42-43.

⁴⁰ Fuller, Timothy, 'The Idea of the University in Newman, Oakeshott, and Strauss', *Academic Questions*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 2003/2004). 47-48. And. Searle, John, 'The Storm over the University', *The New York Review of Books*, December 6, 1990.

⁴¹ Kirk, Russell, 'The Moral Imagination', in Panichas, George A.(ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, Wilmington, 2007. 207.

He talks at length of the duty of letters to ensure a community of mind and norms amongst men, from generation to generation, which he contrasted to modern rebellion against this patrimony, making it clear he thought the great authors of the past were generally men of tradition and the permanent things.⁴² However, this answer commits Kirk to marginalise certain classics which do not easily fit his view of tradition and norms, for example the progressive or sceptical like Voltaire, and therefore leaves open questions about the criteria and consistency of his notion of the canon.⁴³

The use of the canon of great Western literature brings to mind the Great Books tradition, which Kirk commented on in the second part of *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, entitled *Conceivable Renewal*. Great books programs, propounded by Mortimer Adler, Robert Hutchins, and others, were a quite recent (in the 1970s) reaction to a perceived decline in serious study of the classics of the Western tradition in American universities. Kirk praises the ability of these programs to transmit to students what he refers to as “old school literary and philosophical discipline” and comments that spending four years systematically studying important works of literature in various fields is a very good approach to higher education.⁴⁴ This reflects his belief in the centrality of literature and especially great works of literature in the most important kinds of higher education.

However, Kirk also has reservations of the Great Books curriculums as well, particularly the Great Books chosen. He asks, for example, why no works of Cicero, Burke, or Cardinal Newman are chosen when there are writers of inferior power and influence to be studied.⁴⁵ What he seems to be objecting to is, firstly, the claims that these books are the definitive great books of the Western tradition, which may be too rigid and dogmatic a claim and prevent scholarly and moral exploration of other works of importance and also, perhaps, that the Great Books programs are often so multifarious in their viewpoints, some even representing for Kirk the depths of ideological and spiritual error, such as Bentham or Freud. It is probable that Kirk would have preferred a list of Great Books unified around those authors who represent for him the epitome of the Moral Imagination in various genres and fields.

5.3 Educational institutions and the Moral Imagination

So what really defines education and its supreme purpose for Kirk is primarily the concentrated instruction of the cultural and spiritual aspects and norms of man, and then secondarily, though still of central importance, the learning in various disciplines. Education does this through appealing to various faculties, like imagination or sentiment, through its disciplines, such as those used by literature or

⁴² Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 41 and 67.

⁴³ See his curriculum suggestions for example: Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 276-278.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 334.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 334-335.

history, many of which we have discussed previously. But educational institutions themselves provide an immersive, lived experience to the student enrolled, in which they can appeal to our faculties, separate from, and also in combination with, the disciplines offered. They must supply an overall ethos and instruction that unifies the disciplines of education under the aims Kirk offers for education, as well as present the peculiarly direct and comprehensive message of human nature and norms that Kirk envisions for education in their own ethos and pastoral care and atmosphere. This is clear in Kirk's respect for the educational views of Cardinal Newman, which stressed the need for universities to be founded and run on a complete moral and scholarly vision.⁴⁶

Newman, in such works as *The Idea of a University*, defended religion as necessary for a universal knowledge, as theology or religious knowledge can help give a necessary structure to the university curriculum.⁴⁷ For Newman, as Timothy Fuller has made clear, religion provides the perspective and tradition of truth and meaning, providing the ends around which the coherence of higher education can be built. The conservative tradition on liberal education, influenced significantly by Newman, was keen to make clear that the ends of education should have at their centre intellectual and moral knowledge as well as the purely practical and social, but it was often less concerned with explicitly religious and theological knowledge.⁴⁸ But Kirk, like Newman, was not afraid to advocate an explicitly religious sensibility to higher education and its institutions, although he was not exact in how this should be embodied or whether it was strictly necessary.

We can ascertain that discursive reason is a faculty that educational institutions must make prominent use of is. The nature of the comprehensive and conscious pastoral instruction of educational institutions means they must appeal directly to the reason of their students and provide them with discursive moral arguments and descriptions of norms. For example, in the classroom, assembly hall, or lecture theatre, teachers' roles, in order to fulfill Kirk's role of moral guides, there will clearly be conscious and deliberate repetition of moral codes and ethical norms to the students, just as the same process will be involved in the conscious moral ethos of the entire educational facility.

However, it is clear from Kirk's general beliefs about man's moral instruction that imagination and sentiment must also play a role in this process. The teaching staff and institutions, as Kirk sees them, will make use of moral and cultural images, ideals, and exemplars and aim to stir the affections of their pupils in the right proportions to the right objects. In educational institutions, as in all fields, Kirk was sceptical of the capacity of discursive reason to stand alone as a guide to moral conduct. Finally, we have earlier seen the role Kirk felt habit could play in moral tuition, and it must be an important means

⁴⁶ Stanlis, 'Prophet of Higher Education', Op. Cit. 77.

⁴⁷ Marsden, George M., 'Theology and the University: Newman's Idea and Current Realities', in Newman, John Henry, *The Idea of a University*, Turner, Frank M., (ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996. 303.

⁴⁸ Timothy Fuller notes the similar concerns of Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss, although he suggests they were more accepting of a certain secularisation of higher education, see Fuller, Op. Cit. 40-41.

through which educational institutions can provide a support to comprehensive moral awareness. By immersing students in an environment in which both their actual studies and the surrounding instruction of the educational facility constantly instill and imply a normative reality and vision of human nature, education can help to make virtue a basic habit in their lives. Kirk believed habit was extremely important in supporting norms and education, alongside the family, is one of the prime ways in which it can work upon the consciousness of men.⁴⁹

5.4 Kirk on Contemporary Education

We can get some useful examples and demonstrations of the relationship of education to the Moral Imagination if we examine those areas in which Kirk believed the modern American education system failed to provide what he considered an appropriate educational environment and outcome. Kirk believed that education in the United States, at all levels, had declined in the twentieth century and especially since the Second World War, lamenting in his concluding *From The Academy* column in *National Review* that over the period 1955-1980 there had been a continual decline in almost all aspects of higher education in the U.S.⁵⁰ One of the main causes of the continuing decline in higher education, and education in general, Kirk identified as the loss of the normative and intellectual ends he identified for education.

The reasons for this decadence, this loss of object, according to Kirk, were several. One of the primary reasons was the rise of a perspective that saw utility - social utility and especially material prosperity - as the end of education.⁵¹ Kirk believed utilitarianism, in education and without, by ignoring moral effort and imagination and attending only to the rational arrangement of society in order to maximise social and material prosperity, had a faulty, reductionist view of man. One of the primary movements behind this utilitarian view of education was that of John Dewey and his instrumentalist or pragmatist approach to learning.⁵² Dewey and his followers centred education around adjustment to citizenship in a democratic and egalitarian society and the increase of material prosperity in this society. However, not just from the Deweyites, but from many quarters had arisen the notion of education as simply serving society, the fleeting political circumstances of the day, and especially the material well-being of society. Indeed, at one point Kirk even blames modern industrial society itself for the rise of

⁴⁹ Kirk, Russell, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 60.

⁵⁰ Kirk, Russell, 'Imagination against Ideology', *National Review*, 31 December, 1980. 1576-1580. And. Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 92.

⁵¹ Ibid. XIV.

⁵² McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 173 and 199.

utilitarian ideologies, showing the reciprocal relationship he saw here between social conditions and ideology.⁵³

For Kirk this was clearly to mistake the end of education, the normative instruction of the individual, for narrow political and social utility.⁵⁴ Although Kirk believed that education could contribute to order in commonwealth, it did this for him primarily through helping the individual to order his own soul. Kirk was opposed to any schemes, such as Dewey's, that he felt subordinated education to narrow political ends.⁵⁵ Kirk set himself against many twentieth century educational thinkers in his belief that the moral and humane ends he saw as most appropriate for education are superior ones to material prosperity and social utility. It is, for example, commonplace in the modern West for politicians, university administrators, captains of industry, and others to talk of the need for education to cater for the needs of the economy and society.⁵⁶ Ultimately, this difference in opinion may be one of first principles – the importance of moral, spiritual, and cultural wisdom as opposed to material prosperity, but it does highlight the degree to which Kirk's views on education are tied up with his moral beliefs.

This had led to a rise of vocationalism and the proliferation of courses that did not have a focus on developing the scholarly and ethical aspects of the individual.⁵⁷ For example, Kirk opposed the rise of business courses as a major area of higher education.⁵⁸ Although he did think that knowledge of mathematics, sciences, and some professional training had a role to play in higher education, he thought that the growing obsession with measuring education in terms of its employment outcomes and its contribution to social and individual remuneration reflected the replacement of the true ends of education with false, utilitarian ones. As Kirk touches on, this attitude to education is prevalent over many of those involved in the sphere of contemporary education, ranging from parents and students primarily interested in the status and income degrees can deliver to governments inordinately interested in the social prosperity that particular courses and subjects create.⁵⁹

These movements have also led, according to Kirk, especially the utilitarian impetuses of Dewey and others, to the bureaucratisation and commercialisation of education, especially higher education, in the U.S. They have led bureaucracies, who are naturally inclined this way to begin with, to focus on their

⁵³ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. XVI

⁵⁴ Ibid. 198-199.

⁵⁵ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 199.

⁵⁶ One such example, from a university administrator, can be found here: Harding, Sandra, 'Stirring and Shaking Australia's Tertiary Sector – and the Economy', Address to the National Press Club. 26th February, 2014. <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/news/media-releases/Stirring-and-shaking-Australia-s-tertiary-sector---and-the-economy#.UzpVpIJTspo>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 298.

⁵⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'Can We Leaven the Lump?', *The Record*, Volume. 55, (Winter, 1979). <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2014/02/leaven-lump-higher-learning.html>, accessed 6th August 2015.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

own needs and their own returns rather than those that Kirk feels are the true ends of education.⁶⁰ They have also led government and administrators to embark on policies that involve adding corporate or commercial aspects or partners to educational institutions, under the view that college should make a return for society.⁶¹ This impetus had already even gone so far that Kirk could be critical of the place and status that college sport had come to occupy in contemporary American higher education - a far cry from the concerns and purpose Kirk envisaged for the university.⁶²

As an illustration that it was not mere disagreement with measuring education by economic standards – by implication, utilitarianism – alone that led to Kirk’s criticisms, we may compare him with contemporary British literary critic Stefan Collini, who has written influentially on the subject of universities and higher education. Collini too sees intellectual and cultural improvement, for individual and society, as just as important for education as economics, and critiques excessive educational utilitarianism.⁶³ He stresses not so much the understanding of traditional norms of human nature as the central aim of higher education, but rather the expansion of knowledge in all directions without necessarily tying it to any immediate technical or economic ends. It is the opening up of intellectual vistas and new knowledge that is worthy in itself, and worthy enough to not limit higher education’s ends to utility alone, and which can stimulate students with openness to knowledge and appreciation of it. He does see some of this expanding knowledge as leading to a greater understanding of ourselves, but he primarily seems to have intellectual and cultural achievement in all fields – humanities, social sciences, natural sciences - in mind, for both individual and society rather than a more ethical or spiritual standard. Collini, for instance, in assessing Newman’s *Idea of a University*, critiques Newman for trying to ground all university studies in theology and Catholic doctrine and faith. He refers to this as dogmatic and suggests it could not hold sway in the pluralistic contemporary context.⁶⁴ Kirk does not try to ground higher education in the doctrine of a specific Church, but he does see the transcendent and religion as important principles undergirding the aims of higher education.⁶⁵

Here we have the clash of openness and what is currently practical, according to Collini, with Kirk’s attempt to make sure there is a sufficient organising core and wisdom at the centre of higher education. Collini, in advocating for a general intellectual endeavour over the sort of specific organising doctrine of normative and intellectual wisdom that Kirk subscribes to, suggests that three years of university study is not going to be enough to make students into truly moral and scholarly individuals. That is, he is sceptical of the claims of Newman that a proper university education can go a long way to creating a

⁶⁰ Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 82-83.

⁶¹ See Kirk, Russell, ‘Massive Subsidies and Academic Freedom’, in Kirk, Russell, *The Intemperate Professor and Other Cultural Splenetics*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1965. 30-37.

⁶² Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. XII.

⁶³ Collini, Stefan, *What Are Universities For?*, Penguin Books, London, 2012. 53-57 and 86-102.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 44.

⁶⁵ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 69.

gentleman, and by extension Kirk's claims of the moral possibilities of the university.⁶⁶ Kirk does, at times, suggest the university can only give the opportunity to individuals to develop their Moral Imagination, but he does seem to imply the university can achieve more substantively in this direction than Collini thinks likely. The latter thinks it must be content with opening up students and society to the desire to further human knowledge in all directions (and he clearly sees this as a worthy aim in itself). This is an important criticism of Kirk's vision of the Moral Imagination at the centre of education and one he does not fully deal with by providing substantial, empirical analysis and proof of the moral outcomes of higher education, rather than general principles and suggestive historical chronicling. It is open to question just how much education centred on the Moral Imagination can encourage moral apprehension in students and in society at large.

This difference in the ends of universities leads Kirk and Collini to divergent views on contemporary higher education. For example, Collini seems to be far more positive about the amount of time devoted to research compared to teaching in contemporary universities, as he sees research in all areas of knowledge as an important end of the university.⁶⁷ And Collini mostly approves of increased enrollment in universities. He sees this as inevitable in modern democratic societies and as representing a largely salutary desire to allow a larger proportion of society to attend, where Kirk saw largely desultory effects as we have seen.⁶⁸ Collini's challenge to Kirk is to answer the question of how, in the contemporary West, the size of higher educational institutions can be scaled back. Kirk does not really say how this might occur, politically and practically, in any great detail.

Kirk's belief in the Moral Imagination as the centre of education, and the conditions under which it would flourish, is in turn a challenge to Collini. It is the question of whether the cultural and intellectual improvement, individual and social, Collini believes - especially a good chance of access to an ordered and meaningful knowledge, and respect for knowledge - that can be apprehended by students, and through them permeate society at large, occur without something like the robust core of normative ends Kirk believes in; ends that give a coherent vision of education and bring a hierarchic order to all the possible studies and disciplines. In other words, is respect for intellectual inquiry and its carrying out in all fields enough, both as a goal for man's knowledge and for organising higher education? Or, conversely, is there a wisdom that involves understanding the correct hierarchy of knowledge and the more important parts of this hierarchy; a wisdom that is important for respect for knowledge in general and for appreciating the correct place and value of the different areas and subjects of knowledge.

Collini's writings on higher education, therefore, show us that Kirk's specific moral views, beyond just objecting to utilitarianism in education, determined his views on education and that his more

⁶⁶ Collini, *Op. Cit.* 50-52.

⁶⁷ See for example, *Ibid.* 88.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 41-42.

specific recommendations, such as about the size of universities, were strongly connected with the moral aims he saw for education. They also show us that Kirk can contribute insights to the debate over the non-utilitarian goals of education and what these mean for the structure and content of educational institutions, as well as highlight some of the questions about these goals and the recommendations that follow that Kirk's own writings leave somewhat unresolved.

Romanticism - appeals to the idyllic imagination that frequently are a part of much contemporary educational thought - was also, in various ways, responsible, Kirk suggests, for education losing its understanding of its purpose. These appeals made the free and unrestrained expression of the desires and emotions of students, under the vision of an easily achieved egalitarian harmony, the cornerstone of education.⁶⁹ This romanticism included part of the motivation for life adjustment as an end of study, which replaced moral and scholarly effort and norms with the insistence that preaching tolerance and free expression could bring about social harmony and the ends of education.⁷⁰ It was also a part of many efforts, especially under the influence of the 1960s counterculture, to lessen discipline, organisation, and standards in education under the aegis of free expression, creativity, and feeling, which Kirk objected to as misunderstanding both the effort and the ends required for genuine education.⁷¹ And, finally, we may also note the various deconstructionist and liberationist ideologies we examined earlier were another reason for the loss of the ends of education for Kirk. He did not think that the proper end of education was to try and create racial harmony or mend perceived disparities in the social conditions of minority groups.⁷²

Related to all these causes of decline, according to Kirk, is what he held to be the fallacy that practically everyone should attend university.⁷³ This fallacy, Kirk believes, is related to ideologically democratic dogma. As he states, this fallacy is "the extension of political forms to the realm of spirit and intellect", or the application of egalitarian doctrines to areas of education in which they do not belong.⁷⁴ It is a neglect of differences of intellect and character amongst individuals and the effort required for genuine, meaningful education under the mistaken application of abstract equality, itself an example of the loss of the ends of education. Kirk believed it had led to the lowering of educational standards, because of the massive uptake in students entering tertiary education. This occurred especially after the post-war G.I bills, which led universities to feel pressure to cater for many students who had neither the ability nor the inclination to pursue the sort of disciplined effort and holistic set programs which Kirk felt

⁶⁹ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 271. And. Stanlis, 'Prophet of Higher Education', Op. Cit. 77-78.

⁷⁰ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 199.

⁷¹ Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 87.

⁷² Stanlis, 'Prophet of Higher Education', Op. Cit. 80.

⁷³ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 183.

⁷⁴ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. XV-XVI.

still existed before the war and opted, instead, for less disciplined and rigorous study and more election and choice in the fields of study offered.⁷⁵

Those who favour the expanded tertiary education sector would object to Kirk's position on the grounds that it would remove outlets for social mobility and personal advancement that this expansion has opened up in recent decades. This was, after all, often the set purpose of the G.I Bill and other causes of the expansion of numbers attending university.⁷⁶ From this viewpoint Kirk's educational ideals are elitist, withholding the economic and even moral and social benefits that expanded higher education can bring.⁷⁷ Again, some response can be given by appealing to Kirk's stated ends of education. Nevertheless, not only does this response depend upon the acceptance of Kirk's priorities for education, but it would seem to require that it be correct that the higher education of any but the small minority Kirk sees as capable and willing to dedicate themselves to the moral and humane discipline of proper higher learning has a widespread detrimental effect on tertiary education. This is a case that Kirk tries to make through his examination of the developments in higher education over recent decades, such as in *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, but Kirk's overall argument, whilst suggestive, does not amount to certain proof, or anything close.

Kirk, as something of a counterpoint to these criticisms of contemporary higher education, provides us with a sketch of his model university, contrary to his usual hostility to such armchair blueprints for reform, which may serve as a good illustration of his overall philosophy of education. Beginning by underscoring the need for primary and secondary school to prepare students for tertiary education, Kirk discusses the curriculum, staff, students, and facilities that this model university would possess. The curriculum will be designed to inculcate Moral Imagination and right reason, consisting of only a few subjects - namely the arts and sciences we have already noted that Kirk saw as the core of proper higher learning.⁷⁸ Staff are to be learned and lively and to be appointed based upon their wisdom, expertise, and experience rather than their academic qualifications alone. They are to have freedom in teaching methods, but are understood to be imparting moral and scholarly wisdom handed down and not their private opinions. It is teaching and not researching that is their primary concern.⁷⁹

Students must be serious about higher learning, prepared by their secondary schooling for all that is required of them in college (there is to be little room for remedial studies and catching up) in terms of intellectual ability and literary and moral preparation. Kirk would provide scholarships and tuition help to those who require it, but his strictures on the qualifications for and forms of education available

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 4. And Kirk, *The Sword of the Imagination*, Op. Cit. 410.

⁷⁷ Kneller, George F., *Movements of Thought in Modern Education*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1984. 23-236.

⁷⁸ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 302-303. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 194-195.

⁷⁹ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 303-304.

would limit the amount of people going to university.⁸⁰ College facilities are to be handsome, yet not luxurious. There is to be much less room for administration - with Kirk even stating such administration should be in cramped and poor buildings to discourage its growth – and less room for what Kirk considered superfluous buildings, even suggesting, as far as possible, students find their own food and provisions outside the campus. There is to be a chapel or church on campus, however.⁸¹

Here we see all the central features of Kirk's views on education, as a source of moral knowledge and whose central purpose is given by this role as such a source. There should be attention to this moral end in all areas, from school facilities to staff roles and student eligibility, and the removal of what might distract from this purpose, reflecting Kirk's belief in an illative, immersive moral sense that must be awakened in many areas of life and through many faculties of knowledge. So, for Kirk, we can see that education was an important source of the Moral Imagination, especially through its concentrated use of imaginative disciplines and the traditional literary canon, which can help to show students, imaginatively, the norms of human nature. This was also the purpose of education for him, that which gave it the proper ends and structure, so that it could play this role as a source of the Moral Imagination, as well as impart much meaningful scholarly and moral discipline and insight, at all.

⁸⁰ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 304-305. And. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 195-196.

⁸¹ Kirk, *Decadence and Renewal*, Op. Cit. 305-306. And. McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 196.

Chapter Six

Religion and the Moral Imagination

6.1 The Transcendent

Religion and religious tradition are also an important source for the Moral Imagination as Russell Kirk understands it, as we have alluded to previously. The first major way in which religion plays an important role in the Moral Imagination is that Kirk thought that a conception and recognition of the religious or transcendent aspect of life was an inescapable and necessary part of being human.¹ That is, that there is an order of value and meaning and reality beyond the mundane world of everyday experience and existence is for Kirk an essential aspect of viewing the world correctly as well as and man's place in it, which touches deeply upon an apprehension of the norms that govern human nature.²

This sense that the transcendent was an important aspect of the human story can be seen in Kirk's clear belief that men, both individually and as a society, ordinarily require it as a part of their lives. Kirk believed that if men's lives and the scope of society's vision were limited to merely the mundane, the appetites and pleasures of one's material desires – food, sleep, sex, comfort, then most men could not be satisfied.³ They would be bored and look for further purpose, meaning, and value in their lives, which they can only find in the religious or transcendent, or that which transcends the everyday, corporeal world.⁴ Kirk always kept this Tory appreciation of the need to link man's immediate purposes to his ultimate purposes at the forefront of his thought.

Edmund Burke and the Burkean conservative tradition including its post-war revival in the U. S., Babbitt and the New Humanists, and twentieth century Christian humanism were all clear influences on Kirk's respect for the transcendent in human nature and experience, as we have mentioned before and will not repeat in detail here, and his belief in the need to integrate this aspect of man with his earthly needs. As a part of this tradition his belief in the transcendent aspect to human reality made him

¹ Kirk, Russell, 'York and Social Boredom', in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 199-200.

² Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormity in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 21.

³ Kirk, 'York and Social Boredom', Op. Cit. 195-201.

⁴ Ibid.

contemptuous of all political schemes that thought of the goal of human life and the good society only in increasing material prosperity and the comforts of earthly existence, even to fantastic proportions, and which reduced man to only his worldly nature. Indeed, it gave him a special concern for the effects of social boredom, often caused, he thought, by loss of transcendent purpose. In this sense religion, belief in that which transcends the material and the mundane, is a source of moral knowledge by articulating a central part of our human nature: its desires for more than a life of sensual pleasures and material comfort.

Similarly, the religious, divine, or transcendent had, for Kirk, an important part to play in supporting several virtues. These virtues themselves, in not being reducible to the interests of earthly utility and pleasure, and as they are for Kirk clearly involved in the noblest aspects of human character and life, confirm for us the role of the religious or transcendent as a source of moral consciousness. These virtues implicitly or explicitly involve reference to the divine or that which transcends everyday life and interests.

For example, Kirk was keen to stress the importance of humility as a virtue for man in his own soul and in his relationship with others.⁵ Humility, for Kirk, meant that man recognises his limitations and the limits of his place in the world, especially before God. It meant that a man does not inflate his self-worth, and remembers how flawed, indeed, he was, and how much of a struggle was it for him to do what was right and good and worthy. For Kirk this was not just, however, a recognition of man's natural limitations, but was the realisation of his reliance on God, on grace, for his being and that which is good in his life and for his moral and noble character and actions. Humility kept man from attempting the hubristic and the presumptuous, which could only bring ruin, and was necessarily religious.⁶

Similarly, piety is a virtue that Kirk ranked highly, as we have seen. Piety, for Kirk, represented a proper respect for our duties and obligations given to us by our social bonds and those natural to our intrinsic human nature. At the centre of this respect was the respect for God and our duties towards him, as the very word piety clearly alludes to. Indeed, in his discussion of piety, or *pietas*, as displayed by Virgil, Kirk links the veneration of religion and the gods, or the divine, and the duties this mandates, to all our other sundry individual and social duties and obligations. This shows just how important religion was to Kirk's conception of the Moral Imagination.⁷

⁵ Guroian, Vigen, 'The Conservative Mind Forty Years Later', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 24. And. Panichas, George, 'Russell Kirk as Man of Letters', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994). 12.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991. 103-104 And. 115-117.

6.2 Religion as a Source of Morality

Kirk's view of certain central aspects of man and his place in the universe also reflects the importance of the divine and religion as sources and supports for moral awareness. Kirk was profoundly influenced by the Christian view of man, especially as expressed by Saint Augustine and within the Augustinian tradition.⁸ Certainly, the view of man's sojourn upon the earth as that of pilgrim travelling through a foreign and alien land is one that Kirk inherited from Augustine, amongst others. They both shared the belief that the true destiny of man was beyond the here and now and that, many compensations though there might be for our earthly lives, our lives on earth were full of travail, suffering, and moral and spiritual danger – we would only find our home and sanctuary beyond this world, through God's grace and our moral action. This was clearly, and explicitly, one of several reasons Kirk sometimes provided for his belief in the limits of human progress in this world, especially in terms of social progress. His Augustinian Christian perspective convinced him that our world was imperfect and fallen and that to hope to experience secular perfection and utopia was a profoundly unwise thing to do.⁹

From Augustine, amongst other sources, Kirk also inherited an intense belief in original sin and the imperfection of men, a cause and a consequence, indeed, of the imperfect nature of earthly existence.¹⁰ Kirk was always at pains to argue against those views of man, especially prevalent in modern liberalism, which saw man's nature as essentially good, only being restrained by oppressive institutions. Kirk saw man's nature as fallen and flawed. Man, he thought, was capable of great and noble deeds, but he was also very often given to selfishness, passions, and foolishness.¹¹ Kirk inherited this belief from many sources, including much conservative thought and, no doubt, his own experience of the world, but Augustine and the Christian tradition was one important source.

These Augustinian, Christian positions which stressed the limitations of man's nature and scope for happiness and perfection in this earthly realm was an important reason for Kirk's insistence on the necessity of God's grace and religious tradition to support man's moral and spiritual endeavours.¹² In orthodox Christian doctrine fallen man is incapable of pursuing his true spiritual ends without God's support. Kirk endorsed this position and also held that religious tradition was all but a necessary condition for ethical beliefs, to give them a proper sanction and order. In fact, in terms of society at large Kirk positively affirms the position that religious sanction is required to give an authority to ethical

⁸ Quinn, Dermot, 'Religion and the Conservative Mind', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 218.

⁹ Ibid. 211.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. 217-219.

traditions that will have any chance of general acceptance, and is a part of man's moral life which cannot be neglected. Likewise, Kirk believed strongly in the role of providence in guiding man and society.¹³ He took this viewpoint from the Augustinian, Christian tradition and its emphasis on resignation to the will of God and God's providing for man, who finds himself facing much limitation, suffering, and confusion.

Finally, we might mention that the Christian, Augustinian influence supported Kirk's view of the importance and role of free will in man's nature.¹⁴ For Kirk free will and choice was at the centre of what it meant to be human. The human drama had at its core the choice between good and evil, the divine or diabolic. This reflects, in part, the insistence on free will and choice at the centre of traditional, catholic Christianity. From Augustine (although not from the extreme Augustinianism of many of the Reformers) and the traditional Christian tradition, Kirk inherited an abiding respect for man's ultimate moral agency, which reinforced his view of the Moral Imagination as a necessary support for equally necessary moral effort and struggle.¹⁵

What this Augustinian influence most centrally amounted to, in Kirk's view of the Moral Imagination and religion as a source of it, was to remind us of the limits of human nature and its powers of progress in this world, of its flaws and its dignity and its ever present moral choices, and of the necessity for divine support and sanction to support what progress, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual, is possible in this world. Religion, in other words, again operates as a source for the Moral Imagination by its ability to recall to us man's nature and his place in the universe, a place that transcended the purely mundane and naturalistic. It also shows Kirk's belief in the role of the religious life in man's broader life on earth, a religious life that must be brought into harmony with the rest of his existence, in its proper, central place.

As we have already seen, Christopher Dawson, an important an important influence on Kirk, was likewise indebted to the Augustinian perspective.¹⁶ Dawson was especially interested in the role of religion in culture and history, and believed that this influence was of great significance. He was a great critic of those who felt civilisation naturally progressed from the primitive and religious to the advanced and secular.¹⁷ Dawson inherited the Catholic and, especially, Augustinian belief in the role of divine providence in history and the Augustinian distinction between the City of God and historical strivings for it and the City of Man and its progress. The former referred to the spiritual ideal and home of man, ultimately situated beyond this earthly life, whereas the latter refers to man's earthly existence and

¹³ McAllister, Ted V., 'The Particular and the Universal: Kirk's Second Canon of Conservative Thought', *Political Science Review*, Vol. 35 (2006). 187.

¹⁴ Ibid. 217.

¹⁵ Ibid. 217-219.

¹⁶ Dawson, Christopher, *Dynamics of World History*, ISI Books, Wilmington, 2002. XXVI.

¹⁷ Ibid. XVIII-XXI.

worldly interests and society. From Augustine and Dawson Kirk inherited a view of the inherent limitations of the earthly city, even to progress to the optimal expression of those purely material and worldly elements which make it up, and the abiding reality of the City of God, man's spiritual side and destiny, to give meaning and vitality, as well as a commensurate end, to our existence in this world.

Kirk claimed his conversion to Catholic Christianity was largely an intellectual affair based on reading the Church Fathers as well as Plato and Aristotle. However, he does not explicitly explain the arguments of these great, traditional thinkers that he found clearly very persuasive. And it must be noted that in modernity the philosophical question of the existence and nature of God has been hotly debated. There were quite a few noted philosophers during Kirk's lifetime who rejected the philosophical case for God and for Christianity, such as Bertrand Russell and J. L. Mackie. The highly influential philosopher English philosopher and mathematician, Russell, in his essay *Why I am not a Christian*, goes through some important historical arguments for God briefly, such as the cosmological, moral, and teleological arguments and critiques and dismisses them.¹⁸ And Mackie, a noteworthy middle and later twentieth century contributor to analytical philosophy of religion, in his work *The Miracle of Theism*, catalogues the central arguments for God's existence and subjects them all to strenuous criticism.¹⁹ We may take these two as representative of a general trend of intellectual criticism of the rational foundations of religion in the twentieth century.

But it is not correct that theism has been comprehensively refuted. The ancient and medieval sources of Christian philosophy have arguably not been overcome or made obsolete by modern critics (Mackie himself takes seriously historical defenders of theism), and there have been modern theistic philosophers who have made respectable cases for varieties of theistic thought and against naturalistic ones, like Etienne Gilson or David Bentley Hart. We might also mention Edward Feser in this regard, a contemporary Thomistic philosopher who has defended the *Quinque Viae*, or proofs of God, of Aquinas at length and the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft, who has catalogued and defended numerous proofs of God.²⁰ This is not a topic we can enter into at length. What is important from our perspective is that the reality of theism and the transcendent remains an issue of much controversy and debate, and by avoiding making his own philosophical contribution to this debate Kirk removes an important pillar of support for the transcendental aspect of his views on religion and morality. Kirk essentially stands aside from an important debate of modern times, but he wishes to have us accept one side – the theistic,

¹⁸ Russell, Bertrand, *Why I am not a Christian*, Routledge Classics, London, 2009.

¹⁹ Mackie, J. L., *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982.

²⁰ Feser, Edward, *Aquinas*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2009. 65-120. And. Kreeft, Peter, and Tacelli, Fr. Ronald, 'Twenty Arguments for the Existence of God'. http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/20_arguments-gods-existence.htm, accessed 6th August 2015.

Christian side – as correct. This means he has little in the way of a response to those who reject any meaningful transcendent strivings in man or transcendent sanction of and input in man's norm.

6.3 The Nature of Religion

As the foregoing discussion has touched upon, Christianity, especially in its traditional, catholic forms, was very influential on Kirk's idea of religion as a source of moral knowledge. However, unlike some of the Christian humanists who influenced him (especially G. K. Chesterton, who was sharply critical of many Eastern and ancient faiths and religious philosophies) Kirk was far less particular about Christianity being the religious source of moral knowledge. Kirk was often keen to stress the importance of the transcendent without linking it to a particular faith, or by suggesting its expression by a number of different faiths and spiritual perspectives.²¹

We might go so far as to say that Kirk gives us an outline of an enduring moral order or divine intent or transcendent reality that is broader than Christianity, indeed being linked to no specific religion whatsoever. Rather, Kirk expresses a conception of a perennial and universal transcendence and natural law.²² This conception is, in a sense, the Moral Imagination and its normative contents itself – a normative reality of objective value and timeless truths. This conception of Kirk's has much in common with the higher will of the New Humanists such as Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More. The higher will or higher nature or inner check of these thinkers represented an abiding moral reality which was beyond the flux of the world of sense experience, but it was not, for them, linked only as the end of one religious or philosophical path.²³ Likewise, for Kirk there is a transcendent moral reality or natural law whose apprehension he links to no one religion.

We can also see similarities between Kirk's conception in this respect and C. S. Lewis's explanation in *The Abolition of Man*, a work that Kirk greatly admired, of traditional morality, natural law, or the Tao. As Lewis explains this concept, it is a near universal human appreciation of natural law – which any investigation of morality must in some variation express unless arbitrary claims intervene – and is not bound to any one religion, philosophy, or culture. Rather, all the more or less sound religions, philosophies, and cultures have, in some sense, for Lewis, believed in it and have expressed it in their moral codes and teachings.²⁴

²¹ See, for example, Chesterton, G. K., *The Everlasting Man*, Blackmask Online, 2002. And. Kirk, 'Civilisation without Religion?', in *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 7-15. And Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity*, Fount Paperbacks, London, 1977.

²² McAllister, Op. Cit. 183.

²³ McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 42-47.

²⁴ Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, in Lewis, C. S., *Selected Books*, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2002. 404-418.

It might be argued that this conception of transcendence and moral and spiritual reality that is not linked to any one religion takes away some of the attention from religion in Kirk's view of the sources of Moral Imagination. It does mean that this reality is accessible through other sources than religious tradition and that it may even be approached by those who are not overtly religious. Indeed, like his view of the Moral Imagination itself, Kirk's view of the transcendent is deliberately separated from a necessary attachment and participation in the forms and rituals of any one religion, or even any religion at all. Religion undoubtedly has an important role to play as a source and support of moral awareness for Kirk, but it requires no initiation and submersion in the sacraments or imaginal world of a religion, Christian or otherwise, in order to have access to spiritual reality.

However, that said, religious tradition, whilst not absolutely essential as a path to the transcendent, is clearly still one of the best roads in this direction for Kirk. Many times Kirk expresses his belief of the necessity of religious tradition to give force and meaning to ethical precepts and teaching, especially for larger society.²⁵ It is clear that he believes religious tradition - that of the great, traditional faiths of the world with their long histories and rich developments of doctrine and art and philosophy - through its symbolism, its imaginal framework, its sacraments and ritual, its community, and its moral teaching - provides a uniquely potent source of moral education and imagination and is one of the best ways to give proper order and hierarchy to our values, centring them on the highest reality. This is especially true on a societal level, where Kirk feels that it is one of the few sources that can have any significant impact on moral and spiritual apprehension across society and culture.²⁶ But even at the individual level we might go as far to say that Kirk thinks the individual who can reach the higher levels of spiritual and moral attainment without belonging to a religious tradition is a rare man.²⁷ Clearly, religious tradition and practice is one of the permanent things for Kirk, which the Moral Imagination must unify with the other central parts of man's life.

Although we have been stressing the ecumenical nature of religion as a source of the Moral Imagination, it is certainly true that Christianity occupied a unique place in Kirk's thinking. We have already seen the deeply traditional, catholic Christian, and especially Augustinian, influences on his thought. At some points Kirk does express his belief in the superiority of the Christian viewpoint to others, religious as well as secular, referring indeed to the order in the soul and commonwealth as the "religion which has existed since the beginning of the world, but now takes the name of Christianity", implying Christianity is the highest expression of belief; and Kirk himself eventually converted to Roman

²⁵ Kirk, Russell, 'Brownson and a Just Society', in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 140-143.

²⁶ Kirk, Russell, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', in *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 52.

²⁷ Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, Sherwood Sugden and Company, Peru, 1988. 139-140.

Catholic Christianity.²⁸ Kirk's views on religion and religious virtues and priorities reflect, for example, Christian perspectives, and we have already noted his Christian views on human nature. Kirk is primarily interested in social and cultural criticism and revival in the West, particularly his native United States of America, and was naturally less eager to intervene too deeply in the concerns of other societies, which further contributed to the primacy of Christianity in his thoughts on religion and the norms. In essence Kirk then approaches religion in an ecumenical way reminiscent more of Babbitt than of Chesterton, but his own influences and interests still mean that Christianity is at the forefront of most of his ruminations on religion.

6.4 Religion and Society

Related to the importance Kirk placed on religion, or the transcendent, as the necessary summit of values and end of human life is his belief in the social role of religious dogma and tradition. In this belief concerning the social value of religious tradition, Kirk entered himself into a debate that had been raging in the West throughout the twentieth century and still continues to. We have already alluded to the debate over the existence of God and the supernatural, which we cannot go into in detail here, and one's position in that debate is important for one's opinion of the place and value of religion in society. The vociferous critics of religious influence and authority in society have always tended to be those more sceptical of its transcendental claims. However, there is more to the modern debate about religion and society than the truth or falsity of religion.

In the decades preceding the beginning of Kirk's career, the place of religion, especially Christianity, had come under increasing attack in the U.S. There had been a growing cultural and intellectual criticism of religion. For example, the popular journalist and satirist, and later member of the Old Right, H.L. Mencken bemoaned what he saw as irrationality, superstition, and bigotry spread by popular religion.²⁹ Another example of the rise of secularism and critiques of the influence of religion in society in the early and middle of the twentieth century was the Secular Humanist movement associated with John Dewey. This movement took the name humanist from the New or American Humanists led by Babbitt and More, in an attempt to neutralise the latter.³⁰ The Secular Humanists objected to the New Humanists' emphasis on dualism and a morality centred on inner control and also its critique of materialism. The Secular Humanists stood for a materialist worldview that saw in the sciences the chief medium of

²⁸ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 21.

²⁹ See for example, Mencken, H. L., *A Carnival of Buncombe: Writings on Politics*, Moos, Malcolm (ed.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984. 205-207.

³⁰ Kirk, Russell, 'Review of Democracy and Leadership and Great Humanists', *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (June, 1954). 296-299.

human knowledge. For example, the Humanist Manifesto released by the Secular Humanists (who confusingly began by calling themselves religious humanists) mentions the self-existing and uncreated nature of the universe, and that man is a part of nature; and repudiates dualism.³¹ They advocated material prosperity and philanthropy as the centre of moral action. They were opposed, most especially, to the influence of traditional religion over society and saw it as engendering conflict amongst mankind and creating obstacles to human progress. At once remove the dead superstitions of the past, they believed, and society will be better managed, more harmonious, more moral, and happier.

Both the post-war American conservative movement and twentieth century Christian humanism were moved to try and combat the rise of aggressive secularism and attacks on the power and influence of religion in Western societies in the early and middle twentieth century. Post-war American conservatism, especially the strains in it concerned with tradition and culture, was much opposed to the decline in both popular and academic religiosity in contemporary America. They argued, like Kirk, that religion was an important means for moral instruction and guidance in a healthy society, and that man was a partly spiritual animal who required the spiritual or transcendent as part of his social and cultural existence.³² We find, as an illustration of this important part of the post-war conservative movement, Richard Weaver's defence of shared, transcendent first principles and his belief in the danger of forgetting the truth of original sin.³³ And, indeed, the decline and attack on faith in contemporary higher education had been an important point in William F. Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*, one of the founding tomes of post-war American conservatism.³⁴

The twentieth century Christian humanists, likewise, were at pains to point out the limits, social and cultural as well as individual, of a viewpoint that saw in man just a naked ape and instead they stressed the social, cultural, and individual importance of traditional religion, particularly Christianity. This was because of their beliefs that man was a spiritual animal as well as a material and social one; that society and culture must take into account the whole of the individual; and that the individual must explicitly recognise his own transcendent desires and norms, harmonising his earthly life around them. Important works in this regard include T. S. Eliot's *Idea of a Christian Society*. In this work, Eliot mainly discusses the parameters of a healthy Christian society, but he also discusses what he considers the negative nature of contemporary liberalism – its capacity to loosen and dissolve but not bind, contrasting this with the

³¹ Auer et al, Humanist Manifesto I.

http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_I , accessed 6th August 2015.

³² Nash, George, H., *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945*, Basic Books, inc., Publishers, New York, 1976. 58-62.

³³ Weaver, Richard, *Ideas Have Consequences*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984. 19-22. And. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement*, Op. Cit. 60.

³⁴ Ibid. 140.

cohesion and shared beliefs of traditional, Christian society.³⁵ C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* is another such work. In it Lewis describes the abandonment of a belief in a transcendent, objective moral law, and the traditional beliefs and systems incorporating it, as leading to the loss of rightly guided emotions and values and the surrender of society to a de-valued, scientific imperative that would abolish mankind as traditionally understood.³⁶

The decline in religious belief and increased secularisation continued apace in the U.S. and the West in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twentieth-first century. And these developments have often been accompanied by greater scrutiny and criticism of the influence and power of religion on society, culture, and politics. Critics of religious influence and power in society have accused it of causing sectarian conflict, being based on the acceptance of the irrational, appealing to authority rather than rational and critical thought and investigation, encouraging superstitious and bigoted beliefs and practices, and being an obstacle to knowledge and action that will genuinely increase individual and social happiness and prosperity (especially by focusing attention on the transcendent and the religious instead of the social and material).

In many ways representative of these critiques of religion and its social role, if on the more militant and strident end of the spectrum at times, is the movement called New Atheism. This movement, arising in the first decade of the twenty-first century, has been led by such figures as biologist Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, and journalist Christopher Hitchens, who wrote *God is Not Great*. It has been greeted with much publicity as well as criticism of its philosophical and cultural claims from such authors as Thomistic philosopher Edward Feser and Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart.³⁷

Amongst the accusations of this movement against religion and its social influence are that religion involves subservience to dogma and authority. Instead of dogma and authority the claim is that thought should be entirely free and critical. Furthermore, as a consequence of dogmatic thinking, it is claimed that religion has held back the progress of thought and society and has even led to the acceptance of the illogical and absurd. Richard Dawkins, for example, differentiates between devout religious belief and rational and scientific belief when he says, "I believe not because of reading a holy book but because I have studied the evidence" and then goes on to suggest critical and biblical thinking are contradictories.³⁸ Christopher Hitchens describes briefly what he takes to be the progression of rational

³⁵ Eliot, T.S., *The Idea of a Christian Society*, in Eliot, T. S., *Christianity and Culture*, Harcourt Inc., San Diego, 1976. 12-19.

³⁶ See Lewis, C. S., *The Abolition of Man*, Op. Cit.

³⁷ Feser, Edward, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism*, St. Augustine's Press, South Bend, 2008. And Hart, David Bentley, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009.

³⁸ Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion*, Black Swan, London, 2007. 319 and 321.

and critical thought and science, from Socrates to modernity, and its attacks by those who allowed religious dogma to become an obstacle to their reasoned search for truth.³⁹

Another important accusation made against religion's social influence and role by the New Atheists, and other recent critics, has been it leads to social and sectarian conflict and division, and is not required for a tolerably harmonious and decent society, especially a modern, multicultural one. This, in fact, is a famous or even notorious claim of the New Atheists: that religion causes conflict and division. Dawkins often stresses this aspect of religion in his work *The God Delusion*. For example, he relates research into the moral sensibilities of Israeli children on reading passages from Book of Joshua carried out by psychologist George Taramin, in which the children seemed to approve of the slaughter of Canaanites in Jericho. Dawkins uses this to suggest that religion increases sectarian division and hatred.⁴⁰ Hitchens goes so far as to name one of his chapters in *God is Not Great* "Religion Kills" and lists numerous instances where he feels religion has fostered conflict and violence.⁴¹

Dawkins echoes the tradition of secular criticism when he suggests that it is perfectly possible for men, individually and socially, to be good and happy without religion. He, for example, makes the claim that a decent and moral social consensus can be formed without any directly religious input: "the [moral] consensus [which tends to prevail in modern society] has no obvious connection with religion".⁴² It is a common claim amongst other secularists that religion is not required for social and individual morality and cohesion.⁴³ Together these claims – that religion is not socially required and can often be socially divisive and negative – are a noteworthy counterpoint against those who would argue for the importance of religion to society and culture.

Kirk's writings on the central importance of religious tradition to individual and social morality, therefore, must be seen against this backdrop of the decline of religion in society and an atmosphere where the positive social effects of religion were becoming increasingly questioned. Kirk's arguments and claims about the role of religion in society are challenged by the criticisms of secularists and are, on the other hand, also a response, in part, to these challenges. It is clear Kirk felt that he had to defend, against the antagonist world of the late twentieth century, the religious and spiritual as a significant aspect of man that must be reflected in society and culture if they are to cater for the whole man. Whilst Kirk does not refute the entire attack on religious influence and authority mounted by modern secularists, he makes important points and counterpoints in an on-going and important debate.

³⁹ Hitchens, Christopher, *God is Not Great*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2008. 305-331.

⁴⁰ Dawkins, Op. Cit. 289-292.

⁴¹ Hitchens, Op. Cit. 17-42.

⁴² Dawkins, Op. Cit. 298,

⁴³ See for example Epstein, Greg, *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, William Morrow, New York, 2009.

Kirk believed that dogma, far from being only a limitation and restraint on free thought and creativity, was the foundation of civilised and moral existence, applying generally to society what we have already seen him claim in the narrower field of education. This is because he felt that little of worth could be learned or done in life unless some safe-haven of certainty was allowed from which the inquiries and strivings of men could begin.⁴⁴ If the individual questioned everything and demanded that all must be proved then, Kirk declared, following Tocqueville, then all would be in flux and he would never arrive at the foundations of moral action, the true end of life for Kirk.⁴⁵ Even beyond this Kirk thought dogma could be beneficial as it represented, so he claimed, settled opinion or tenets and principles firmly established.

Dogma, in this sense, had a similar role to the Burkean notion of prejudice: it was of ready application throughout the stresses of everyday life, without leaving men scrambling to adapt to the new and unexpected, and could make of a man's habit his virtue and foundation for thought and action.⁴⁶ This dogma, like Burke's prejudice, was given authority by being long-held and time-tested. It had been developed out of long experience and adapted for the circumstances of a particular society. To reject dogma is to essentially try and replace the knowledge that can only be gained over time and through great social experience with private rationality, ignoring one source of knowledge and giving exaggerated focus to another. The individual of noble deed and wise and bold thought, Kirk therefore believed, was not one whose free or critical thought was over critical or suspicious or arrogant - such patterns of thought destroy the foundations upon which any edifice of virtue or intellectual endeavour must be built – but one who respected tried and tested dogmas of society. Dogma could then be a source of the Moral Imagination by providing the individual with the moral experience and judgments of his civilisation in a way easily accessible to a great many.

The same, Kirk believed, was true for society as it was for the individual. He went so far as to suggest that "All societies, in all times, have lived by dogmas".⁴⁷ What Kirk means is that healthy societies tend to have a core of dogmata, of accepted and established beliefs which its members can and will generally access and rely on. This dogmata serves to bring them together and to maintain harmonious and humane behaviour, and can be draw on and combined with other sources of knowledge. Such societies tend to have a shared view of man and morality, as well as the role of government and law and social institutions, which most in society subscribe to and make largely unqualified use of in their everyday lives. This prevents clashes and conflicts that would arise if the society was divided over such first principles and basic supports for shared social and cultural life. Those societies in which pretensions to

⁴⁴ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in Higher Learning*, Gateway Editions, Limited, South Bend, 1978. 251-252.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 253.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 249-254.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 249.

free and critical thought and rationalism begin to heavily, persistently, and popularly question this shared core of social dogma will tend to dissolve, quickly or slowly, the very basic bonds of society. As Kirk puts it, “When dogmas are abandoned, the social bonds dissolve – swiftly or slowly; and the ‘open’ society ceases to be a society at all, giving way to some new order.”⁴⁸ We might add that this quote clearly shows Kirk includes a tolerance of indifference that refuses to judge opposition to a society’s first principles and social dogmas as another form of acid to the social bonds.

Religious tradition, for Kirk, is one of the most important forms of social dogma in terms of its role in creating social harmony and the social and cultural foundations for moral and humane actions. One of the reasons for this is that Kirk clearly feels that religious dogmas can play a particularly profound and comprehensive role in creating and supporting social morality and harmony.⁴⁹ Religious dogma and traditions are peculiarly concerned with the ultimate purposes of life, as well as connecting these purposes to the events of everyday life: the Christian is taught, for example, to both treat his neighbour well in the course of life and to cherish him as an equal reflection and image of God. Similarly, religious dogmas and traditions, Kirk believed, often have a unique capacity to provide fundamental and axial beliefs, values, and identities across a society, due to their comprehensive nature and their ability to connect with basic, yet profound, imaginative and symbolic themes and content. Or, in other words, religious dogmas and traditions have a rare quality (sometimes seen in other areas, like some patriotic traditions) to appeal to large swathes of the population in a strong and lasting way, providing moral and social unity and direction.⁵⁰ The influence of Protestant notions of justification, grace, and faith as Kirk describes them in *The Roots of American Order*, and their influence over early modern, Protestant societies, might be mentioned as one example.⁵¹

Kirk states that humanity’s cultures come from its cults, its religious traditions.⁵² Because of their particularly effective role in gripping the imagination of individuals and directing their thoughts and behaviour, Kirk thought religious dogmas were particularly effective also in creating cooperation and harmony in society. They provided that core of shared dogmata and established belief about the nature of man and morality which he have noted Kirk felt society to need in order to hold together its social bonds and not to be torn apart by incessant conflict and division over first principles and basic social organisation. Indeed, Kirk goes so far, at one point, as to suggest a formative role of religious tradition – cult – in influencing government and law, the material culture, and arts of a civilisation.⁵³ This shows just

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Quinn, Op. Cit. 207.

⁵⁰ Kirk, ‘Brownson and a Just Society’, Op. Cit. 140-141.

⁵¹ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 232-236.

⁵² Kirk, ‘Civilisation without Religion’, Op. Cit. 7.

⁵³ Ibid.

how important Kirk felt that religious dogma and tradition was in shaping the ways of thinking, the values, and the symbols and imagination of a society.

It is interesting that Kirk seems to differ here from his New Humanist influences, especially Babbitt. Babbitt stressed that, although religious dogma had been useful in the past for encouraging man to seek serve the higher ethical ends, and keep lower passions in check, modernity had seen a decline in the authority of such doctrine which could not be undone. Babbitt claimed that modernity was a time of individualism and empiricism in which, instead of relying on religious authority and dogma, men must take part in an individualised imaginative struggle of the higher against the lower will.⁵⁴ As he writes, "To be modern has meant practically to be increasingly positive and critical, to refuse to receive anything on authority 'anterior, exterior, and superior' to the individual" and "I am myself a thoroughgoing individualist, writing for those who are, like myself, irrevocably committed to the modern experiment."⁵⁵ For Babbitt religious dogma and authority were largely out of place in modernity and could even stifle modern man's experiential moral quest.

Kirk sided with Babbitt's student T. S. Eliot in his criticisms of Babbitt's humanism on this score. Kirk, like Eliot and the Christian humanists, believed that the moral struggle could not be based on largely individualised and experiential quests, however imaginative, but must be based on a substantial body of social authority and dogma, as we have just seen. Religion, for Kirk and the Christian humanists, is one of the most important forms of social authority, images, and doctrine. Man being a social and cultural being, it is argued, he requires social and cultural support for his moral instruction, and cannot be expected to find all moral truth simply through his own private reasoning and experience. And man being a religious or spiritual being, some of this social and cultural moral instruction must be part of a body of belief that speaks to the transcendent in man.⁵⁶ Babbitt's position, then, for Kirk and the Christian humanists, is a good example of an overly individualist one that neglects important parts of the whole man.

We can see, therefore, the role religious tradition, dogma, and practice played in Kirk's social and political thought, and we can see that he raises important counterpoints to secularist attacks on the moral and social contributions of organised religion, like those we examined above in the case of the New Atheists. However, Kirk does not attempt a full empirical and historical study of the relationship between religion and society, and religion and culture to vindicate his claims about the role religion and religious beliefs and practice can play in society, exploring their role in morality and social harmony. He is content to rely on the suggestive but limited claims and preliminary survey we have described. This,

⁵⁴ Babbitt, Irving, *Democracy and Leadership*, Liberty Fund Inc., Indianapolis, 1979. 166-171.

⁵⁵ Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, Op. Cit. 166-167.

⁵⁶ Eliot, T. S., 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', in Eliot, T. S., *Selected Essays*, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1932. 435, 437-442. And Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, Op. Cit. 137-143.

obviously, limits the force of Kirk's claims in this regard, which would be benefited by more extensive study.

Amongst conservative writers there has been a spectrum of beliefs about the importance of religion to man and society, as well as its intrinsic moral role. Obviously, there are a myriad of possible positions along this spectrum, but major places extend from those, like some traditionalist Catholics, who affirm a particular religious tradition as the true moral foundation of a good society; to those, like Kirk, who are strongly supportive of traditional religion in general and affirm the truth and moral role of the transcendent; to those, like many sceptical conservatives, who are sceptical and agnostic about the metaphysical truth of religion but who see religion as being generally important for social cohesion and morality, with various ideas about what forms this social religion can take.⁵⁷ Just about all conservatives have some respect for religion, given its ubiquitous place in human society and culture; however, on the far end of the spectrum, some sceptical conservatives are weary of both considering traditional and organised religion as a necessary or general aspect of human personality and a necessary relationship to man's moral life.

Michael Oakeshott represents this latter extreme of sceptical conservatism. Oakeshott's thought on religion was complex and idiosyncratic, based in his idealist thought, with religion to him amounting to the culmination of practical and moral life, and requiring moral autonomy and sincerity rather than fixed doctrine or beliefs.⁵⁸ What is central to our discussion, however, is that Oakeshott rejected the view that religion in any traditional sense was necessary as a source of moral instruction or apprehension of norms. This represents a brand of conservatism quite at odds with Kirk's, as we have seen in this chapter. Kirk, however, does not give a proper philosophical defence of his beliefs in the truth of religion or its relationship to norms, which means he cannot respond to the more philosophical or metaphysical objections of those conservatives (and others), like Oakeshott, who do not agree with him.

What Kirk does provide, though, again, is a plausible account of the importance of the transcendent in human life and society and the enduring place which religion has occupied in traditional cultures. He writes about this in historical works and in his commentary on religion and politics, implying that it is an aspect of man that cannot be neglected but must be integrated and given a proper place. We might site in support of this, as well as what we have already written in this chapter, his *The Roots of American Order*, in which he discusses America's inheritance from its Western forebears, from Israel to the classical world to medieval and early modern Britain. In this work Kirk puts the religious or metaphysical

⁵⁷ Muller, Jerry Z.(ed.), *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997. 13-14.

⁵⁸ Abel, Corey, 'Oakeshott's Wise Defence: Christianity as a Civilisation', in Abel, Corey (ed.), *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2010. 27-31. And. Tregenza, Ian, 'Skepticism and Tradition: The Religious Imagination of Michael Oakeshott', in Abel, Corey (ed.), *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2010. 2-3.

impulses of each period or society at the centre of his description of these societies and America's inheritance from them. And his essay *Civilisation without Religion?* explores what he considers the close relationship of man and society to religion, briefly sketching the sociological position that "it is from association in the cult...that human community grows" and culture is formed and alluding to the historical examples of numerous cultures, from ancient Egypt and India to the contemporary USA.⁵⁹ He also goes some way to defending the importance of traditional, organised religion, over vaguer spirituality, when he defends the traditional, prescriptive beliefs, as well as the place of dogma and settled opinions, in supporting normative instruction, as we have seen.

Certainly, the account Kirk gives of the role of religion in society and man's moral life is far from complete and more work would have to be done to present a definitive case for the importance of the transcendent and eternal in men's lives and the defining role of religion in history. And without addressing the philosophical and metaphysical, he will have trouble affirming the ultimate foundation of these allegedly perennial beliefs and human longings, weakening the case for necessity of attending to man's religious aspects in understanding his moral and social life. But Kirk does give some good reasons, nonetheless, when he alludes to the widespread longings for the transcendent in man and the central place of religion in human societies, to prefer his account to those conservatives that see religion as less important a factor in human society and moral life.

Or at least Kirk provides important claims these conservatives will have to respond. He gives reasons, that is, to think this aspect of man's moral life cannot be marginalised but must be properly understood and integrated into this life as a whole. And in giving evidence – both in his historical studies and analysis of religion – that the important personal, social, and culture roles of religion, myth, and the transcendent is not tied to one particular faith, Kirk also shows that the traditionalists who are overly dismissive of all religious traditions but their own may be mistaken. This is at least so far, again, as the historical benefits of these traditions to individual and social life in their particular times and places are concerned, if not as regards any ultimate truth these traditions may contain.

The implications Kirk's belief in the social importance of religious dogma has for the Moral Imagination will be clear. It underscores that religious dogmas are a very important aspect of how normative knowledge is apprehended by individuals through society. Religious dogmas – their values, their beliefs, and their symbols – help to shape much of the way in which men absorb a view of man and norms from their culture. As we have been stressing, the illative nature of the Moral Imagination means that it collects sources of and prompts to moral knowledge and action from a myriad of inputs, most of which are inextricably social and cultural. Kirk's belief in the central importance of religious tradition and

⁵⁹ Kirk, 'Civilisation without Religion?', Op. Cit. 1998. 7.

dogma in forming the bonds of society means that they must also have a very important role to play as a general source of moral knowledge and direction.

Because of this emphasis on the role of religious tradition in social harmony and unity, Kirk has sometimes been accused of harbouring an essentially instrumentalist view of religion.⁶⁰ Kirk's interest in religion as a unique and near-essential social cohesive is a good example of Kirk's often made points about the utility of religion to the individual and society. Kirk was certainly not afraid to stress the social benefits of religion. He felt it was absolutely necessary for society, partly for reasons that need have little to do with any transcendent truth behind the religious tradition. However, Kirk did believe in the supernatural or transcendent side of religion, especially Christianity. He was critical, indeed, of those whom he felt simply had an instrumental belief in religion and was quick to ward off such insinuations against Burke, in such a way as to show respect for what he considered the latter's heartfelt acceptance of orthodox Christianity.⁶¹ Above all, as we have seen towards the beginning of this chapter, Kirk passionately believed in the reality of the divine, and, indeed, in Christianity, and his concept of the necessity of belief in the transcendent for the individual and society is clearly wedded to his belief in the truth behind such a belief.

⁶⁰ Quinn, Op. Cit. 207-209.

⁶¹ Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, BN Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 2008. 28-29.

Chapter Seven

Social Associations and the Moral Imagination

Another source of the Moral Imagination, though one given a somewhat muted treatment – as a source in its own right - by both Kirk and many of those commenting on his work, is social associations. By the term social associations is first and foremost meant social groupings of everyday life, such as the family, local community, religious organisations (in their communal aspect), occupational associations (workplaces, unions, and similar groups), as well as voluntary associations like charities, clubs, etc. But under this term of social associations we can also place certain related areas of society, including economic institutions and arrangements in their most socially important aspects, larger social groupings like regions or cities, and all the more sociological (as opposed to cultural or religious or historical, so far as any of these can be properly separated) ties that bind civilisations, although the primary focus is on the social groupings mentioned above. We will explore how these associations guide and direct moral awareness and are a source for the Moral Imagination.

We must begin by stating that Russell Kirk holds to the traditional conservative view of social associations exemplified in the writings of twentieth century conservative sociologist Robert Nisbet.¹ As Nisbet puts it,

Conservatives, from Burke on, have tended to see the population much in the manner medieval legists and philosophical realists (in contrast to nominalists) saw it: as composed of, not individuals directly, but the natural groups within which individuals invariably live: family, locality, church, region, social class, nation, and so on. Individuals exist, of course, but they cannot be seen or comprehended save in terms of social identities which are inseparable from groups and associations.²

This is Kirk's essential position as well. He held that social associations – family, local community, and others – were essential in both forming and regulating individuals, including their moral knowledge and behaviour. These associations are necessary to give meaning and values to individuals and even to constitute much of their personality. Through the close bonds and continual interactions amongst the

¹ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 140.

² Nisbet, Robert, 'Conservatives and Libertarians: Uneasy Cousins', *Modern Age*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter, 1980). 5.

members of these groups much of what gives individuality and personality to individuals is created.³ Social associations form a particularly immersive part of our existence; they are a constant part of our lives from our earliest days to the end, providing a background and influence over all we think, feel, and do. These associations form a source for the Moral Imagination because of the strong influence that they have over the formation and regulation of character, meaning they cannot fail to influence our appreciation and apprehension of human nature and its norms. Man being a social animal, for him to be morally ordered his social influences and relations will generally have to be brought into harmony with the rest of his being around the norms of human nature - as Kirk, in his review of Nisbet's *The Quest for Community*, states in a negative fashion when he links the modern loss of ends, or norms, with loss of community.⁴

This conservative belief in the importance of intermediate associations, what Edmund Burke called the little platoons, is somewhat at odds with the trends of modern society. In modern Western society, many intermediate associations, like the family and local community, have declined in their functions, autonomy, and authority and in their general importance. As Nisbet puts it "plainly, the major toll of modern social change has been exacted from such communal entities [social associations] as these".⁵ There have been various reasons for this development. There has been an increase in individualism and concern for individual liberty and autonomy, which was often connected to liberal political thought. This thought tended to wish to remove more and more obstacles to autonomy from individuals, and these often included obstacles like the power and authority of social associations like families and local community.⁶ There has also been the interference of the state, which, sometimes out of concern (real or feigned) for individual liberty, has taken over many functions and roles of intermediate social associations.⁷ For example, the state has tended to take over many of the charitable functions, like supporting the sick and disabled, which were once the responsibility of families, local community, and voluntary associations. Finally, economic changes have often led to the reduction of the role of social associations. There has been a decline, for example, in the economic role of the extended family, often owning its own land and productive property. Instead the focus has been on the nuclear family working outside the family property and on the autonomous producing and consuming individual. Increased social mobility and change, brought about by economic factors, has also seen the decline of settled

³ Kirk, Russell, 'Ethical Labor', in *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of a Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 90-91.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nisbet, Robert, *The Quest for Community*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981. 76.

⁶ Fukuyama, Francis, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and The Reconstitution of Social Order*, Touchstone, New York, 2000. 13. And Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*, Op. Cit. 57-158.

⁷ Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*, Op. Cit. 106-108.

communities, meaning that the role of local community and other locally rooted social associations, like churches, have declined in their roles in the lives of individuals.⁸

These trends, which often go back to the dawn of modernity, were still continuing as Kirk began his writing career, providing a background for his discussion of social associations and the Moral Imagination.⁹ In Kirk's lifetime the American family, which had already been more and more limited to the nuclear family of parents and children and which had lost its previously normal connection to land and productive property to support itself, was more and more beset by dysfunction and disintegration. Divorce and the break-up of families rose over the course of the century and single parent families became more common.¹⁰ In cities and the suburbs there was increased change and mobility, like the centralized urban renewal that Kirk often criticised and wrote about himself, which further harmed effective community cohesion and functions.¹¹ With the rise of the welfare state, especially after the New Deal and the Great Society, the state, and increasingly the federal government, came to take on more and more social functions and roles that had once been provided for by the family, local community, and voluntary associations.¹² This is not to say that social associations had been eradicated in contemporary America. Kirk firmly believed that America had not entirely abandoned the thriving civil society which Tocqueville had noted it possessed. Damaged and under threat as they were, Kirk thought there was enough life in America's families, communities, and voluntary associations that they could be revived, and did not need a total reconstruction.¹³

This on-going decline in the role and functions of intermediate social associations was not without its defenders in Kirk's lifetime. These defences were based on two primary arguments, or networks of arguments, and were often related. Taken together these criticisms have contributed to the marked hostility to and decline of many traditional social associations and their functions in contemporary society that we have mentioned. The first argument was psychological and sociological, if often just informally so. It was based on assumptions and arguments that the individual was less reliant for his personal development and regulation – materially, morally, and psychologically – on social associations than the traditional conservative position believed. That is, this individualist viewpoint held that the individual was far less necessarily formed and regulated by his membership of social associations like

⁸ Ibid. 94-96.

⁹ Fukuyama, Op. Cit. 27.

¹⁰ Ibid. 36-47.

¹¹ Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 261-264. And Nisbet, Robert, *Twilight of Authority*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1975. 84-85.

¹² Berger, Peter J., and Neuhaus, Richard John, 'To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy', in Muller, Jerry Z. (ed.), *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to The Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997. 374-380.

¹³ See for example his comments on the American family: Kirk, Russell, 'Prospects for the American Family', in Kirk, Russell, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things are Written on The Sky*, Regnery Gateway, Inc., Washington D.C., 1987. 54-56.

the family than the conservative maintains, and that social associations are thereby less substantial entities, formed largely through the conscious and rational actions of individuals whose personality is mostly prior to them. This is at least the implication and end consequence of the individualistic psychological and sociological position that many sceptical of intermediate social associations have voiced in the twentieth century. This has caused them to see claims of important functions and, especially, authority claimed by social associations often with little support in reality and pernicious and limiting to individual freedom and autonomy.

Libertarian movements are one example of such thought.¹⁴ As another example of contemporary thinkers who have advanced significantly individualist claims we might mention influential liberal political philosopher John Rawls. Rawls was attacked by several prominent communitarian thinkers because his model of political society and justice was seen as overly individualistic, based on the interaction of pre-social individuals.¹⁵ Or as Barbara Goodwin describes the outline of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, "[Rawls] imagines a hypothetical pre-social or a-social 'original position' in which a number of people are trying to decide consensually on the form of society in which they would all agree to live".¹⁶ Imagining this kind of individualist basis for society strongly implies individualist criteria (i. e., those strict on and suspicious of significant restraint on individual autonomy and equality) for judging social institutions, contrary to the conservative perspective of Kirk.

Similarly, we might mention feminist and other liberationist critiques of traditional social structures, which have sometimes implied individualism. This might be illustrated by Renate Bridenthal's claim: "feminists have opened a whole new vista by asking, not what do women do for the family?...but what does the family for women?"¹⁷ This implies that a separateness and precedence of the individual to social structures like the family, which can be judged according to individualist requirements.

The other main argument is related, but basically approaches the issue from the operation direction. This argument, or complex of connected arguments, claims that social associations or, more usually, a particular social association or specific function or authority of a social association has a negative effect. This negative effect is usually on individual liberty and choice, but it can also be against prosperity (individual and social), knowledge, dignity, equality, and so on.¹⁸ So, for example, divorce laws that put obstacles in the way of quick and easy divorces, in order to try to keep more marriages and families together, were criticised for limiting individual liberty and the choice to dissolve a marriage and for offending against women's dignity and equality by keeping them tied to husbands. Peter Hitchens has

¹⁴ Nisbet, 'Conservatives and Libertarians: Uneasy Cousins', Op. Cit. 6-7.

¹⁵ Carter, April, and Stokes, Geoffrey, 'Introduction: Liberal Democracy and Its Critics', in Carter, April, and Stokes, Geoffrey (eds.), *Introduction: Liberal Democracy and Its Critics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998.6-7.

¹⁶ Goodwin, Barbara, *Using Political Ideas*, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., Chichester, 2007. 403.

¹⁷ Thorne, Barrie, 'Feminist Rethinking of the Family: An Overview', in Barrie, Thorne, and Yalom, Marilyn, *Rethinking the Family : Some Feminist Questions*, Longman, New York, 1982. 18.

¹⁸ For examples involving Feminist critiques of aspects of the traditional family structure see, Ibid. 4-16.

catalogued some of this process in Britain.¹⁹ In frequently being based on an at least implicit belief that these malign aspects of social associations were unnecessary for any greater social purpose, these criticisms were clearly often related to those of the psychological and sociological individualists.

Kirk, unlike Nisbet and some other contemporary conservative scholars, does not explicitly involve himself in such discussions for the most part. Or, at least, he does not concern himself with wider criticisms of the role of associations in the lives of individuals. He certainly does not defend this role methodically. But he does offer some diffuse defences of the importance of social associations in general, as well as of specific associations. And whilst these defences certainly are no complete refutation of the criticisms of the conservative position on social associations, they do provide important reasons to think that social associations are vital in providing both personality formation and on-going and necessary guidance to individuals, as we shall see below.

Obviously, social associations are intertwined with most of the other sources of the Moral Imagination which we have studied. This is most obvious when it comes to tradition and history, which are at the centre of society and social associations. Or, rather, they are at the centre of society and social associations for traditional conservatives, who view society as being a substantial, intricate growth across time and generations, adapting to changing circumstance and reliant upon the distilled experience of the past.²⁰ Likewise, for Kirk, as we have seen, religion was an integral part of social cohesion and the bonds of society, giving them direction and producing harmony. In a similar fashion, if to a lesser degree, education and the arts are also intertwined with social associations; not only do many social associations have an educative side, but schools and colleges qualify as important social associations themselves. And arts and material culture are an important part and expression of human life in society. Our purpose in this chapter, however, will be to examine, as far as is possible, the social structures and relationships themselves for their role as a source of moral knowledge according to Kirk. But, in doing this, we will often have cause to note the relations these social associations have with other sources of the Moral Imagination.

7.1 The Family

For Kirk an especially strong and important social association, in its influence and power over the individual and in its place in a healthy society, is the family. This power and influence of the family includes, for Kirk, that over the moral awareness of those individuals which make up the family. Many times Kirk expresses his belief that it is those moral beliefs and habits fostered in early life, even before

¹⁹ Hitchens, Peter, *The Abolition of Britain*, Quartet Books, London, 2000. 226-229.

²⁰ Kirk, Russell, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Regnery Gateway, Washington D.C., 1989. 250-252.

one begins anything but the most elementary schooling, which go a long way to determining whether one will lead a moral life or not. As Kirk puts it in his essay entitled *Can Virtue Be Taught?* :

If good moral habits are acquired at all, they are got ordinarily within the family, within the neighborhood, within the circle of close associates in youth; often good moral habits, or bad ones, are fixed by the age of seven, little more than a year after school has begun for the typical child.²¹

As we can see from this quotation, Kirk sees one of the main ways in which the family helps to form the moral character of its members, especially its young members, is through habit. That is, through constant instruction, admonition, and direction the family is a very important source of moral knowledge. In a sense the family operates here as particularly forceful and concrete manifestation of tradition and prescriptive wisdom, or at least it can do when it remembers its moral role and has the proper guidance from society and culture.²² It gives the values, beliefs, and imperatives of this prescriptive moral knowledge and manners embodiment in a way that is close to the individuals that make up the family and in which they are immersed.

This is not to say that for Kirk it is solely this basic sociological and habitual kind of moral awareness that informs man of the norms of human nature. This would make the Moral Imagination itself largely unnecessary, by making morality simply a matter of the instinctual and habitual transfer of knowledge to healthy individuals from their families and societies. Kirk does not believe morality is simply a matter of habit. Indeed, for him, as Donald Atwell Zoll reminds us, what Zoll calls the discursive channels, those which transmit moral knowledge cognitively and ideationally, such as literature and education, are so important that Kirk somewhat neglects giving the more elemental, to use Zoll's term, sources of moral awareness, such as social associations, their full due consideration and analysis.²³ However, it is also certain, as his writings on the family indicate, that Kirk saw habit as one of the central motives towards virtue in the mass of men and the family as one of the prime sources of this moral habit. There is perhaps a certain vagueness here about the way in which these sources and faculties of the Moral Imagination interact and can interact to produce moral consciousness.²⁴ What we should note going forward is the intricate interaction of various sources and faculties in the Moral Imagination, which thereby addresses the whole man, and the importance habit has in inculcating respect for traditional

²¹ Kirk, Russell, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 60.

²² Ibid. P61-62.

²³ Zoll, Donald Atwell, The Social Thought of Russell Kirk, *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 2 (Autumn, 1972). 132.

²⁴ Kirk, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', Op. Cit. 60. And. Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999. 188.

and prescriptive norms in social associations such as the family, due particularly to their immersive and ubiquitous influence over the lives, thoughts, and actions of those who make them up.

But it is not just habit alone that Kirk notes the family makes use of to educate its members, including normatively. The family also makes use of exemplars and models to arouse family members' imaginations to an awareness of norms. Kirk provides the illustration of his own grandfather, Frank Pierce, who was a man of good, generous character and whose reading of important books and good periodicals, and his discussion of history and literature with the young Kirk, helped to fire Kirk's own appreciation of history and love of reading.²⁵ Kirk makes it clear he is aware that not all families can be possessed of exemplars and models of character like his grandfather, but he was convinced that at one time moral emulation within the family was greater than it is now and he would like it to play this role again.²⁶ This shows that the family helps to support the Moral Imagination not just through immersive habit and instruction, but also through the imagination, providing a medium for consistent illustration of good character and wise judgment, like that which Kirk saw firsthand in his grandfather.

Kirk often associated the moral import of social associations with material possessions, objects, and places. This association is the case for the family. Kirk thought of the strong and healthy family as rooted in place; he also saw it as connected to a particular patrimony of land and property.²⁷ These are, in a sense, the material manifestations of the continuity and inheritance of the family. They represent its ability to show its spirit of endurance and purpose over time. They are also supports themselves to the unity and meaning of the family. These material vestiges increase the sense of belonging which the family group generates; increase motives for effort and cooperation by the family; and remind family members of the past and enduring achievements of their kin. Kirk highlights, in his travels in the Kingdom of Fife whilst studying in Britain, the way in which the family heritage of land and property contributed to notion of duty, honour, service to the community, and integrity handed down amongst the families of lowlands lairds with their position in their locales, as well as their incentives to maintain the family property and lands.²⁸

These material manifestations can be a motive to moral behaviour by reminding the individual of the inherited norms and exemplars of his family, and by giving him roots and a sense of togetherness, belonging, and continuity with the family, now and across the generations. This is a classic example of the complex and multifarious nature of the Moral Imagination, uniting a myriad of sources to impart moral knowledge. It is also an example of the unity of the material with the social, moral, and spiritual,

²⁵ Kirk, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', Op. Cit. 61.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Russello, Gerald J., *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2007. 48-51.

²⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'The Altered Face of Britain', in Kirk, Russell(ed.), *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of a Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 218-220.

showing how for Kirk moral knowledge and moral being unite the material and moral, particular and universal, sides of man in a comprehensive whole.

7.2 Local Community

Kirk marks out local community as second only to the family in terms of its importance as a social association and a source of moral knowledge. The importance of strong, decentralised local community is a theme to which Kirk often returned.²⁹ He saw local community as a necessary support for moral habits and instruction. We see this, for example, in the above quoted passage of Kirk in which he claims that good moral habits are acquired within the neighbourhood and amongst the close associates we have when young, as well as in the family.³⁰ Local community operates as a source of the Moral Imagination through habit, but it also is clear that Kirk sees the healthy local community as being an immersive and concrete embodiment of traditional norms and customs which give direction and meaning to the lives of the community members. In his 1956 book of essays, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*, Kirk included an essay entitled *Ethical Labor* in which reviews Richard Weaver's *The Ethics of Rhetoric* and Robert Nisbet's *The Quest for Community*. In his critical remarks on Nisbet's work, Kirk shows a clear appreciation and agreement with much of what Nisbet has to say on community. Kirk agrees that individuals look for the support, structure, and meaning that community can provide for them. Although Nisbet, and Kirk following him, designate by the term community here all of what we have been referring to by the term social associations, including the family, an explicitly central aspect of this general category of community they are invoking is local community.³¹ The bonds of local community, Kirk felt, give form to the imperatives and values of prescriptive norms and experience, helping to link the individual immersed in a healthy community to the permanent things in a particularly effective way.

Local community also can impress moral vision upon the individuals who make it up, for Kirk, through imaginative exemplars. This is especially the case for the local leadership, the natural aristocracy, who Kirk indicates are often at the centre of flourishing local community. Kirk was always a firm believer in the importance of leadership, particularly imaginative, prudent, and virtuous leadership. He sometimes refers to these leaders as natural aristocrats – the mixture of those who take up the mantle of leadership due to merit, birth, and wealth.³² These individuals and their role often crop up in

²⁹ See for example, Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormality in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 235-252.

³⁰ Kirk, 'Can Virtue Be Taught?', Op. Cit. 60.

³¹ Kirk, 'Ethical Labor', Op. Cit. 91-100.

³² McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 122-124.

Kirk's discussions of healthy local communities, and their decline sometimes is alluded to in the decline of local community. For example, we see this in his discussion of the decline of traditional rural communities in Scotland, which he witnessed during his stay in the country. Kirk claims that one reason for the decline of these communities was the loss of the old gentry, hit hard by greatly increased taxation and inflation.³³ By exercising wise judgment and by showing an image of noble conduct, a community's elders and natural leaders, Kirk believes, is able to act as an exemplar of the norms which the community has inherited and, partly, manifests.

Like the family, Kirk also believed that local community, when it was healthy and a true community, was reflected in place and in the landscape and in the planning and material layout and design of the community. When a local community has a definite and enduring identity and sense of continuity and belonging, it will connect with the landscape and shape the landscape, and this identity and continuity will shape the layout and buildings which make up the material side of the community. Kirk gives us an example of the British New Towns and new housing estates he travelled through in Britain as negative illustration. They were not animated by a proper sense of community and were rather the outcome of centralised government planning. Therefore these towns and residential areas, and those who lived in them, were without proper connections to the locales they lived, and the towns were poorly designed for the sort of dignified and shared life of a thriving community.³⁴

Here we see again the linking of the material, social, moral, and spiritual together in a holistic way, with the material vestiges of the community being both a product of its social and moral aspects and a support to them. These material aspects support moral behaviour, in this case, aside from supporting the existence of the local community and its togetherness, by reminding the members of the community, Kirk implies, of their shared roots and legacy. By having an attachment to place and to the landscape, he believed that men would be better impressed by a sense of continuity and the prescriptive wisdom handed on by their forebears, and also of the need themselves to continue this legacy of traditional wisdom.³⁵ By living in communities that were designed for healthy communal living this would not only be a boon to the creation and continuance of such communities, but make association and identity with the local community more natural and easy for its members.³⁶

Kirk believed that modern civilization was threatened by the rise of the rootless mass, the proletariat. A mobile society with a diminishing respect for prescriptive wisdom, he felt, was leaving men more and more without a sense of continuity which linked generation to generation and bound

³³ Kirk, Russell, 'The Broken Case of British Custom', in *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of a Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 233-235.

³⁴ Ibid. 238-248.

³⁵ Russello, *The Postmodern Imagination*, Op. Cit. 48-51.

³⁶ Ibid. 49.

them together.³⁷ Without roots, especially as provided by local community, as well as family, it was hard for the experience of human nature and norms to be communicated to individuals in a concrete and powerful form. As individuals with only limited and often fleeting connections to other individuals and to places it becomes hard both for them to know how to morally act and think as well as be provided with the affections and images that prompt them to so act.³⁸ The material sides of social associations, the landscapes and sense of place which they occupy, the property and buildings which they are connected with, are, for Kirk, an important aspect in the establishing roots. They can provide some of the necessary continuity and knowledge of his place in society and the cosmos which Kirk feels is needed for a man to feel a sense of rootedness and belonging.

What is worth reiterating here is that social associations are an especially concrete expression of prescriptive wisdom and norms. They, in the everyday interactions and relationships their members have with each other and even in the material manifestations of the particular associations, make present the universal in the concrete and the particular. We can see that many of the traditions and the principles Kirk affirmed require this sort of immersive and close form in order to be communicated individual to individual, generation to generation, and to assert sufficient influence over men, making social associations and their moral role important. This underscores Kirk's commitment to the support which the Moral Imagination lends to understanding universal moral norms through the concrete and particular – especially when we remember the role material correlatives play in supporting social associations.

7.3 Other Social Associations

The other social associations that traditional conservatives see as a vital part of a flourishing society operate on the Moral Imagination, according to Kirk, in a similar, if often less powerful and central, way. For example, Kirk, as well as Nisbet, makes mention of class and natural aristocracy, or orders and degrees, as a kind of social association.³⁹ It would seem here that normative consciousness can be supported by this group through the habitual ethos and identity that classes have. Classes also provide imaginative models of good behavior, such as the models of the noble behaviour and character that illustrious past members provide. A good illustration of this sentiment is Burke's contention that the

³⁷ McDonald, , *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 146-148.

³⁸ Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Op. Cit. 256.

³⁹ Kirk, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Op. Cit. 187.

spirit of a gentleman, along with the spirit of religion, had upheld European civilization for centuries, with which Kirk was in agreement.⁴⁰

Some social associations that Kirk and Nisbet mention as important to social vitality and which can serve as guides to moral behaviour are generally linked to only some of the faculties of moral awareness which the family or local community make use of. One such variety of association is voluntary associations. These do not normally provide the same immersive and habitual climate, especially from a young age, as the family and local community provide, but Kirk does often mention voluntary association and charity, albeit briefly, as social associations that help to bring men together into genuine social communion, implying they can help to bring order to those they affect.⁴¹ One can readily discern that the moral impact of such voluntary associations depends upon the degree to which they embody important norms, the importance the individual places on these associations, and the convergence of their normative message with those of other associations, including other voluntary ones, that the individual is a member of. However, Kirk himself gives us no thorough treatment of these dynamics and little in the way of specific references to possible varieties of voluntary associations, like clubs or fraternities.

As we have seen, also, religious and education institutions are social associations, and their moral input must be considered in this light as well as in their peculiarly religious and educational aspects. They operate in much the same way as family and local community do as social associations. That is, they embody norms in concrete, immersive social interactions, which inculcate moral habits – for example, through the years one spends in schooling or in a Church congregation or similar religious institution. As noted, though, this aspect of their being a source of the Moral Imagination is intertwined with their more overtly religious and educational aspects.

Another source of moral impetus and appreciation of the norms of human existence that Kirk alludes to that can be placed under the category of social association is that of work and occupational associations. However, although Kirk does make reference to the importance of dignified and humane employment, it too is not a topic to which Kirk devotes a sustained and exhaustive treatment. Nor does he explore in any great depth or detail the relationship of work and morality, although there seems to be ample scope for exploring such a topic from the standpoint of Kirk's concept of the Moral Imagination. This means we can only note the brief remarks he makes on the topic and draw provisional conclusions from these.

Kirk claimed that work – what he at one point calls fruitful work - was capable of contributing to the alleviation of boredom, which for Kirk resulted in a loss of the knowledge of the ends of human

⁴⁰ Federici, Michael P., 'The Politics of Prescription: Russell Kirk's Fifth Canon of Conservative Thought', *Political Science Reviewer*, Vol. 35 (2006). 163.

⁴¹ Kirk, *The American Cause*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1957. 105.

existence, and therefore its norms as we have noted before.⁴² In his economics textbook, *Economics: Work and Prosperity*, Kirk also mentions the importance of diligent and intelligent work, effort, and thrift as the means to prosperity, which could be interpreted as referring to the discipline and positive influence on such character traits that work can have when correctly organized and directed (as well as the influence of such character traits on the outcome of work and production, of course).⁴³ Work, under which category we might include childrearing and homemaking, is clearly a very important part of an individual's life. It is usually an activity one spends a considerable portion of one's adult life engaged in, therefore it is sure to have a not negligible effect on their moral and spiritual development and Kirk clearly did believe it humane and dignified work was important, despite his lack of comment. However, this lack of exposition on his part means he left only preliminary remarks on the subject of work and the Moral Imagination.

We might end this chapter by mentioning again here that Kirk's inclusion of social associations as important sources of the Moral Imagination is one of the major differences between Kirk's vision of the Moral Imagination and David Bromwich's. Bromwich, as we have noted, sees the Moral Imagination as our means to understand the humanity and experience of our fellow men.⁴⁴ He downplays the moral importance of what Burke called the little platoons, or those intimate associations of everyday life like family, because these relationships tend to be formed on affection and habit and it does not require the same moral effort to care for and try to understand those close to us as it does strangers and those least like us.⁴⁵ He connects such associations to social conformity and habit, claiming that these tend to cause stifling complacency about our moral duties to others and our views of ourselves. As he writes, using the opinions of Virginia Woolf as his supporting framework, "the end [of conformity and complacency] is to tyrannise by the imposition of uniformity, suavity, compliance – all those estimable qualities which serve to polish experience and give it every quality of art except courage and surprise".⁴⁶ Bromwich suggests that imaginatively understanding the humanity of the other is the highest use of the Moral Imagination and implies this is hampered more than helped by settled customs and social associations, which actively encourage unexamined conformity to their own standards and a moral exclusivism.

Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination, and its use of social associations as a normative source, has much to say to balance and critique Bromwich's view. We have already noted, in a previous chapter, that the expanded norms of Kirk's Moral Imagination, which go beyond empathy for others, do seem to provide for important areas of morality that Bromwich neglects, like personal virtues such as courage

⁴² Kirk, *Economics: Work and Prosperity*, Beka Books, Pensacola, 1999. 46-48. And Kirk, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Op. Cit. 172. And. Kirk, *The American Cause*, Op. Cit. 96 and 125.

⁴³ Kirk, *Economics*, Op. Cit. 9-10, 34, 38, and 46-48.

⁴⁴ Bromwich, David, *Moral Imagination: Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014. 7-11.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 12-17 and 21-26.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 23.

and wisdom.⁴⁷ We may also say that Kirk argues for the importance of social association as teachers, including moral teachers. That is, as we have seen in this chapter, he saw social associations, like the family and local community, as having important constitutive and regulative functions in the lives of individuals, capable, through habit, instruction and example, of contributing powerfully to moral development.

Bromwich, on the other hand, seems to disconnect the development of the Moral Imagination from our everyday social associations, which he seems to imply are more of a hindrance than a help to this development. The consequence of this would seem to be a dualism in society, a curious separation of much of man's everyday social interactions and relationships from a place, except negatively, in his moral life; a division in man, therefore, between his familiar social arrangements and moral being. Kirk's vision of the Moral Imagination is, above all, integrative and suggests that to ignore the moral role of such immersive and lifelong influences in the lives of individuals as family and community is a mistake. When we add this to his belief in norms that had as much of a place for restraining virtue (like self-control and prudence) and the morality of everyday life as for empathy for others, which we have seen Kirk thought could be encouraged by social associations, we can see Kirk's vision of the Moral Imagination helps to show how such an important influence on an individual's life as social associations can be effectively integrated into his moral existence, overcoming the dualism represented by Bromwich.

This is especially the case as Kirk's idea of the Moral Imagination sees social associations as one of many sources of this faculty. And whilst he does not highlight the role of sympathy for the other, it surely must, as we said earlier, be bound up in the understanding of the human nature at the heart of the concept of the Moral Imagination. He does allude to the moral weakness of effective solipsism in some, including in his fiction.⁴⁸ This means that Kirk's concept of Moral Imagination joins together the respect and understanding of the other, giving means to curb excessive parochialism and unbalanced attachment to these little platoons, at least if the requisite care and effort is taken, with moral insight that goes beyond everyday social relationships and loyalties. These means are the combination of the numerous sources of the Moral Imagination and its attempts to understand human nature as a whole. We may mention, as an example in this regard, literature, whose use of myth and fantasy Kirk praises for shaking man from the familiar and confronting him with universal moral principles.⁴⁹ This is supposed to be accomplished whilst seeking to understand and properly respect the large role that everyday social associations, like the family, play in the lives, including the moral lives, of individuals

⁴⁷ See for example, Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 20. And. Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991. 22-38, 43, 83-84, 89-90, 109-113, and 117-119.

⁴⁸ Kirk, Russell, *There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding*, in Kirk, Russell, *Ancestral Shadows: An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2004. 287-288.

⁴⁹ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 112.

from their infancy. This makes Kirk's conception of the Moral Imagination peculiarly comprehensive and balanced.

Chapter Eight

Politics and the Moral Imagination

Russell Kirk, despite his clear literary and cultural predilections, which we have seen at every step of our journey into his doctrine of the Moral imagination, had a lifelong, intense interest in the political. This is one of the most marked differences between him and many of the twentieth century Christian humanists who greatly influenced him. As Andre Gushurst-Moore suggests, Kirk applies the Christian humanism developed by or contributed to by his forebears to the realm of politics.¹ Many of the Christian humanists who influenced Kirk had either left politics at the margins of their thought or had ignored it altogether, but it was Kirk's role to specifically attend to the political. Therefore, Kirk spends ample time addressing areas which are properly political, for all his emphasis on arts and culture.

We will be examining here those areas of politics which are most important for understanding the relationship of politics to the Moral Imagination: law, government, and leadership or statesmanship. Kirk commented on numerous other areas of politics, such as foreign policy, but it is these three areas which play the most central normative role in his expressly political thought. That is, the areas of law, government, and leadership or statesmanship are those areas of politics which Kirk devotes the most time and space to examining in terms of their normative role and which he clearly feels have the most important moral role of all the factors which are properly political.

8.1 Law and the Moral Imagination

So we shall begin by discussing Kirk's jurisprudential views, so far as they have a moral import. Law and jurisprudence was a topic that Kirk devoted a significant amount of his time and energy to understanding and discussing, in its many forms, from legal philosophy to constitutional law.² Law for Kirk was intimately connected to social order; indeed, law was a reflection of social order.³ Law was that part of the rules and procedures of social organisation given propagation and enforcement by the state

¹ Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelico Press, Tacoma, 2013. 217.

² Person, James E. Jr., *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, 1999. 96-97.

³ Russello, Gerald. J., 'Time and the Timeless: The Historical Imagination of Russell Kirk', *Modern Age*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer, 1999). 354.

and its agencies, local or national. It was for Kirk only a small part of the order which society required to be healthy and free and virtuous. In fact, for Kirk, law was not able to bring about order on its own. A deeper order in society was required if that society was to be truly orderly.⁴ A despotic government might bring about a sort of ersatz order simply through state coercion, but this would be for Kirk a very shabby and dubious sort of order and would violate the normative intent of law.⁵

It would violate the normative intent of law because Kirk held that positive law was meant to be a reflection of natural law, as indeed was all the structure and institutions of society when it was healthy and good.⁶ The human laws of a nation, to the degree they reflected the permanent things, were a manifestation of the natural law in a particular, concrete society. However, the law itself had only a part to play in reflecting the eternal order in society. And, besides, the law could never perfectly live up to its own role in expressing this order - human nature being always imperfect in this life.

Kirk, in believing positive law was grounded in natural law (in the classical sense), here disagreed with a large body of legal thought in late nineteenth and twentieth century America, whose influence continues today, of legal positivism and realism, which emphasised the conventional grounding of law. This legal positivism and realism was represented by such illustrious and influential figures as American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and influential British legal philosopher H. L. Hart (although Hart did accept a minimal idea of natural law it was quite different – in both derivation and content - to the classical variety in which Kirk believed) in the middle of the twentieth century.⁷ Kirk certainly does not attempt an explicit refutation of these legal philosophies, but his belief in the way that law should reflect transcendent norms and not just utilitarian interest balancing is a criticism of them.

Kirk, in his belief in the transcendent foundation of human law and society, echoes the twentieth century Christian humanists, who also saw all aspects of human society as a holistic whole orientated towards man's divine or transcendent end, as we have seen. Similarly, some aspects of the post-war American conservative also argued that human law should be based in divine or natural law, unifying man's social imperatives to his higher, moral and spiritual ends. We see, for example, Leo Strauss, in his *Natural Right and History*, make strong criticism of legal and social positivism for engendering loss of moral bearings in society and state.⁸

Law though for Kirk was not simply a reflection of social order and, ultimately, the eternal order, or natural law. Rather, it was also a support for these within society. Law was a necessary part of society;

⁴ Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 187-190.

⁵ Ibid. 187-188.

⁶ Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regney Gateway, Washington, 1991. 108-113.

⁷ Holmes, Oliver Wendell Jr., 'The Path of the Law', in Summers, Robert Samuel (ed.), *American Legal Theory*, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1992. 5-6. Levy, Beryl Harold, *Anglo-American Philosophy of Law : an Introduction to Its Development and Outcome*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1991. 49, 55-60, and 109-115.

⁸ Strauss, Leo, *Natural Right and History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953. 5.

law was needed to prevent crimes and the breakdown of basic security and peace in any society.⁹ Law, therefore, was a necessary condition for order in the commonwealth and it was also a necessary part of the manifestation of the eternal or natural order in human affairs, being a reflection of natural law. Its role and place could therefore not be overlooked in any investigation of human society.

From this summary of Kirk's basic views on the meaning and place of law, we can take away a few crucial points for understanding law as a source and influence for the Moral Imagination. We can see that Kirk links law to order and order to morality. Law, therefore, for Kirk is connected to morality. Kirk is weary though of tying law in a simplistic and naïve sense to morality.¹⁰ For Kirk law reflects the moral order not necessarily through being the implementation of a straightforward and discursive moral duty or prohibition. Rather, law reflects morality through its complex balancing and ordering of claims and institutions in society.¹¹ But, as it does indeed reflect moral reality in this sense, law can be a political source for moral knowledge of human nature. This is certainly the case when this law is wise and good and in conformity to true social order and health.

Obviously, the impact and normative influence law will have over individuals depends upon their exposure to it and the development of legal institutions in the nation. In a modern society it will tend to exert moral influence in the populace's witnessing of the functioning of police and judicial services, as well as the legal apparatus that supports the government of the nation – its constitution and legal framework and governance. As society, especially modern society, is considerably affected by its legal system in many complex and intricate ways, we can see that the law becomes an increasingly significant institution in the lives of individuals. What is important is that for Kirk the laws and legal system of a nation will tend to provide a certain, if small, source of moral influence upon a nation, and they will particularly influence those learned individuals who take an interest in the institutions and the politics of their nation.¹² Kirk is keen to disassociate himself from any position which would turn positive, human laws into sacred objects in their own right – human laws for him are always only an approximation and temporal groping for the eternal.¹³ But laws can still form a sort of imaginative insight into human nature and norms.

A good illustration of Kirk's views on the nature of law, and its moral ramifications, is the Common law. Kirk was a great champion of the Common Law. As he states in *America's British Culture*, "The System of law that developed in England, from the latter half of the eleventh century to the present, has

⁹ Kirk, Russell, *America's British Culture*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1994. 29.

¹⁰ Kirk, Russell, *Rights and Duties: Reflections on Our Conservative Constitution*, Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, 1997. 132-138.

¹¹ Russello, Gerald J., *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2007. 156.

¹² As an example see Kirk's description of the battles in the early American Republic over the Common Law heritage – Kirk, Russell, *America's British Culture*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1994. 40-43.

¹³ Kirk, *Rights and Duties*, Op. Cit. 135-138.

been more successful in keeping the peace than have been the laws of other cultures and nations.”¹⁴ Kirk saw the Common Law as a form of law that strove, by being based in gradual precedent and the customary usages of the nation rather than the fiat of legislatures, to reflect the natural and complex order of society and that was particularly good at helping to maintain this order in a healthy and organic way.¹⁵ The reliance on case law rather than statute law meant that the legal system was required to adapt itself to the dynamic circumstances of society, especially – as the law was based upon cases arising in always slightly different circumstances - society in its multifarious and decentralised nature.¹⁶

Kirk felt that the Common Law was one of the great developments of British culture and one of the most important inheritances of America from its British forebears. Many times he makes use of the Common Law as an example of America’s relatively good governance and social strength, as well as of America’s traditions, and its identity within the Anglo-American strand of Western culture.¹⁷ What is most important about Kirk’s writings about the Common Law for our current investigation is they show the links between norms and the law for Kirk. That is because what Kirk particularly admired about it, as we just mentioned, is its connection to healthy social order and respect and support for that order and the social institutions and traditions which make it up, which in turn are the embodiment, as we have seen, for Kirk of enduring norms in society.

This shows that law, for Kirk, can be a reflection and support for norms. For Kirk the Common Law was a part of the reason that ordered liberty and individual right, balanced by obligations – such as respect for individual property - had so long endured in Anglo-American society, even to his own time.¹⁸ It was an influence, imaginative and principled, in the respect for social custom and prescriptive institutions and ways of life, amongst the masses as well as the learned. As it was an important traditional aspect of American culture, inherited from Britain but made America’s own through the long use and adaption by the colonies and the new republic, the Common Law is also a good representation of the cultural and moral influence legal systems can exert. It is part of the understanding for an American of what defines his own particular nation and its identity, history, and situation. The connection being made here is meant to be deep and profound. A legal system is part of the defining and lasting aspects of a society - at least when the system is legitimate and healthy - and reflects the inner norms of human nature which are ultimately behind proper social order and organisation.

¹⁴ Kirk, *America’s British Culture*, Op. Cit. 29.

¹⁵ Russello, *Postmodern Imagination*, Op. Cit. 157-162.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Kirk, Russel, *American’s British Culture*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1994. 29-45.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Russell Hittinger and Gerald Russello have written at some length on Kirk's jurisprudence, including its place in contemporary American legal discourse.¹⁹ As we have already noted, Kirk was in opposition to those, like Justice Bork, who disavowed the natural law foundation of laws. However, Kirk's position also was opposed to that of those whose idea of fundamental or natural law was ideological, including many liberal and activist jurists and judges in the middle and late twentieth century.²⁰ We might include in this latter category those who appealed to human rights. Kirk believed the human rights doctrine was a perversion of natural law, based on ideology that did not try to properly apprehend the complex nature of man, but instead was founded on a simplistic view of man drawn from the liberal tradition.²¹ For Kirk natural law, as we have seen, was linked to the Moral Imagination; it was a complex and multifarious norm to be painstakingly uncovered in many instances. It was not to be condensed into an ideology that could be applied regardless of circumstance and historical situation.²²

This put Kirk at odds with many in his time who saw law as serving the needs of social policy determined by a more or less ideological perspective. An example, in Kirk's view at least, might be the Warren and Burger Courts (though the activist view of these has been challenged), which made important decisions, like the *Roe vs. Wade* ruling, that often gave a significant place to conceptions of social need or individual rights, with controversial and questionable claims to legal and constitutional precedent, seemingly based on contemporary liberal viewpoints.²³ Nor, for Kirk, was natural law to be applied directly by judges, except in extreme cases. He believed that, although natural law underwrote positive law, it was the historically and culturally evolved positive law that should almost always be respected. To circumvent this positive law was to remove the intricate links between society and its legal system and leave this system at the mercy of individual understandings of natural law.²⁴ This, again, put Kirk at odds with many of those in his time who were less ready to defer to settled legal principles and precedents if these compromised abstract rights or ideologically based social policy. Kirk, therefore, steered a middle course, making sure he linked positive law to the fundamental norms of human nature, whilst respecting this positive law as necessary to give voice to this nature in the intricacies of historical human communities.

¹⁹ Hittinger, Russell, 'The Unwritten Constitution and the Conservative's Dilemma', *Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 30, No 1 (Autumn, 1994). And. Russello, Gerald J., The Jurisprudence of Russell Kirk, *Modern Age*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Autumn, 1996).

²⁰ Kirk, *Rights and Duties*, Op. Cit. XXI-XXVI.

²¹ Kirk, Russell, 'The Illusion of "Human Rights"', in Kirk, Russell, *Redeeming the Time*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1998. 231-232.

²² Kirk, *Rights and Duties*, Op. Cit. 131-135.

²³ Zietlow, Rebecca E., 'The Judicial Restraint of the Warren Court (and Why it Matters)', *Ohio State law Journal*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (2008). 270-2, and 274. And. Kirk, *Rights and Duties*, Op. Cit. XXIX.

²⁴ Hittinger, 'The Unwritten Constitution and the Conservative Dilemma', Op. Cit. 59. And. Kirk, *Rights and Duties*, Op. Cit. 131-135.

8.2 Government and the Moral Imagination

Kirk also sees in government, or the institutions and procedures of government, a relationship to norms. Kirk notes the distinction between the traditional conservatism of Dr. Johnson and Edmund Burke. The former he describes as believing that the achievement of a moral society is almost completely the outcome of individual moral struggle, whereas he suggests Burke, whilst holding individual moral effort to be of prime importance, was convinced that social institutions, including those of governance, were also of significance in shaping the moral tenor of society and its members.²⁵ Kirk shared Burke's point of view in this regard.

Kirk clearly felt that government institutions could influence the moral awareness of society, in a similar way to that we have noted concerning his position on the moral influence of the legal system. That is, they can reflect the order of the commonwealth in varying degrees, giving an imaginative and principled illustration of that order and channelling the affections and sentiments of the members of society in ways congruent with the order of society and the abiding norms it represents.²⁶ If the commonwealth is suffering under disorder and disharmony then institutions that are themselves modelled on this disorderly spirit will presumably reflect it and help to imaginatively further these basic social problems. In a sense Kirk held that a society's governmental institutions would have an important effect on the apprehension of principles, as well as the imagination and the sentiment, of its citizens, for good or ill.

In this sense, government institutions support moral behaviour for Kirk and are a source for the Moral Imagination. They also can support morality in more particular ways, by supporting particular aspects of society and culture – other sources of the Moral Imagination – such as local community, family, religion, education, and so forth. There are many ways in which government institutions may act in order to support of particular sources of normative authority and knowledge. Usually it will be, Kirk implies, the role of government simply to offer support behind the scenes, as it were; for example, by empowering local government and what Kirk calls “territorial democracy” or what has often been called federalism and subsidiarity.²⁷

But also the state can lend official endorsement to particular sources of social and moral authority which can help give imaginative and affectionate power to these sources. Kirk believed the state could do something to support stronger families in America and, especially, to remove obstacles to the health and flourishing of American families; for example, by its taxation policy and welfare reform, and by

²⁵ Kirk, Russell, *Prospects for Conservatives*, Regnery Gateway, Washington D.C., 1989. 203.

²⁶ Russello, *Postmodern Imagination*, Op. Cit. 205.

²⁷ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 144.

increasing the diversity in education (thereby increasing the functions of the family over this important social role).²⁸ Although Kirk certainly does not talk at length about the way the state can give official endorsement and support to these kinds of institutions, it would seem to follow from his discussion of numerous concrete cases in which the government can be involved in these institutions that this endorsement will be one moral effect of the government's involvement. We can see here an example of the intertwining of the sources of the Moral Imagination, with government institutions having a supporting role in numerous other varieties of sources for the Moral Imagination, from schools to churches. This is a further illustration of the intricate and unifying nature of the Moral Imagination, which draws together moral insight from a myriad of sources, sources which themselves are often interconnected and interrelated.

The U.S. constitution is a good example of Kirk's belief in the moral consequences and influence of governing institutions. Indeed, in the case of constitutional law we have an institution which is partly one of governance proper and partly one of law and jurisprudence. However, as the constitutional framework of a nation is bound up with its basic governing institutions, we can discuss Kirk's views of the U.S. constitution as an illustration of his beliefs about the moral role of governance. Kirk was keen to stress the way in which the U.S. constitution was an outgrowth and reflection of the deeper unwritten constitution of the American nation.²⁹ He argued strongly that the American founders had not sought to create a new and innovative political experiment, but that they had rather sought to cement the already existing liberties and justice of the colonies that had been menaced by royal and parliamentary innovation.³⁰ Here the moral implications are the sense in which the constitution reflects American mores and traditions to its inhabitants, giving support to them by having an important aspect of social organisation give official endorsement to them and, not to mention, preventing the government from meddling unduly in the proper and traditional workings of American society.

Kirk's description of the U.S. constitution is also a useful illustration of how a governing institution can support more particular sources of moral knowledge and authority. Kirk greatly respected the way in which he felt the American constitution had distributed and balanced power, both between the branches and agencies of the federal government as well as the respective levels of government from local (implicitly) to state and federal. Aside from helping to lessen the risk of concentrating unaccountable power, which helps to make sure politicians better respect the order of society and present better moral images, the constitution's balance of power meant that official support and endorsement could be given to local and regional communities and government. And, especially, the

²⁸ Kirk, Russell, 'Prospects for the American Family', in Kirk, Russell, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things are Written on the Sky*, Op. cit. 51-53.

²⁹ Hittinger, 'The Unwritten Constitution and the Conservative's Dilemma', Op. Cit. 60. And. Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 416.

³⁰ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op, Cit. 416.

federal government could be better restrained from interfering in the associations of civil society unduly.³¹

We can therefore see that Kirk's views on U. S. constitution readily show how he felt government institutions can be sources of moral insight. They can do this through how they reflect and support the order, or disorder, of civil society and its institutions, giving it legitimacy, aid, and not interfering in it unduly or damagingly. They can also do this through support for particular institutions, from official endorsement to active economic and other support. The most important moral roles that government institutions play for Kirk, we can see, are to give an imaginative presentation and image of the basic social order and ethos and to support this order in ways appropriate to the government – although Kirk here stressed the definite limits of politics. Kirk affirmed that government was not a necessary evil. He believed, like Aristotle and Aquinas, that government helped to improve and make possible social order and the pursuit of the common good.³² We have seen just how it would do this, what role it would play - the keeping of order and justice and the judicious support of the general and particular order of the commonwealth. But it is worth stressing that what government does not do – interfere incautiously and overzealously in civil society - is itself an important moral duty of government.³³ Recognising the real and from a modern perspective quite narrow limits of politics was morally important. Kirk believed that a government too interventionist and too centralised could easily usurp the autonomy, authority, and responsibility of individuals and intermediate social associations like the family. An example Kirk mentions is the interference of the British government of the late 1940s and the 1950s in the domain of building homes and planning residential living arrangements for working class British subjects.³⁴ Kirk felt much of the intervention was injudicious and represented just the sort of state intrusion that could undermine moral character. In this example the government had taken away motives to personal effort and familial betterment amongst the British working classes.

In following Burke and not Johnson, in believing that government and institutions might influence moral behaviour, Kirk was somewhat at odds with certain strains of the post-war American right and some sceptical conservatives, like Michael Oakeshott. Those of a libertarian or individualist bent were generally averse to giving any moral role to the state, whose only legitimate job, they felt, was to keep the peace, externally and internally.³⁵ Early on in his career Kirk was involved in an on-going public debate with Frank Meyers. Meyers criticised Kirk for his accepting a greater role for the state to restrain individual freedom and interfere in the freedom of its citizens, to try to achieve moral aims. Meyer was

³¹ Kirk, Russell, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations and Abnormality in Literature and Politics*, Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers, Peru, 1988. 235-240.

³² McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, Op. Cit. 141-146.

³³ Russello, *Postmodern Imagination*, Op. Cit. 134-137.

³⁴ See Kirk, Russell, 'Does the State Build Homes?', in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of A Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 251-271.

³⁵ Boaz, David, *Libertarianism*, The Free Press, New York, 1998. 56-57.

a proponent of what came to be called fusionism, which advocated the fusing of traditional values with a libertarian view of the responsibilities of government.³⁶ Kirk himself, in his early writings, tended to see the state's primarily role as keeping the peace, but the fact he was drawn into a protracted dispute with Meyer is proof that he never saw the state's responsibilities only in libertarian terms.

Meyer and Kirk's libertarian critics stressed that coerced virtue was not virtue at all – morality was an individual matter.³⁷ Kirk, on the other hand, as we have seen, thought that the state and institutions could work to further morality, although only in a limited and restrained sense. In this Kirk shows the integrative tendency of the Moral Imagination, which makes use of the state as another of the myriad supports for normative instruction. Kirk did not see morality as simply individual or voluntary. Certainly, it was to an important degree, but this did not mean for him, as it did for Meyers and the libertarians, that no coercion, social support, and state action could be made use of. In this Kirk seems to have a more holistic view of morality, in which individual choice and will are important but the role of social example, prohibition, and even penalty is also recognised. This follows from the holistic nature of the Moral Imagination.

Similarly, some sceptical conservatives have made arguments against the state and social associations taking on substantive moral purposes. Oakeshott, for example, argued that the modern state should play the role of impartial umpire, providing a neutral rule of law groundwork for individuals to autonomously pursue their individual moral choices, rather than enforce substantive moral purpose on society and social associations.³⁸ F. A Hayek stressed the importance of the spontaneous growth of social institutions, and therefore was suspicious of the state and other powerful bodies setting extensive social and moral purposes for society and social associations.³⁹ One argument for the attack on substantive moral purposes and intervention by the state given by some sceptical conservatives, especially Oakeshott, is a version of the argument of Meyers's we have just mentioned: the importance of moral autonomy to a properly moral life. Oakeshott's views on this stem from his personal philosophical position but there is no need to specifically address his version of the argument.⁴⁰

Another important argument, made by Oakeshott and many others opposed to the state adhering to traditional moral and religious beliefs, is that modern Western states are inherently pluralist, made up

³⁶ Meyer, Frank S., 'Collectivism Rebaptized', *The Freeman*, No. 5 (July, 1955). 559-562. And. Regnery, Henry, 'Russell Kirk and the Making of the Conservative Mind', *Modern Age*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Autumn, 1977). 347. And. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement*, Op. Cit. 159-160 and 174-175.

³⁷ Person, *Russell Kirk*, Op. Cit. 194.

³⁸ Oakeshott, Michael, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, Fuller, Timothy (ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996. XII-XIII.

³⁹ Gray, John, *Hayek On Liberty*, Basil Blackwell, New York, 1984. 27-30. And. Hayek, F. A., 'The Mirage of Social Justice', in Muller, Jerry Z. (ed.), *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997. 328-334.

⁴⁰ Isaacs, Stuart, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, Routledge, London, 2006. 129-134.

of populations with diverse beliefs and values.⁴¹ It is therefore argued that the sort of substantive moral purpose Kirk advocates cannot be implemented, at least not in a democratic way. Kirk does not really answer this objection, except to point out that America, at least, is not quite so diverse yet that a Christian humanist ethos might not be able to democratically guide it without requiring authoritarianism. He implies this when he writes of America's still essentially conservative character.⁴² He seems to think that a more overt recognition of its traditional norms and beliefs can increase the strength of these in contemporary American society. How achievable this goal is in 2015 and beyond is debatable.

The other argument put forward by sceptical conservatives against the state being guided by, and acting in society on behalf of, substantive moral purposes is that such an undertaking is un-conservative, as it means the state must excessively meddle in organic social processes on behalf of rigid and abstract precepts. Hayek, though not strictly a conservative, gives a version of the standard sceptical conservative argument against such substantive purposes, when he defends a spontaneous social and market order against extensive state interference bent on a deliberate plan, as we referred to in the last paragraph. Hayek most had in mind progressive attempts to use the state for substantive social justice goals, but this argument can be applied to conservatives as well.

However, Kirk certainly wished the state to be cautious in its moral role and intervention. As noted, he wished it mostly to take on a general traditional moral ethos. It does not seem clear that this is an either/or issue where any and all substantive moral purpose and action by the state must involve extensive intervention according to a rigid blueprint. Instead, it seems eminently plausible that cautious and limited action may be taken – like maintaining a broadly traditional normative ethos or making sure laws and tax codes do not penalise the permanent things. Furthermore, from the perspective of the Moral Imagination, according to Kirk, many major aspects of life are integrated by its illative process and, therefore, can have a moral impact on the individual, including the state and politics. It can be argued that by leaving out norms, the permanent things, from the ethos and conduct of the state this will create a social influence that does not reflect these norms, and therefore may detract from healthy Moral Imagination, though it would take detailed investigation and argument to make this case properly.

However, during Kirk's lifetime the American state became more and more centralised and more and more power and responsibility resided with the federal government.⁴³ Kirk, although eschewing strict libertarian views on the role of the state, tended to favour a restrained and limited role for the

⁴¹ Oakeshott, Michael, 'On Being Conservative', in Kirk, Russell (ed.), *The Portable Conservative Reader*, Penguin Books, London, 1982. 586-592.

⁴² See for example, Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 142-143.

⁴³ Sale, Kirkpatrick, *Human Scale*, Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, New York, 1980. 99-102.

state, including its moral responsibilities. He also tended to believe that those duties that the state had to carry out were best done at the most local and decentralised level possible.⁴⁴ This topic of the centralisation and decentralisation of government, and the level of intervention it should undertake, had been a controversy in American politics throughout Kirk's career, and continues to be so, between conservatives and libertarians, on the one hand, and liberals on the other.⁴⁵ Kirk's perspective on the issue, informed by his doctrine of the Moral Imagination, is a contribution to this debate.

His preference for decentralised government is implicit in his views of the moral role of government and politics. Kirk believed that centralised and overbearing government was inefficient. It was inefficient both in terms of its administrative and economic functions and also its moral functions.⁴⁶ He saw what he referred to as territorial democracy, a phrase he borrowed from Orestes Brownson, or the vitality and autonomy of local and regional government and institutions, as "at bottom a moral issue". It was this form of governance which allowed for encouragement of local initiative, spirit, and leadership, whereas centralised, interventionist government would tend to crowd out local institutions, which could usually have a more abiding and responsive moral presence in individual's lives. On other hand, the distance of centralised government from everyday life and activities could not provide efficient moral example and leadership in many areas.⁴⁷ Here we see the integrative quality of the Moral Imagination, which encourages decentralised governance and institutions because these tend to be more immersive and varied sources of moral knowledge. Kirk believed decentralised and restrained government more likely to respect and reflect traditional norms, taken from many the sources of the Moral Imagination. This was in contrast to the innovatory impulse of central planning that he felt often had little time for the permanent things and independent, traditional moral authorities, but relied instead of ideology and narrow rationalism.⁴⁸

Those liberals and others who believe in a more centralised and activist state will disagree with Kirk in many of these points. They will of course disagree with the conservative scepticism of centralised government administrative efficiency, a topic which we cannot discuss here. Many liberals would maintain that government is one of the most important active moral instructors of the people, using its power and authority to actively further social justice. On this view the state, especially the central state, should be one of the central moral foci of society and should widely intervene in social and economic institutions to achieve perceived moral ends. We might mention, as examples, influential liberal philosopher Ronald Dworkins who has argued for the state to take an extensive interest ensuring

⁴⁴ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 240-247.

⁴⁵ Davenport, David, and Lloyd, Gordon, *The New Deal and Modern American Conservatism*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2013. 43.

⁴⁶ Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Op. Cit. 247-252.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 238-252.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 235-239 and 243-247.

egalitarian distribution of economic resources regardless of chance and circumstance or, more specifically, liberal arguments in favour of an expansive minimum wage and other policies based on social justice.⁴⁹ Kirk's arguments about the moral hazards of activist government seem to highlight a weakness in this liberal position. The central state will have trouble providing the role of moral exemplar and source of moral knowledge that is provided by the immersive and several sources of the Moral Imagination. so will weaken the Moral Imagination so far as it crowds these out and negatively interferes with these sources. Kirk, therefore, makes an important argument in favour of decentralised and restrained governance.

There is, though, a disagreement between Kirk and liberal interventionists over moral priorities, which informs their disagreement about the role of the state. Many liberal interventionists see social justice issues, like those of racial or sexual equality, and economic issues, like wages and employment conditions, as centrally important moral issues.⁵⁰ This is one reason they are willing for the central state to intervene in local government and institutions to make sure the right moral outcomes are achieved. Kirk, on the other hand, tends to see personal moral interactions as most important, as we have noted. That is, he tends to stress traditional personal virtues and actions, like courage or filial piety, over liberal social justice or economic concerns. Though in part this is a disagreement in moral first principles, we can again surely say that the traditional, personal morality Kirk prioritises is an important part of morality - virtues like self-control and our everyday social interactions are a significant part of our moral existence. And this personal morality is surely not, for the most part, encouraged by extensive central government action: it is not to the centralised state we look for the lion's share of the development of inner virtues. So, we can see Kirk makes a useful contribution on this issue of moral governance, based in his doctrine of the Moral Imagination and its integrative, illative function.

8.3 Leadership and the Moral Imagination

The imaginative moral influence of the political for Kirk is underscored by his views on the statesman and its relationship to norms. Kirk, echoing the views of Irving Babbitt, held that one of the primary roles of the statesman and political leader was his imaginative example.⁵¹ The politician was supposed to exemplify virtues such as wisdom, prudence, temperance, and so forth, giving a good model of leadership and of a human life well lived. This image would be communicated to the populace and could

⁴⁹ Kelly, Paul. *Liberalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005. 77-83. And. Krugman, Paul, *The Conscience Of A Liberal*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 2007. 261-264.

⁵⁰ Clark, Robert F., *The War on Poverty: History, Selected Programs and Ongoing Impact*, University Press of America, Inc., Lanham, 2002. 23-28. And. Kelly, Op. Cit. 74-91.

⁵¹ Russello, *Postmodern Imagination*, Op. Cit. 117-124.

be a source for the Moral Imagination of other individuals in society, showing them how to act morally and live humanely.⁵² One such example of an imaginative statesman that Kirk gives is Abraham Lincoln. Some contemporary southern conservatives, whose conservatism influenced Kirk, were suspicious or hostile towards Lincoln. Kirk, on the other hand, despite certain misgivings, considered Lincoln, whilst he was president, to be a profoundly conservative statesman, whose prudential, upright, and imaginative example was rightly admired by Americans in Lincoln's lifetime and ever afterwards.⁵³ A leader, Kirk believed, could set a morally uplifting example, and this is central to the role of a statesman but politicians, it follows, could also set a bad moral image and contribute to moral decline the community, or be an image of mediocrity that simply failed to imaginatively uplift the populace at all.

Statesman and leaders, for Kirk, should have the key virtue of prudence. That is, they should abide by Burke's great dictate, which Kirk was fond of quoting, of combining a disposition to preserve and an ability to reform, and be able to maintain, with wisdom and imagination, a necessary continuity in the midst of inevitable change.⁵⁴ This means that statesman, politicians, and political leaders have it as one of their major roles to maintain the prescriptive institutions and traditions of their society, prudentially adapting and reforming them as changing time and circumstance necessitates. In this way statesman and politicians can help to influence morality by supporting the social order itself, which Kirk held was vital for the basic peace and security necessary for the pursuit of the truly human and moral life, and can also help to support particular institutions that are sources of moral knowledge, such as the family.

Kirk also makes it clear that incautious and intemperate interference in the social order and in particular institutions by political leaders can easily unbalance basic social order and, even more easily, important intermediate institutions and sources in the presentation of enduring norms to society and its members. An example might be that of the large and increasing federal subsidies which he noted were beginning to flow to universities in the early 1960s and he thought (rightly) would continue and increase. He thought these subsidies had and would come with strings attached and ultimately help to undermine educational priorities, in many instances. One such case that Kirk mentions that had already occurred in the mid-1960s was the federal support, through the National Defense Education Act, of linguists and languages. Kirk felt these subsidies had the tendency to promote statistical achievements – more teachers, etc. – rather than the humane, moral appreciation Kirk felt was the true end of literature.⁵⁵

⁵² Kirk, Russell, *The Sword of the Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995. 306-309.

⁵³ Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Op. Cit. 447-457.

⁵⁴ Kirk, Russell, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered*, Arlington House, New Rochelle, 1967. 213-215.

⁵⁵ Kirk, 'Massive Subsidies and Academic Freedom', in Kirk, Russell, *The Intemperate Professor: and Other Cultural Splenetics*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1965. 34-36.

Kirk devoted a lot of space to writing about historic and contemporary conservative leaders, as well as statesmen and politicians of other stripes. Indeed, it has been argued that he made use of the imaginative exemplars of conservatism to propagate his message of conservatism and the Moral Imagination.⁵⁶ For example, his *The Conservative Mind* is, to an extent, built around a genealogy of imaginative conservative figures, like Burke and John Randolph, in Anglo-American conservatism whose lives were, in different ways, an example of the imaginative conservatism Kirk preached.

Kirk wrote, also, on contemporary politicians and statesmen from Robert Taft to Lyndon Baines Johnson.⁵⁷ This raises the question of imaginative leadership in the late twentieth century and today. We may ask how a leader acts as an exemplar in contemporary politics. In particular do the conditions of the mass age and modern politics and media – public relations, spin doctors, and the circumstances of present-day democracy – prevent politicians and statesmen in our time being examples of the Moral Imagination? Kirk's idea of imaginative leadership was not unrealistic. He praises the leadership of Ronald Reagan on several fronts and seems reasonably happy with Reagan as a conservative leader.⁵⁸ He seems to see in Reagan a statesman who, whilst being no Arthurian ideal of the Saint-King, exhibited prudence, compromise, and vision through which he repaired recent damage to the American economy and polity and faced down the threat of Soviet communism. In doing this Reagan, Kirk implies, helped to give confidence and self-belief back to an American nation after the political scandals and crises of recent decades.

Here we might also point out Reagan as an illustration of the imagery of political leadership and its relations to the Moral Imagination. Through prudent leadership, through a political image that was deliberate but genuine and not stultified by public relations efforts, Reagan gave a prompt to the imagination of the nation.⁵⁹ As Kirk puts it, "to the American people, Ronald Reagan had become the Western hero of romance – audacious, faithful, cheerful, honest, and skilled at shooting from the hip."⁶⁰ We could compare him to those recent leaders, like Tony Blair, who have courted public approval and a popular image through media and public relations whilst not, in the opinions of some at least, concentrating on making sure genuine prudent leadership and virtue were a part of their public image.⁶¹ Here Kirk has something to say on timely discussions about media management and public relations by politicians – it is important to imaginatively reach the populace, but this must be done not through

⁵⁶ Frum, David, 'The Legacy of Russell Kirk', *New Criterion*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December, 1994.). 10.

⁵⁷ See Kirk, Russell, and McClellan, James, *The Political Principles of Robert A. Taft*, Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, 2010. And. Kirk, *The Sword of the Imagination*, Op. Cit. 309-336.

⁵⁸ Kirk, *The Sword of the Imagination*, Op. Cit. 448-454. And Kirk, Russell, *The Politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, 1993. 207-208.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Kirk, *The Sword of the Imagination*, Op. Cit. 452.

⁶¹ Jones, Nicholas, *The Control Freaks: How New Labour Gets Its Own Way*, Politico's Publishing, London, 2001. 1. And. Louw, Eric, *The Media and Political Process*, Sage Publications, London, 2007. 18-35.

seeking popular approval alone; instead, genuine communicate of norms – wisdom, prudence, and honesty – must be involved. This would make spin doctors and overly manipulative or populist public relations suspect.

Related to this issue of contemporary political leadership and imagery we might mention Kirk's commentary on rhetoric and cant and contemporary politics. Kirk makes this commentary especially in reviewing Richard Weaver's *The Ethics of Rhetoric*.⁶² In this review, published in *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*, Kirk seems to concur in Weaver's claim that rhetoric is inescapably ethical and that one's rhetoric is determined by one's ethical principles.⁶³ Kirk states that "Great rhetoric is founded upon immutable principles – arguments from definitions".⁶⁴ He then goes on to describe and agree with Weaver's claims about the use of cant and false rhetoric and language by many social scientists and politicians today. What is most important for our present purposes is that here Kirk's comments can be implied as reinforcing his views on political leadership and imagination. That is, through the correct moral principles one can come to the correct rhetorical principles. And through correct rhetoric one can make a positive contribution to public discourse, if one is in such a position. This shows Kirk's agreement with the Christian humanist belief in the importance of language used well and properly to contribute to an atmosphere ripe for wisdom and goodness. As Andre Gushurst-Moore describes the Christian humanist position, "Language must be protected, re-stored, and nourished if it not to decline, and our common life decline with it".⁶⁵ It is also shows the unitive nature of the Moral Imagination that makes use of language and image and belief to inform and reinforce each other.

We might apply Kirk's comments on language to contemporary debates about political rhetoric and media management. Kirk, like Weaver, wishes for a political rhetoric that supplies genuine truths and essences to the populace in an imaginative and eloquent fashion.⁶⁶ He wishes neither for rhetoric that panders to the masses, obscuring truths and norms they might dislike, nor which manipulates them for the sake of the designs of others. This, again, would seem to put Kirk at odds with aggressive media and public relations management, such as the spin doctors the New Labour government in Britain and many others became famous for.⁶⁷

So we can see that, for Kirk, the relationship of statesman and political figures to norms and morality is one that stresses on the one hand their role in reflecting and giving basic support to the social order and the particular institutions which contribute to it. Statesmen do this through recognising these institutions' prescriptive authority and continuity as upholders of the wisdom, including normative, of

⁶² Weaver, Richard, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, Regnery Gateway, inc., South Bend, 1953.

⁶³ Kirk, 'Ethical Labour', in Kirk, Russell, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice: Essays of A Social Critic*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1956. 81-82.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 83.

⁶⁵ Gushurst-Moore, Op. Cit. 15-16.

⁶⁶ Kirk, "Ethical Labour", Op. Cit. 81-88.

⁶⁷ Jones, Op. Cit. 1.

society's experience and by trying to support and adapt them to the constant change of life. Here the stress is on their behind the scenes, in a sense, support for the social order and particular social institutions and customs that, in their turn, are sources for moral authority. On the other hand, statesman and political figures take a more active role in supporting morality and norms by being an imaginative exemplar and representation of them themselves, presenting an image of these norms to society so that its members can model themselves upon it and be prompted to improve their actions and themselves.

This is a schema that is apparent in Kirk's general view of the moral role of the political. The political – law, government institutions, and political figures – reflect and support the social order, especially in their own sphere of maintaining peace, security, and order in society. They also support, though cautiously and with strict limits, certain institutions and traditions from families to schools to churches, helping them to play their necessary role as normative authorities. But the political also has a more active role as a source for norms, although for Kirk there is always a clear limit to what the purely political can achieve – it is not, we can say, in the first tier even of sources for the Moral Imagination. The political can give an image and a legitimacy to the norms of the social order, the order of commonwealth, as well as those inherent in particular institutions, which allows the political, such as the statesman or the legal system, to be an exemplar and a guide and prompt to moral action in its own right. This division is not hard and fast. Both roles support each other and the political can be a prompt to moral action simply in its role as guarantor of basic law and order (although Kirk held there were clear limits to the degree that the state could coerce and prompt virtue in this way), but these are the main ways in which Kirk sees the political as a source for the Moral Imagination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, we can now come to better understand the nature of the Moral Imagination for Russell Kirk. Despite Kirk's lack of a full philosophical account, we have seen that for Kirk the Moral Imagination is the name for man's moral faculty, his awareness or understanding of moral norms. The norms it perceives or understands (Kirk is not clear on the exact mechanics of the Moral Imagination) are objective and transcendent, but also immanently reflected in human nature and society, so that man learns transcendent, universal norms most centrally in their immanent, particular expression. Kirk sees the content of these norms in a traditional, Christian humanist framework: theistic; realist; virtue-oriented; and often requiring self-control and restraint. As we have seen he, not uncontroversially, took this perspective on norms to represent the general position of the great wisdom and moral traditions of the West, if not the world, like traditional Christianity, Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism, whatever their differences in details and speculative philosophy. Examples of virtuous men for Kirk are many of the U. S. Founding Fathers or the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius.¹ They are men of piety, humility, prudence, and temperance; and have a great respect, even veneration, for the edifice of traditional beliefs and institutions of their society.

This Moral Imagination operates by making use of numerous sources of insight into moral realities and human nature provided by everyday life and the major aspects of human existence. These include, most importantly, tradition and history, literature and arts, education, religion, social associations, and politics and law. And the insights which these sources can reveal are brought to the awareness of the Moral Imagination by all the major faculties of human knowledge: reason, intuition, imagination, sentiment, and habit. The relationship between a particular source and faculty, like that between literature and imagination or sentiment or reason, depends on the peculiar conditions involved, conditions we have thrown some light on in our investigation.

Kirk writes repeatedly on the limitations of the individual's capacity for knowledge, including moral knowledge, based simply on his own private reason and experience, and his need, as a social being, for social guidance. He does this most forcefully when discussing tradition, in which he argues strongly that the individual requires the assimilation of the knowledge of myriad individuals represented by tradition to get proper knowledge about most things, as well as the continuity and purpose granted by the beliefs and narratives of tradition, which the individual would have a hard time supplying himself. The other sources of the Moral Imagination play similar roles, like literature, which can provide an individual the

¹ See for example, Kirk, Russell, *The Roots of American Order*, Regnery Gateway, Washington, D.C., 1991. 120-125. And. Kirk, Russell, 'The Framers: not Philosophes but Gentlemen', in Russell Kirk, *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Panichas, George. A (ed.), Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 2007. 450-457.

thoughts and feelings of great artists who have an intuitive grasp of human nature and norms, and through which the imaginative tenor of society can affect the individual.

In fact, Kirk takes the opposition to rationalism so seriously that it is one of the reasons he does not attempt to give us a complete philosophical investigation of the Moral Imagination. In contrast to Cardinal Newman, who develops a parallel illative sense (indeed, it is from him that Kirk get the very term illative) as part of a deeply philosophical attempt to understand man's religious psychology, Kirk is content to give us a common sense overview of the Moral Imagination dispersed amongst his writings on various aspects of it, like literature or tradition. We have seen in this thesis how he uses his writings on the main sources of the Moral Imagination to bring up moral issues. He is content to give us the general outlines of the way in which literature or religion can shape our moral bearings, in other words. As our moral awareness is a matter for our whole being, it cannot be circumscribed by a purely discursive account. As Kirk makes clear, if we would understand man's moral life, we must make use of art and literature, history and tradition, religion, and so on, as well as reason, so this is what he does in presenting this life to us.

Kirk, therefore, implies the reliance of the individual on repeated encouragements – conscious and unconscious – and exemplars inherent in all the important areas of the life almost all individuals are immersed within and the faculties through which they experiences them: man draws from his full human experience to understand his full human nature. As we have seen, the healthy Moral Imagination therefore integrates man's imaginative, sentimental, and habitual aspects with his rational aspects; the individual with society; the individual's imagination and creativity with that of society; the past, present, and future; the universal and particular – all the integral parts of man and the human experience. This integrative process or nature of the Moral Imagination Kirk calls illative, a term taken from Cardinal Newman. And it is this quality in the Moral Imagination, which we have seen mark out its uniqueness and the significance, we have been assessing in detail and in context, focusing on the Christian humanist nature of Kirk's views on the Moral Imagination with a thoroughness and depth not pursued by the other important works on Kirk's thought, such as W. Wesley MacDonald's *Russell Kirk and he Age of Ideology* and Geraldo Russello's *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*.

Kirk was deeply influenced by Edmund Burke and Irving Babbitt as well as what we have referred to as the twentieth century Christian humanist tradition, especially T. S. Eliot, Christopher Dawson, G. K. Chesterton, and C. S. Lewis, in his keenness to recover other means of moral knowledge, such as reason and sentiment, from what he felt was an over reliance on reason. And, likewise, he was also influenced by them to recover the moral input of authorities like tradition and religion from such an over emphasis on reason. And whilst Burke and Babbitt supplied him with his concern for the limits of rationalism and the ethical power of imagination, as has long been pointed out by commentators on Kirk, as well as a

concern for restrictive virtue, the Christian humanists were especially influential in endowing Kirk with a concern for the moral and spiritual wholeness of human experience, as a means to such knowledge, and with a concern for traditional Christian norms as a means of order in such experience.

Kirk wrote essays or even books, in the case of his work on Eliot entitled *Eliot and His Age*, about all these figures, or at least made reference to them in important ways. These Christian humanists concurred with Kirk about the limits of reason and the role of imagination, art, letters, and fantasy in man's spiritual and moral journey – in the case of Eliot, Chesterton, and Lewis even being writers of fiction and poetry. And they reinforced his belief in universal moral laws or norms, reflected in the common sense and traditional institutions of mankind, and essential human nature, which could give order to man's disparate needs and experiences and institutions under the aegis of traditional Christian morality. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* is the most obvious expression of this belief and ethos which Kirk shared to the full. But all of these four representative figures of made their similar perspectives clear, as did other figures in the tradition, like Dorothy Sayers, as we have seen.

We have seen part of the power and significance of Kirk's integrative ideal of the Moral Imagination when we contrasted it to other recent usages of the term or concept of the Moral Imagination, which has been an idea invoked more frequently in recent decades. In particular we contrasted Kirk's use of the term to the conceptions of normative imagination of David Bromwich and Martha Nussbaum. Though differing in details and approach, and, like Kirk keen to understand how imagination as opposed to reason alone is important to man's moral knowledge, both these writers portray the normative Imagination as largely concerned with only the imagination proper. When it comes to the Moral Imagination at least, they see this imagination as an important instrument for understanding the full humanity and dignity of others, especially those who are marginalised and oppressed, like the poor, women, homosexuals, the disabled, and minority ethnic groups. This is the primary moral role they see for this normative imagination and their primary moral concern when discussing it.

As noted, this leads to quite a different understanding of the Moral Imagination to Kirk. Kirk presents the Moral Imagination as a comprehensive, unifying process that supplements pure reason by drawing from all aspects of man and his life and is concerned with the broad sweep of human behaviour and virtues, from prudence to compassion. Conversely, Nussbaum and Bromwich emphasis a much simpler version of the Moral Imagination that is largely concerned with the means of the imagination – bolstered in Nussbaum's case by Socratic reasoning that questions settled opinions and prejudices – and whose end in moral understanding is empathy for the humanity of others. This contrast has helped us to illustrate the significance in Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination in presenting a unique conception of the idea.

The contrast between Kirk and Nussbaum and Bromwich has also allowed us to see the significance of Kirk's understanding of the Moral Imagination in presenting an insightful version of the Moral Imagination that deals with some of the deficiencies in other versions. We have seen, for example, that Nussbaum's and Bromwich's emphasis on the importance of understanding of the humanity of others led them, especially Bromwich, to marginalise the moral role of everyday social associations. These for Bromwich create complacency and conformity that can blind us to the humanity and needs of those outside them. This creates a division between our ordinary life, which contains moral dangers but few outlets for supreme moral virtue, and our interactions with strangers and the oppressed, the heart of our moral duties. On the other hand, Kirk avoids this sort of dualism because his doctrine of the Moral Imagination is broader and can integrate the moral instruction and support of everyday, immersive social associations with the duties to strangers. This is because his Moral Imagination makes use of these social associations, which have a central role in most individual's lives, for their insight into human nature, and tradition and prescription, which Kirk sees as essential for providing knowledge and continuity to the individual who looks to them for guidance for his own frail experience. But he balances this by a concern for the moral insights of more universal sources like art and for more universal moral duties than those specifically tied to family or local community, like those concerned with religion and the transcendent.

This is representative of what makes Kirk's vision significant as a contribution to discussions on the Moral Imagination: its integral and holistic nature. This means his account more strongly fulfil the original impetus behind the Moral Imagination; that is to say, its concern to understand all facets of man's moral existence and knowledge, rather than reducing them to only partial aspects, like discursive reason and rationalism alone. We, as well, seen this illustrated in connection to education. Kirk's view of the role of the Moral Imagination supplements Nussbaum's focus on Socratic questioning of received opinion and stress on imaginative evocation of the full dignity and humanity of others with respect for the role of dogma and received opinion, as well as other kinds of moral areas and duties. Kirk does not defend the philosophical basis of his understanding of norms fully, nor does he provide detailed empirical research to show the superiority of his understanding of man's moral knowledge: both of which would improve his account. Nonetheless, Kirk makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the Moral Imagination forcefully illustrated in the contrast between him and Bromwich and Nussbaum.

We have also seen the significance of Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination as a means of unitive, ordered moral knowledge illustrated through examining the contribution it can make to contemporary conservative thought. In particular, we have contrasted Kirk's Moral Imagination to what we referred to as sceptical conservatism, which eschews substantive commitments to beliefs and institutions beyond

opposing drastic, rapid change. We have seen how Kirk's perspective measures up to this sceptical conservatism as a basis for conservative thought and how it can avoid some of the problems that face sceptical conservatism. We made particular use of British philosopher Michael Oakeshott as a representative of sceptical conservatism. We saw, by contrasting approaches to religion and tradition and history between Kirk and Oakeshott and the sceptical conservatives, several problems that can occur for sceptical conservatism.

The first such problem is a lack of positive content with which to appeal to the public, being based as it is more on avoidance of rapid change than a substantive platform of moral beliefs and enduring institutions. The second problem is a propensity for sceptical conservatism to act simply as a brake for liberalism and radicalism whilst otherwise being dragged along by them, because its lack of positive commitments means it cannot provide a direction of social development of its own. The third problem is an inability to address what are arguably longings and needs of men that endure across societies, whether in terms of religion, morality, or social associations, because such conservatism avoids commitment to particular beliefs and values across time and place.

Kirk cannot totally refute the sceptical conservative who simply does not accept that the norms Kirk believes in can be shown to be real and known. Nor does Kirk conduct thorough enough research to show beyond doubt that all or almost all societies have had broadly the same spiritual, moral, and social longings and views. For example, there is little in Kirk's works to contrast to Oakeshott's idealist philosophical writings. In these writings Oakeshott argues against holistic views of knowledge, like Kirk's, in which norms are a fundamental part of reality and permeate all human life, in favour of separate modes of experience, such as history, science, and practical experience, under the last of which falls morality. These modes of experience are distinct from each other and from experience or reality as a whole: the moral values derived from practical experience could not be equated with reality as a whole. This means that Oakeshott could not accept the doctrine of transcendent norms or the relationship of all human experience to norms which Kirk advocated. In this he is representative of sceptical conservatism as a whole, which tends not to accept the proven existence of the transcendent and immanent norms Kirk asserts though he bases his view on this peculiar, Idealist philosophy not shared by many (including many Idealists).

Similarly, we have noted that Kirk does provide suggestive reasons why substantive purpose is important in social associations. Most especially, because of the illative, integrative nature of man's moral awareness, that draws from all his important social interactions, and therefore needs some embodiment in major social organisations, including the state itself. This is in contradistinction to Oakeshott and the sceptical conservatives, who reject substantive ends for social organisations on the grounds such norms are not proven and can cause un-conservative interventions in spontaneous social

processes. We will mention again the latter conjunct in a moment, but, as for the first proposition, we must again say that it is true that Kirk does make only a point worthy of more investigation – the moral role of social institutions – and more research is required to better understand this role, as well as, again, the nature of the norms themselves. But this point is a contribution to understanding the place of social associations in conservatism and in man's life in general.

However, Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination can provide a positive vision for conservatism, as we have seen, which sceptical conservatism cannot. The permanent things – faith, virtue, family, and community – are this positive content whose broad content and enduring sets of institutions, beliefs, and norms the conservative can defend, despite the changing details and circumstances. And, by doing so, Kirk therefore can provide his own direction for political change rather than only making negative warnings against rapid change, otherwise having to follow the general drift of society in all matters, even being in the embarrassing position of defending practices when established that he attacked when they were novel. Although the power of this vision will ultimately depend upon the philosophical and scholarly account of the permanent things and the Moral Imagination, which Kirk did not complete, he did, as we have been examining throughout this thesis, make a solid foundation for further research and study into them. And, against the objection that it is un-conservative to resort to rigid plans and principles that cannot adapt to changing circumstances, Kirk can point to the nature of the Moral Imagination itself, which sees the universal in the particular and can help conservatives to use right reason to guide change in dynamic circumstances, adapting what is perennial to contemporary needs. This is an example of the balanced and holistic nature of the Moral Imagination.

Kirk even goes so far as to showing that these permanent things, seen through the Moral Imagination, answer to the apparent perennial needs and desires of mankind. He does this through his writings on the sources of the Moral Imagination and his historical writings, which contain constant implicit reflection on enduring social associations, virtues, and beliefs, including the role of the transcendent or sacred, though more work needs to be done here to present a more forceful and explicit case. We can therefore see the significance of Kirk's writings on the Moral Imagination in contributing to our understanding of how conservatism can present a positive, enduring platform which is not narrow and inflexible to changing circumstance.

We have witnessed that Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination is of great importance for framing his moral and political thought. It was central to all the issues on which he spent a considerable amount of time and effort, such as literature and tradition. Indeed, we may say, because of the centrality of the moral and spiritual ethos behind the Moral Imagination when it came to all the major areas of politics and society which most clearly concerned Kirk, that this ethos was central to his entire view of life and man's journey within it. Kirk, for example, wrote about history, such as that of America's Founding, with

his idea of norms and right reason in mind to judge individuals and societies. And he also wrote it with the intention of making use of history in order to supply moral examples for the Moral Imagination and provide the continuity in a moral tradition that he thought individuals required. Similarly, we have seen that even law for Kirk was connected with his moral vision, centred on the Moral Imagination and permanent things, as law was to grow out of the traditions and institutions of society – it was that part of them that required coercive force by the state - reflecting their moral understandings of human nature adapted to the particular society and culture, and must not interfere with these understandings.

What is more, we now have a better idea of how Kirk's thought, based in the Moral Imagination, can make contributions to specific debates in these areas in which he is most interested. For example, we have seen the contribution Kirk can make to discussion of the use of the canon of great Western literature in contemporary education. This contribution is based in the Moral Imagination, and was centred on the importance of literature speaking to our enduring human nature and the permanent things, within a peculiar Western moral and stylistic tradition, rather than being centred on the experiences of marginalised groups as many enemies of the canon would wish. This was a prime illustration of a salient aspect of Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination: that it is the universal truths of human nature that are the end of morality, and that these truths are more important than shifting political and social privilege and disadvantage, which themselves would be compounded if marginalised sections of the community are deprived access to the moral and spiritual succour of the permanent things. But it is also an illustration of the contribution that the Moral Imagination as a unifying expression of human moral experience can make to contemporary debates.

Though Kirk goes a long way to showing how we can understand this expression, there is still much work that has to be done to complete the project he started. Kirk, most obviously, eschews systematic and detailed philosophical explanation of his preferred system of norms as well as the operation of the Moral Imagination. By providing such an explanation Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination would become more persuasive, better able to answer objections, and, above all, a more comprehensive and complete contribution to our understanding of human moral knowledge. As we have had cause to mention previously, such as in discussing similarities between Kirk's perspective and Alasdair MacIntyre's, there may be profit, as an example of how a deeper philosophical understanding of Kirk's views might be sought, in augmenting Kirk's understanding of the Moral Imagination with an Aristotelian understanding of morality, or one derived from it, like Thomism. This is because Kirk includes Aristotelianism and Thomism amongst the great Western traditions he draws his vision of norms from and because their understandings of norms are based in human nature, just as Kirk's was. And as we have seen, the Aristotelian position is peculiarly ecumenical compared to the other great Western traditions Kirk admires, not having some of the more controversial aspects of the other

traditions, like the materialism of Stoicism or the abstract forms of Platonism or the revelation of traditional Christianity, whilst having a developed moral philosophy.

Indeed, MacIntyre's ethical philosophy, though it does not include the same emphasis on the illative nature of man's ethical awareness as Kirk's, stressed the *telos* or end of man's human nature and the role of virtues in living up this end. Moral actions, for him, are then in turn measured in terms of achieving such virtue or good character within the particular social and cultural situations and traditions an individual finds himself within.² Although for MacIntyre the *telos* of man is ultimately to actualise human nature, the social context, with its traditions and the set of practices of a particular society and social subgroup an individual finds himself in, helps to define and regulate the virtues that express this nature, and through them the actions that support them.³ MacIntyre's ethics then are social and are open to the dynamic nature of moral circumstances in the lives of individuals. This is something further that he and Kirk have in common; Kirk was keen to stress the importance of the moral role of social institutions and traditions, as well as weary of too rigid, rationalistic, and *a priori* an approach to ethics. It may, therefore, be a profitable task to see what Kirk's account may gain from MacIntyre's Thomistic approach, and yet, also, what MacIntyre's account may gain from Kirk's doctrine of the Moral Imagination. This is because, although MacIntyre devotes much space to understanding human moral knowledge as tradition bound and related to the practices of life in a society, he does not emphasise an integrative and illative foundation of moral knowledge, as Kirk does.

It must be said that McDonald has rejected Kirk's own claims to be associated with the Aristotelian or natural law tradition, because of its alleged rationalism and rigidity.⁴ MacIntyre himself is an example of a Thomist who cannot be described in this way, because, as we have just mentioned, he emphasised the role of tradition in man's normative knowledge, and the way that particular social practices and contexts shape the expression of virtues and moral action. Nevertheless, it seems correct that Kirk's concern for dynamic circumstance of moral action has not been shared to the same degree by many natural lawyers, who have sometimes advocated a more rationalist view of moral knowledge. Kirk could accept the Aristotelian understanding of human nature, and its perspective on more universal or general moral principles and precepts, whilst insisting on the role of the Moral Imagination in teaching men much about how to be virtuous and act morally. This is especially true when it comes to specific circumstances where the more general moral precepts must be adapted to the proliferating details of everyday life, as well as in turning rational moral knowledge into effective action.

² MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London, 1985. 52-78 and 256-259.

³ Horton, John, and Mendus, Susan, 'Alasdair MacIntyre After Virtue and After', in Horton, John, and Mendus, Susan (eds.), *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994. 10-14.

⁴ McDonald, W. Wesley, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2004. 70-80.

Another writer who has explored a perspective on moral and social knowledge similar to Kirk's is Andre Gushurst-Moore. Gushurst-Moore has written on what he describes as a Christian humanist tradition of common sense and the common mind, which is the organ men have for apprehending this sense or knowledge. By common sense, he means not simply that of the average man on the street, but the common human nature and capabilities that are present in all men, to some degree actually and to some degree potentially, but which the wisest and most creative individuals actualise to a greater extent.⁵ Gushurst-Moore's use of the term common human nature bears much in common with Kirk's appeals to an enduring natural law and shared beliefs, institutions, and values across all traditional cultures. Indeed, he explicitly makes use of Kirk as a member of the Christian humanist tradition he sees as preaching the doctrine of common sense and the common mind, along with important influences on Kirk like Burke, T. S. Eliot, Chesterton, and C.S. Lewis.⁶

Although Gushurst-Moore does not fully develop the illative nature of the common mind as we have seen in this thesis that Kirk began to do with his Moral Imagination, he does stress its integrative nature. That is, he writes about the disintegration of modernity, with its reductionism and social and spiritual dislocation, and lauds the common mind, ordered around a traditional Christian vision of natural law, as bringing integration of the individual with society; the rational and scientific with faith and with the imaginative, creative, and literary; and man with nature and God. The common mind, or common sense, very close to Kirk's Moral Imagination, properly developed, Gushurst-Moore claims "appears as a vast wholeness, connecting man and God, matter and mind, heart and soul".⁷

Gushurst-Moore is of interest not only because his notion of the common mind has much in common with Kirk's Moral Imagination, but also because he attempts to link this notion to philosophical accounts of ethics, knowledge, and metaphysics. Specifically, he tries to connect the common mind and common sense with the Thomistic tradition, even claiming that Aquinas was "the great philosopher of common sense" and "Thomism is the fullest and most profound expression of the common mind."⁸ Gushurst-Moore himself does not embark on a full, systematic philosophical account of the common mind on Thomist, or any other, terms. However, he does make the argument, invoking Chesterton's writings on Aquinas, that Thomism represents the rational justification of common sense, rather than its replacement. This means that Thomism defends common sense realism as well as universal norms and spiritual sense, and it offers an understanding of human nature and its place in the world – presumably the Aristotelian and Thomistic teleological and hylomorphic account that sees man's actions and

⁵ Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelic Press, Tacoma, 2013. 7-11.

⁶ See Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelic Press, Tacoma, 2013.

⁷ Ibid. 1-19.

⁸ Ibid. 9-11.

relationships in the world as naturally orientated towards actualising a normative, potential human nature— that philosophically explains these, though he does not go into details.⁹

What is more, implicit in Gushurst-Moore's claim for Thomism – which he claims as integrative – is that it rationally defends and supplements the intuitive, sentimental, and imaginative means of human knowledge, rather than replaces these with a purely rationalistic account of human knowledge. It is clear in his rendering of Thomism and philosophical reason that they play the role of philosophically explaining and extrapolating insights common to all men through other faculties, from practical reason to imagination, especially in spelling out a metaphysics and ethical philosophy that accords with the common mind and give it philosophical credence. Philosophic reasoning, therefore, takes its place in the whole, developed understanding alongside these other faculties, and does not dominate them. Nor is it to leave the abstract realm of philosophic reason but must respect the limits of reason and the aid other faculties can provide towards adapting the abstract and the universal to the particular and concrete.

For example Gushurst-Moore shows his belief that discursive, philosophical reason must exist alongside other means of knowledge proper to different fields of life when he writes:

For Chesterton, as for Aquinas, an objective reality does not merely exist as a remote dogma, but may be apprehended by all sane human beings, via the senses and reason. Which provide the basis of common sense.¹⁰

Indeed, he implies the ultimate subordination of discursive reason to intuitive truths of common sense, like the existence of norms, matter, and the external world when he writes with approval that Thomism is “integrative, universal, sensible, reiterative of the common understanding of experience rooted in sense and refined by reason”.¹¹ Obviously, this quote shows it is not reason in its discursive, and certainly not its philosophical, sense that is the ultimate foundation of the common mind for him; reason works to reinforce these intuitive proofs.

His work *The Common Mind* is itself an exploration of what he feels is a Christian humanist tradition of the common mind whose devotees, including, on top of those we have mentioned, St. Thomas More, Jonathon Swift, Dr. Johnson, have combined rational understandings of universal norms and human nature - of which the greatest exponent he names as Aquinas himself – with the use of other faculties like imagination, intuition, habit, and sentiment, as well as explored sources of moral guidance ranging

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. 11.

¹¹ Ibid. 10.

from philosophy to creative fiction and humane letters to social institutions.¹² Gushurst-Moore's contribution is only a foundation for how a Thomist philosophy may aid our understanding of Kirk's conception of the Moral Imagination without compromising it. Specifically, he suggests that a general Thomistic account of man's nature and norms, that provides a philosophical backbone to attempts to understand man's norms as following from his human nature and its *telos*, can be combined with respect for other faculties of moral knowledge other than discursive reason and for how these other faculties can bridge the gap between a general understanding of norms, provided by philosophical reasoning, and their adaptation to particular social circumstances. Though only a foundation, this highlights an interesting possibility for further investigation into Kirk's Moral Imagination.

So we may end by saying, Kirk urges us to remember that our entire lives and our entire being form our moral journey. His writings are a testimony that one part of us alone – whether it is our reason, feelings, or imagination – cannot suffice to guide us through the hazards and tribulations of life. The order in the soul and order in the commonwealth he so often spoke of are derived from a harmony of diverse parts, with a place for each and each in its place. Throughout his writings and his life, whatever his limitations, he sought to communicate the ever present moral importance of our choices and our social interactions. Anyone who has read Kirk's ghost stories is made forcefully aware of his vision of the spiritual nature of man and the profound battle between good and evil that is always before him. With C. S. Lewis, Kirk was in perfect accord: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.....it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."¹³ The Moral Imagination is man's means of understanding this nature and this battle through its revelation in all parts of our mortal lives, from culture to society to politics; and of building his life around them.

¹² See Gushurst-Moore, Andre, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society, and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*, Angelic Press, Tacoma, 2013.

¹³ Lewis, C. S., 'The Weight of Glory', in Lewis, C. S., *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity, and the Church*, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2000. 105-106.

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