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## The Example of John Courtney Murray

*Jude P. Dougherty \**

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In its cover story of 12 December 1960 *Time* magazine used John Courtney Murray to symbolize the coming of age of American Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy had just been elected president of the United States and would become the first Catholic to hold that office. Significantly, Murray was pictured against the backdrop of a sixteenth-century manuscript of Robert Bellarmine's "Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei." A diagonal yellow banner bore the title of the cover essay, "U.S. Catholics and the State." Murray, a theology professor at the Jesuit seminary, Woodstock College, was then a major academic participant in a debate concerning the nature of American democracy and its presuppositions. It was the time of a vigorous and self-confident Catholicism. Issues were sharply defined as Murray challenged both secular liberal and Protestant social and political thought.

Many things have changed since Murray wrote. In the political order Vietnam was yet to come; in the religious, the culmination of the Second Vatican Council was six years off. Murray never lived to witness the fall of Saigon or to experience a Church recreated in the "spirit" of Vatican II. He was sixty-three years of age in 1967 when he was stricken with a heart attack while riding in a taxi in his native New York City. The subsequent collapse of the American will to prosecute to a successful conclusion a war in Southeast Asia would not have surprised him; the dissolution of his beloved Catholic church into a friendly, mindless, liturgically impoverished religious body would have come as a shock. Murray had more confidence in the Catholic church than he did in the United States, principally, because, in his view, the Church possessed a tradition much wider and deeper than any that America had elaborated, and, with a history many times as long, it commanded the intellectual resources indispensable to the formulation of a public philosophy. He was under no illusion that the United States could, in fact, develop a public philosophy, but he was convinced that the country needed one. He was confident that the materials required were available in the natural law tradition carried within the Catholic intellectual community. He was pleased to observe that the Catholic church in America was

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1. *Time*, 12 December 1960, p. 65.

not divided into Left and Right as was the case in France. With confidence he could represent an essentially unified Church, articulating what he took to be a common outlook with respect to the fundament of law. That fundament in its ideal formulation is what he called the "public philosophy," and insofar as it was broadly accepted, he was willing to call it the "public consensus."

No doubt the experience of war years had led many public figures to reflect on the difference between the American republic and the totalitarian regimes which it had just defeated and others which were seen as emerging. The debate was many-sided and its participants represented a wide range of disciplines from philosophy and theology to sociology and economics. Prominent among those engaged in this debate were Mortimer Adler, Will Herberg, Sidney Hook, Walter Lippmann, Jacques Maritain, and Gustav Weigel.<sup>2</sup> There was a sense that things were changing and that it was necessary to elucidate, to use Lincoln's term, "the American proposition." In retrospect, it is clear that the nation was moving from a Christian past to a secular future, a drift that was even then dimly perceived. Many thought that America was entering a state of ideological disarray, having lost the certitudes that formerly were provided by metaphysics and religious faith. Throughout the 1950s, the sociologist Will Herberg could say, "To be American is to be religious, and to be religious is to be religious in one of three ways, as a Protestant, as a Catholic or as a Jew." Sidney Hook would dissent. America is not simply a pluralist society in the sense of religiously plural. For Hook, to be an American is to be religious or irreligious.

Murray was an attractive and articulate speaker and was a frequent lecturer throughout the country. In 1960 he collected a number of his speeches and published them as *We Hold These Truths*.<sup>3</sup> In his book, Murray described for a Catholic audience the truths they held as Americans, as Catholics, and as Catholic-Americans. But in a sense Murray was after bigger fish. He wished to find those truths which all Americans pre-

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2. Mortimer Adler, *Philosophy Law and Jurisprudence* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1961), *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1940); Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) and *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955); Sidney Hook, *Political Power and Personal Freedom* (New York: Criterion Books 1959), *Reason, Social Myths and Democracy* (New York: John Day, 1940), *Education for Modern Man* (New York: Dial Press, 1946); Walter Lippmann, *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little Brown and Company, 1955); Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Gustav Weigel, *Faith and Understanding in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

3. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

sumably shared by virtue of citizenship. The basic problem, he was convinced, was not one of the relation of church to state, but of the intellectual unity required for a nation to act. The nature of the "public philosophy" is the issue which would bring Hook, Lippmann, and Murray into the same forum. All three were to ask, is there a constitutional consensus whereby the people acquire an identity, a sense of purpose as a collective, sufficient to serve as the basis for action? "Can we or can we not," Murray wrote, "achieve a successful conduct of our national affairs, foreign and domestic, in the absence of a consensus that will set our purposes, furnish a standard of judgment on policies; and establish the proper conditions for political dialogue?"<sup>4</sup> To Murray the civic consensus is constructed neither of psychological rationalizations nor of economic interest nor of purely pragmatic working hypotheses. "It is an ensemble of substantive truths, a structure of basic knowledge, an order of elementary affirmations that reflect realities inherent in the order of existence."<sup>5</sup> But he recognized that any systematic formulation of these truths is apt to meet resistance.

If there was once an American consensus, if the Founding Fathers knew what they meant by liberty, law, and by God, that consensus does not exist today. "The ethic which launched Western constitutionalism and endured long enough as a popular heritage to give essential form to the American system of government has now ceased to sustain the structure and direct the action of this constitutional commonwealth."<sup>6</sup> Murray was convinced that the grounds for such a consensus still exist, at least ideally, in the natural law philosophy of Aristotle, the stoics, and Aquinas. It is that tradition, reflected in the writings of Richard Hooker, John Locke, and others, which provided the principles on which the nation was founded. It is a philosophical tradition which surmounts religious difference, an intellectual tradition that is confident that the order of nature can be discerned and that what is good for man can be established.

For Murray, political life aims at a common good which is superior to a mere collection of individual goods. The fruit of common effort must, of course, flow back to the individual. But he was disturbed by the question, in the absence of a common way of looking at things, can there be an ascertainable common good? Murray's answer contrasts sharply with that entertained by John Dewey and Sidney Hook, who subscribed to an essentially Hobbesian account of the social order. From the point of view of Hobbes, society is not one entity but a collection of action

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4. *Time*, 12 December 1960.

5. *We Hold These Truths*, p. 9.

6. *Ibid.*

groups each pressing for advantage. According to Hobbes the source of government is the consent of those governed, taken one by one. The individual is the sole source of the right or the good and as an autonomous agent is subject neither to given norms nor to a naturally determined end. Hobbes makes no attempt to subordinate the individual act of self-aggrandizement to the public good. Self-interest, he holds, is not only the dominant motive in politics, but enlightened self-interest is the paper remedy for social ills. Men, he believes, are constituted differently in temperament, biography, and intelligence, and consequently identify the good for themselves in radically different ways. Self-interest is not to be taken as evidence of moral defect but as evidence of disparate personality. In the absence of a common good, separate from and superior to the private goods of individual men, the function of government becomes that of conflict management. Given the fact that litigious subjects are likely to press for special privileges and exemptions for themselves, bargaining and negotiating are natural features of public life. The sovereign is not the representative of the common will; he is the common object of separate wills. In the exercise of his authority, the sovereign is restrained by the diverse purposes of his subjects. The sovereign assists his subjects in the pursuit of happiness not by defining the goals which the members of society ought collectively to pursue, but by removing obstacles to happiness, privately defined. Public order thus has its sources in negotiations between individually situated political actors.

In North America this Hobbesian analysis of society is nowhere more evident than in the area of sexual morality. Sexual union has been made a purely personal affair with society's interest downplayed. Abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and pornography are sanctioned as if their presence had no social repercussions. It is also evident in various rights movements where an invocation of the common good is thought to be a betrayal of a social agenda. In both theory and practice, those who defend special interests do not acknowledge any need to attend to the perceptions or reactions of others who do not share their view. Rights are to be pushed no matter what the consequences. This, in spite of the fact that many communities are presently suffering from the effects of a one-sided pressing of rights, a pressing that in the making identified success with the achievement of a particular gain, even if that gain meant the loss of the setting where that gain might have become meaningful. To offer one notorious example, in Washington, D.C., in the 1950s a Federal judge struck down a "track system" in the public schools of the District of Columbia because its purpose to discriminate between the gifted and not-so-gifted also seemed to discriminate against the blacks. The result was the flight of white families to other school districts and a

D.C. public school system in which 97 percent of the students enrolled were from black families. The gifted black students who remained in the system were themselves disadvantaged by the ruling which prevented instruction on the basis of talent. A judicial emphasis on equality of treatment failed to recognize that the common good demands appropriate education for the gifted. After decades of inferior education, the District of Columbia school system is only now beginning to reverse its losses. It is doubtful that Hobbes himself would have looked with favor on the extremes to which his doctrine has been carried.

To return to my theme, in the absence of a common way of looking at things can the notion of the common good play a role in thinking about the ends of government? Lord Patrick Devlin, the English jurist reflecting on the social order in his own country, not unlike Murray, saw the need for a public philosophy which would provide a secular as opposed to the fading Christian underpinnings of his nation's laws and culture.<sup>7</sup> Devlin, also like Murray, realized that any single candidate for the title "public philosophy" is unlikely to gain universal acceptance. But one may ask, is it necessary that a philosophy prevail in order to exercise a beneficial influence in the social setting? Is it not sufficient that it keeps alive and defends a vantage point? May not calls to attend to the common good have their effect on policy even if the philosophy underlying the concept is imperfectly understood or flatly rejected? Murray's answer is that a working consensus need not embrace all sectors of the society and that it need not embrace equally those which do share it. The existence of intellectual conflict, suggests Murray, is not evidence that there cannot be agreement on very important matters. The acceptance of principles such as the rule of law, the separation of powers, the freedom of belief, the freedom of association, and the representation of beliefs and interests do not depend on metaphysical agreement, though these principles obviously need a defense. Sidney Hook, normally an opponent, would concur. The danger of course is that in the absence of a set of commonly acknowledged principles special interest groups may prevail. Irving Babbitt saw this when he wrote in *Democracy and Leadership*. "No movement illustrates more clearly than the supposedly Democratic movement the way in which the will of highly organized and resolute minorities may prevail over the will of the inert and unorganized mass."<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, when Murray attempts to articulate the truths we hold as a people, the list is surprisingly long. On his account, we can readily

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7. Patrick Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

8. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), pp. 290-91.

identify the broad purposes of the nation, or, if you will, the aims of government. With respect to means, standards of judgment may vary and there will be policy differences but we can speak about these things because there is a basis of communication, a universe of discourse. "We hold in common a concept of the nature of law and its relationship to reason and to will, to social fact and to political purpose. We understand the complex relationship between law and freedom."<sup>9</sup> As a people we have in common an idea of justice, we believe in the principle of consent, we distinguish between law and morality, and we understand the relationship between law and freedom. We also recognize criteria of good law, that is, norms of jurisprudence. As a people we "grasp the notion of law as a force for orderly change as well as social stability."<sup>10</sup> Most law is rooted in the shared idea of the personal dignity or sacredness of man, *res sacra homo*. This sacredness guarantees him certain immunities and endows him with certain empowerments, and this is universally recognized.

Neither ideally nor in the United States, need consensus prevent dissent. In the United States the dissenter is not placed beyond the pale of social or civil rights. Those who refuse to subscribe often came from the ranks of the literati and have the media at their disposal. They are not only the academicians, the professional students of philosophy, politics, economics, and history but also the politicians, writers, journalists, and clergy. Murray calls them "clerks." Oxford professor, John Gray, in a recent essay, calls them "intellectuals" and is wary of them because of their nonconformist tendencies.<sup>11</sup> They lack the same stake in society which those responsible either for economic production or for governance possess. They are apt to be disruptive in any scenario.

To readdress Murray's big question. "Can we or can we not achieve a successful conduct of our affairs, foreign and domestic, in the absence of a consensus that will set our purpose, furnish a standard of judgment on policies, and establish the proper condition for political dialogue?"<sup>12</sup> Murray's answer is "no." In Murray's judgment the United States of his time was doing badly. He uses the words "insecure" and "political bankruptcy." Writing thirty years later, John Silber begins the Introduction to his volume, *Straight Shooting*, with the observation "Our society is in trouble and we all know it. We know that something is terribly

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9. *We Hold These Truths*, p. 81.

10. *Ibid.*

11. John Gray, "Society and Intellectuals: The Persistence of Estrangement and Wishful Thinking," *The Many Faces of Socialism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1987).

12. *We Hold These Truths*, p. 86.

wrong—the way we might know in our own bodies that we are seriously ill.”<sup>13</sup> Silber is forced to address many of the issues previously explored by Murray and comes to many of the same conclusions. Only now the nation is further down stream and the problems more serious, showing how prescient was Murray’s analysis. The cause of our weakness, Murray thought, is not simply the Soviet threat. If the Communist empire and communist ideology were to disintegrate overnight our problem would not be solved. We would be worse off in many ways. Anticommunism is not a public philosophy. This is never more evident, he thought, than in discussions concerning the structure, content and orientation of military policies. We have not articulated, for example, the political and moral ends for which we are prepared to use force. Murray could in 1960 cite Kissinger’s book *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (1957) and its chapter, “The Need of Doctrine,” in support of his own outlook. “It is not true that America can intelligently construct and morally put to use, a defense establishment in the absence of a public philosophy concerning the use of force as a moral and political act.”<sup>14</sup> Until we can articulate an American consensus with regard to our truths, our purposes, and our values, unless we can agree on fundamentals, “public policy will continue to be projected out of a vacuum in the governmental mind into a vacuum in the popular mind.”<sup>15</sup> The only bright spot is that in the absence of intellectual agreement, our instinctive wisdom permits us to cope and survive.

Murray is careful to note that consensus does not mean majority opinion. “Public opinion is a shorthand phrase expressing the fact that a large body of the community has reached or may reach specific conclusions in same particular situation. Those conclusions are spontaneously, perhaps emotionally reached usually from some unstated but, very real premises. The ‘public consensus’ is the body of these general unstated premises which came to be accepted. It furnishes the basis for public opinion.”<sup>16</sup> The consensus is a doctrine or a judgment that commands public agreement on the merits of the arguments for it. “The consensus is not in any sense an ideology; its close relation to concrete experience rescues it from that fate.”<sup>17</sup> The public consensus is a moral conception. “Only the theory of natural law is able to give an account of the public moral experience that is the public consensus. The consensus itself is simply the tradition of reason as emergent in developing form in

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13. John Silber, *Straight Shooting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. xi.

14. *We Hold These Truths*, p. 91.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

the special circumstances of American political-economic life."<sup>18</sup> Murray is aware that the doctrine of natural law is associated with Catholicism. He is quick to point out that the doctrine has no Catholic presuppositions. Its presuppositions are threefold: "that man is intelligent; that reality is intelligible; and that reality as grasped by intelligence imposes on the will an obligation that it be obeyed in its demands for action or abstention."<sup>19</sup> The assumption is that rational human nature works competently in most men, although intellectual judgment alone is not enough. Not only knowledge but rectitude of judgment is required.

"Natural law theory does not pretend to do more than it can, which is to give a philosophical account of the moral experience of humanity and to lay down a charter of essential humanism."<sup>20</sup> It does not show the individual the way to sainthood, but only to temporal fulfillment. "It does not promise to transform society into the city of God on earth, but only to prescribe, for the purposes of law and social custom, the minimum of morality which must be observed by the member of society, if the social environment is to be human and habitable."<sup>21</sup> To inquire what natural law is, means to inquire, on the one hand, what the human mind is and what it can know, and on the other hand, what human society is and to what ends it should work. Its hallmark is its empirical character, its fidelity to evidence derived from common experience and from the sciences. Natural law is best considered as a meta-ethic. As a meta-ethic it amounts to this advice, proceed with confidence that intelligence can determine in a general way what is good for the human race. Put another way, natural law encourages the observer to look for regularities in nature, human and nonhuman. Regularity indicates structure and a knowledge of structure will in turn yield functional explanation, which has a major role in the determination of moral norms. Systematic reflection on human nature will reveal certain constants which are the same everywhere and remain the same from generation to generation. But there are variables too which differ with culture, economic situation and even topography. But Murray was engaged in formulating a public philosophy not on a global scale but for the nation.

An interesting study of contrasting views on the nature of the public philosophy and its justification is provided by an examination of the views of Murray and Sidney Hook. For Murray, democracy is an effective mode of government. The democratic charter is not to be made

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 297.

21. *Ibid.*

an object of faith. The Constitution and the articles of its First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof," are articles of peace, not part of a secular credo which renounces a role for religion in civic affairs. "If history makes one thing clear it is that these clauses were the twin children of social necessity, the necessity of creating a social environment, protected by law, in which men of differing faiths might live together in peace."<sup>22</sup> The American solution to the relationship between church and state was purely political. Among the various churches vying for allegiance none was to be preferred for the nation as a whole; although in the beginning of the American Republic nine states had established churches, eventually this principle was to be applied to the states as well. The result was political unity and stability without uniformity of religious belief and practice. The Gallic, "One law, one faith, one king," had been replaced by "political unity in the midst of religious plurality." But it does not follow from this that political unity can long endure in the absence of a moral consensus. "Nor has experience yet shown how, if at all, this moral consensus can survive amid all the ruptures of religious division, whose tendency is inherently disintegrative of all consensus and community."

In 1960 Murray could write "In America we have been rescued from the disaster of ideological parties."<sup>24</sup> Where such parties exist, the struggle for office becomes a struggle for power, for the means by which the opposing ideology may be destroyed. In contrast to certain Latin countries, the American experience of political unity has been striking and to this the First Amendment has made a unique contribution. Murray is convinced that the Church has profited from the American arrangement. In Latin countries, the Church has alternately experienced privilege and persecution. Where it is thought that the business of government is the fostering of the commonwealth as ascertained by the Church, the fortunes of the Church wax and wane with transfer of political power. "In contrast, American government has not undertaken to represent transcendental truth in any of the versions of it current in American society."<sup>25</sup> It has not allied itself with one faith over another, but it has represented a core of commonly shared moral values. In a religiously plural society, government must be neutral; it cannot set itself up as a judge of religious truth. But pluralism is the root of certain problems. How much pluralism and what kinds of pluralism can a

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22. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

pluralist society stand? Thus the debate concerning the need for a public philosophy.

As we have noted, Murray's public philosophy is one grounded in the natural law which he believes is accessible to all, believer and nonbeliever, Protestant and Catholic, though he recognizes that the Catholic church in a unique way is the bearer of the natural law outlook. The principal function of the public philosophy is the articulation of a set of standards external to the civic order against which the actions of the state can be measured. The standard is right reason shaped by a time-transcending metaphysics and anthropology.

Orestes Brownson, writing in 1856, was similarly confronted with the problem of holding the state accountable, but came to a conclusion which Murray rejected. In an essay, "The Church and the Republic," Brownson argued that the Church is necessary to the state.<sup>26</sup> Surveying American political and social life, Brownson found two powerful and dangerous tendencies: on the one hand, an excessive power of the state leading to social despotism, and on the other, an excessive individualism leading to anarchy. Brownson thought that the Catholic church provided a necessary corrective to both tendencies. As an institution, carrying a moral tradition, it could call the state to account; it could also mitigate, in a way in which Protestantism could not, a destructive individualism by fostering a respect for authority and tradition. But the Church had to exist as an institution with the power not only to teach but to provide moral sanctions. In the interest of the common good, it could not avoid political engagement. Brownson's was the classic notion of political engagement, with antecedents in Greece and Rome, which Murray happily found absent on the American scene. Brownson, himself, was reacting to the Jacobian separation of the Church from the civic order and the denial to it of any influence. Murray stands somewhere between Brownson and Sidney Hook who can be taken as a representative of the Enlightenment Program.

For Hook there can be only one society, one law, one power, and one faith, namely, a civic faith that is the unifying bond of the community. Hook would banish from the political sphere the divisive force of religion. He has no quarrel with religion taken as a "purely private matter." What alarms him is religion in an institutional form, visible, corporate and organized, a community of thought that presumes to sit superior to and in judgment on the community of democratic thought. Religion possessed of social structures by means of which it can voice its judgments and perhaps cause them to prevail is foreign to Hook's concept of civic life. Civil society is the highest societal form of human

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26. *Quarterly Review*, reprinted in *Works*, vol. 12, p. 409.

life. Civil law is the highest form of law and is not subject to judgment by pure ethical canons. Thus Hook would decry the existence of the parochial school system, while recognizing its legality, as "educationally and democratically unsound," because it separates out a large segment of our youth and imbues them with quite a different outlook.<sup>27</sup> For Hook there is no eternal order of truth and justice; there are no universal verities which command assent, no universal moral law which requires obedience. The ultimate values espoused by society do not flow from the recognition of some antecedently derived notion of the common good. Rather, ultimate value is to be identified with the democratic process itself. The democratic faith is belief in the efficacy of the process.

Both Hook and Murray would agree that democracy is a form of political judgment and as such is to be measured by the extent that it achieves more security, freedom, and cooperative diversity than any of its alternatives. But Hook also speaks of democracy as a way of life; a set of procedures for critical discussion and discovery, which are preeminently exhibited in the work of the scientific community. Even so, democracy as a social philosophy is to be considered an hypothesis. Considered as an hypothesis, Hook believes, it is justified by experience. For Hook the essence of democracy consists in the equal treatment of persons of unequal talent and endowment. "This method of treating human beings is more successful than any other in evoking a maximum of creative, voluntary effort from all members of the community."<sup>28</sup> It enlarges the scope of our experience by forcing us to understand the needs, drive, and aspirations of others, without abandoning our own viewpoint. In nurturing the capacities of each, it adds to the existing stores of truth and beauty. "Regard for the potentialities of all individuals makes for less cruelty of man toward man, especially where cruelty is the result of blindness to, or ignorance of, others' needs."<sup>29</sup> Essential to the democratic process are the methods of public discussion, criticism, and argument. Though these are postulates themselves, they are the postulates of democracy. To undertake their justification is to begin "a new inquiry into a new problem."<sup>30</sup>

Murray's natural law philosophy and Hook's pragmatic naturalism lead to many of the same conclusions, and both recognized this. Their

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27. As quoted by the *New York Times*, 10 October 1963.

28. "The Justification of Democracy," *Political Power and Personal Freedom* (New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1959), reprinted in *The American Pragmatists* (New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1960), p. 396.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

differences illustrate the metaphysical and epistemological difference between a Dewey-type instrumentalism and an Aristotelian-Thomistic natural law outlook. For Murray there exists a body of truths about human nature and about that which is required for human fulfillment which can be passed from generation to generation. Thus the ancients, no less intelligent or observant than we, can speak to us across the ages, about an essentially unchanging human nature, and it behooves us to return to those authors whose works have been appreciated and commented upon for centuries. That body of truths rests on a set of metaphysical assumptions, viz., that there is such a thing as human nature and that certain ends can be identified as proper to it and others as not. Thus one can say that a life of the mind is preferable to a "simple sense life," that the laws of the state should promote those structures and activities that contribute to self-fulfillment, that self-fulfillment cannot take place apart from community, that the state, for example, is obligated to defend the family, the rights of private property and ensure access to a basic education for all of its citizens. Those commonly accepted truths serve as principles in the prudential order. The prudential judgment itself does not share in the certitude characteristic of the universal or time-transcending principle. The prudential judgment is made in context; its value is determined not solely by principle but by the empirical data available. Concrete options may even foster a reexamination of abstract principles. The further removed from the basic truths regarding human nature and society, the more precarious the judgment. Thus Murray, recognizing the importance of the family for personal growth and for the stability of the social order could never sanction contraception, divorce, abortion, or voluntary euthanasia for the hopelessly afflicted, as Hook would. Of a different order is the judgment, for example, to place an aging parent in a nursing facility when care could be rendered by the family. "Respect for one's parents" taken as a principle does not dictate a specific conclusion. Circumstances direct prudential decision.

The pragmatist's preference of solving each problem in the context in which it arises does not abrogate for him an appeal to principle. He too will invoke principle, but he is not willing to weave those principles into a consistent whole or anchor them in a particular conception of human nature or conception of human fulfillment. Thus contradictory principles may be appealed to in different contexts without inconsistency. If a principle itself is challenged, it too is defended in the context at hand without recourse to a set of constants. For this reason the pragmatist is often considered to be slippery in argument. The metaphysics to which he is committed often goes unstated and placed beyond direct confrontation.

The history of philosophy in the United States can provide many examples of pragmatism. Lovejoy in his famous work identified thirteen. That form which has dominated the American scene, however, has been the instrumentalist or pragmatic naturalism of the Dewey-Hook variety. Murray finds this outlook nothing less than "barbarous." He was, of course, not the first to find it wanting. Writing a generation before, Irving Babbitt in his *Democracy and Leadership* (1924) came to the conclusion that the influence of Dewey and his kind on education "amounts in the aggregate to a national calamity."<sup>31</sup> The ill effects of "progressive education" were apparent to Murray in the fifties and are even more so now.

The pragmatic naturalism of the Dewey-Hook variety reduces science to technology, to problem-solving of the sort where answers are not so much to be expected as are reliable predictions. Though it eschews metaphysics, it is nevertheless a materialism which rules out the existence of God and therefore the need for religion in the lives of the people. The beauty attendant the temple, ritual, and feast is held to be built on chimerical foundations. Man is regarded as through and through physico-chemical, having his origin, growth, and decay in nature. This has implications for ethics, since there is no transcendent end for human life. The most one can aspire to is to make this a better place for future generations. Hence the emphasis on training for service and power. Dewey's educational philosophy, with its assumption of "progress," its insistence on personal experience and its orientation to an idealized future, tends to denigrate the inherited and even the study of history. Classical languages are not required to gain access to an irrelevant antiquity. For Dewey, one of the primary aims of education is that of challenging the inherited. Education does not consist in an appropriation of the literature that has nourished the West since classical Greece, but is rather a training for change.

Thus Murray could speak of the new barbarism which threatened the life of reason embodied in law and custom. The perennial work of the barbarian is "to undermine rational standards of judgment, to corrupt inherited wisdom by which the people have always lived, and to do this not by spreading new beliefs but by creating a climate of doubt and bewilderment in which clarity about the larger aims of life is dimmed and the self confidence of the people destroyed."<sup>32</sup> Murray in his day was not optimistic that the West could in the near future recover its patrimony. He would have even less grounds for optimism today. Many

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31. First published (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1924); reprinted (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1979), p. 339.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

outside his Church look to it to supply the intellectual and moral void which is increasingly apparent. Yet that Church as a visible organization in North America appears as muddled and as confused as the larger society which it seems more to reflect than to challenge. But the legacy is there and can be tapped for the direction it provides. The key, of course, is the learning which gives one access to Athens and Rome and medieval Paris and Padova. A respect for the time-transcending wisdom of the ancients follows acquaintance. The Greeks can teach us much about human nature, about the nature of science and about the requirements for virtue. The Romans can instruct us on the subject of law and on the nature of religion and its importance to civic life. Their medieval commentators can weave both into a synthesis that contains a third element, namely, revealed religion.

Revolution and reformation notwithstanding, there is a great literature which remains to be explored by the open mind. But Murray would not be content simply with its recovery. A heritage is to be appropriated, built upon and utilized. That is exactly what Murray did in his own life.